

[Planning Code - Landmark Designation - Mother's Building in San Francisco Zoo]

**Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate Mother's Building, situated within San Francisco Zoological Gardens, 1 Zoo Road, southeast of Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard, in Assessor's Parcel Block No. 7281, Lot No. 006, 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 uncodified 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. CEQA and Land Use Findings.

(a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 *et seq.*). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 220757 and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board of Supervisors affirms this determination.

(b) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the proposed landmark designation of the Mother's Building, situated within Assessor's Parcel Block No. 7281, Lot No. 006, will serve the public necessity, convenience, and welfare for the

1 reasons set forth in Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 1248, recommending  
2 approval of the proposed designation, which is incorporated herein by reference.

3 (c) On June 15, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission, in Resolution No. 1248,  
4 adopted findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are consistent, on balance,  
5 with the City's General Plan and with the eight priority policies of Planning Code Section  
6 101.1. The Board adopts these findings as its own.

7  
8 Section 2. General Findings.

9 (a) On April 12, 2022, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 137-22,  
10 initiating landmark designation of the Mother's Building as a San Francisco Landmark  
11 pursuant to Section 1004.1 of the Planning Code. On April 22, 2022, the Mayor approved the  
12 resolution. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No.  
13 220275.

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

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

22 (d) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of June 15, 2022,  
23 reviewed Planning Department staff's analysis of the historical significance of the Mother's  
24 Building set forth in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet dated June 8, 2022.

1 (e) On June 15, 2022, after holding a public hearing on the proposed designation and  
2 having considered the specialized analyses prepared by Planning Department staff and the  
3 Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended  
4 designation of the Mother's Building as a landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code by  
5 Resolution No. 1248. Said resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board in File No. 220757.

6 (f) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Mother's Building has a special  
7 character and special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value, and that its  
8 designation as a Landmark will further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth  
9 in Article 10 of the Planning Code. In doing so, the Board hereby incorporates by reference  
10 the findings of the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet.

11  
12 Section 3. Designation.

13 Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, the Mother's Building is hereby  
14 designated as a San Francisco Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code. Appendix A  
15 to Article 10 of the Planning Code is hereby amended to include this property.

16  
17 Section 4. Required Data.

18 (a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the  
19 historic building footprint of Mother's Building, located within the San Francisco Zoological  
20 Gardens ("SF Zoo"), southeast of Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard, in Assessor's Parcel  
21 Block No. 7281, Lot No. 006, in San Francisco's Lakeshore neighborhood. The Mother's  
22 Building is located at the northwest portion of the SF Zoo, between Elinor Friend Playground  
23 and Koret Animal Resource Center. The Landmark site includes the courtyard terrace/plaza  
24 extending from the east elevation edged with remnants of concrete balustrades, excluding all  
25 other aspects of the SF Zoo.

1 (b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and  
2 shown in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet and other supporting materials contained in  
3 Planning Department Record Docket No. 2022-004422DES. In brief, the Mother's Building is  
4 eligible for local designation as it is associated with events that have made a culturally,  
5 historically, and architecturally significant contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco  
6 history and embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of  
7 construction. The Mother's Building, constructed in 1925 for Herbert and Mortimer  
8 Fleishhacker to honor their late mother, was donated to the City and dedicated to serve as a  
9 place of rest for mothers and young children, with tile mosaics completed in 1934, titled *St.*  
10 *Francis and Children and Their Animal Friends*, by Helen Bruton (assisted by her sisters,  
11 Margaret and Esther Bruton), and an egg tempera on plaster mural cycle painted between  
12 1933 and 1938, titled *Building the Ark, Loading of the Animals, Landing of the Ark, and The*  
13 *Ark's Passengers Disembark*, by Helen K. Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli, through the federal  
14 Public Works of Art Project and the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration  
15 (WPA). Specifically, designation of the Mother's Building is proper as it is individually eligible  
16 for its association with women's history, as one of the only recreation sites of the period  
17 focused on the comfort of mothers and their young children, and as the only large-scale WPA-  
18 era art project solely featuring female artists; with the WPA's art programs and with the  
19 outstanding murals and tile mosaics created by these female artists; with early recreational  
20 facilities in San Francisco; and as an excellent example of Italian Renaissance Revival  
21 architecture and work of architect of merit George W. Kelham.

22 (c) The particular features that should be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined  
23 necessary, are those shown in photographs and/or described in the Landmark Designation  
24 Fact Sheet, which can be found in Planning Department Record Docket No. 2022-  
25 004422DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set

1 forth. Specifically, the following features are character-defining and shall be preserved or  
2 replaced in kind:

3 (1) All those exterior elevations, form, massing, structure, rooflines, architectural  
4 ornament, and materials of the Mother's Building, identified as:

5 (A) Siting of the building along the Pacific Coast and within the setting of  
6 the SF Zoo;

7 (B) Relationship of the building with the terrace/plaza that extends along  
8 the east facade;

9 (C) Three-bay composition in the Italian Renaissance style;

10 (D) Mission-style red clay tile hipped roof;

11 (E) Recessed loggia with vaulted ceiling and arches supported by  
12 Corinthian capitals and columns;

13 (F) Stucco finish with wavy texture;

14 (G) Tile mosaics on walls at north and south ends of recessed loggia by  
15 Helen Bruton (with assistance from her sisters Margaret and Esther Bruton);

16 (H) Recessed apses with decorative, pre-cast concrete panels and urns  
17 at east elevation;

18 (I) Frieze panels depicting cherubs and mythological figures at east and  
19 west elevations;

20 (J) Wood windows, consisting of:

21 (i) One 16-lite paired casement sash window at west elevation with  
22 a semi-circular pediment supported by Corinthian columns;

23 (ii) Six 5-lite paired casement sash windows, four at the east loggia  
24 and two at south elevation;

1 (iii) Two double-hung 6-over-9 sash windows with precast concrete  
2 surrounds, and triangular pediments at east elevation;

3 (iv) Eight double-hung 6-over-9 sash windows, two at north  
4 elevation and six at west elevation;

5 (K) Wood doors, consisting of:

6 (i) Panel main entrance doors with precast concrete semi-circular  
7 pediment with frieze depicting two female figures and a lintel listing dedication to Delia  
8 Fleishhacker in bronze letters;

9 (ii) French doors with transom and semi-circular precast concrete  
10 pediment supported by Corinthian columns at north elevation;

11 (L) Concrete balustrade delineating the east entrance terrace/plaza; and

12 (M) Two-tiered, semicircular concrete and stucco planters at base of  
13 recessed apses on east elevation and at one window on west elevation.

14 (2) The character-defining interior features of the Mother's Building are those  
15 depicted in photos and written description in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, all of  
16 which were historically accessible to the public, including:

17 (A) Symmetrical arrangement of a large central room flanked by two  
18 smaller rooms;

19 (B) Egg tempera on plaster murals by Helen K. Forbes and Dorothy  
20 Puccinelli with wood wainscoting below;

21 (C) Decorative wood beam ceiling;

22 (D) Hardwood flooring at main lounge;

23 (E) Wood panel doors with painted surrounds at main lounge; and

24 (F) Two walnut benches and octagonal tables.  
25

1 Section 5. Standards of Review for Applications.

2 The following scopes of work shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness, or shall  
3 be subject to an Administrative Certificate of Appropriateness, as specified below:

4 (a) No Certificate of Appropriateness shall be required for new plantings, pruning,  
5 changes to vegetation, changes to driveways, pathways, retaining walls, or other structures  
6 within the surroundings of the Mother's Building. Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed  
7 to regulate maintenance of or changes to vegetation, driveways, pathways, or other features  
8 aside from those specified herein, within the SF Zoo; and

9 (b) An Administrative Certificate of Appropriateness shall be required for work  
10 delegated by the Historic Preservation Commission to Planning Department Preservation staff  
11 pursuant to Planning Code Section 1006.2.

12  
13 Section 6. Effective Date.

14 This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs  
15 when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not  
16 sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the  
17 Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

18  
19 APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
20 DAVID CHIU, City Attorney

21 By: /s/ Victoria Wong

22 VICTORIA WONG  
23 Deputy City Attorney

24 n:\legana\as2022\1800206\01606959.docx



City and County of San Francisco

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

Tails
Ordinance

File Number: 220757

Date Passed: September 06, 2022

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to designate Mother's Building, situated within San Francisco Zoological Gardens, 1 Zoo Road, southeast of Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard, in Assessor's Parcel Block No. 7281, Lot No. 006, 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.

July 25, 2022 Land Use and Transportation Committee - RECOMMENDED AS COMMITTEE REPORT

July 26, 2022 Board of Supervisors - PASSED ON FIRST READING

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

September 06, 2022 Board of Supervisors - FINALLY PASSED

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

File No. 220757

I hereby certify that the foregoing Ordinance was FINALLY PASSED on 9/6/2022 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Handwritten signature of Angela Calvillo
Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

Handwritten signature of London N. Breed
London N. Breed
Mayor

9/16/22
Date Approved



# ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION FACT SHEET



Mother's Building, east façade  
Source: [Richard Rothman, San Francisco](#)

<b>Historic Name:</b>	Delia Fleishhacker Memorial Building, Mothers House, Zoo Mother's Building  This building has been referred to by different names and name variations, including Mother's or Mothers Building, Mother's or Mothers House, Fleishhacker Mother House, Zoo Mother's Building, and Delia Fleishhacker Memorial Building. For the purposes of this designation fact sheet, the building will be called either Mother's or Mothers Building.
<b>Address:</b>	Located within San Francisco Zoological Gardens (SF Zoo) (1 Zoo Road)
<b>Block/ Lot(s):</b>	7281/006
<b>Parcel Area:</b>	N/A

<b>Zoning:</b>	P (Public) / OS Height and Bulk
<b>Year Built:</b>	1925
<b>Architect:</b>	George W. Kelham
<b>Artists:</b>	Helen K. Forbes Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli (Cravath) Helen Bruton Margaret Bruton Esther Bruton
<b>Prior Historic Studies/Other Designations:</b>	<p>Architectural Resources Group, Inc. "Mothers Building Conditions Assessment." Prepared for San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, February 2016.</p> <p>Anne Rosenthal Fine Art Conservation. "Examination and Condition Report of Mural of Noah's Ark by Dorothy Puccinelli and Helen Forbes, 1933-1938 at The Mothers' House." Prepared for Architectural Resources Group, Inc. for Conditions Assessment. July 8, 2015.</p> <p>National Register of Historic Places, Delia Fleishhacker Memorial Building/Mothers House, City and County of San Francisco, California, National Register #79000529, 1979. The Mothers Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.</p>
<b>Prior HPC Actions:</b>	None
<b>Significance Criteria:</b>	<p><u>Events:</u> Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. (National Register Criterion A)</p> <p><u>Architecture/Design:</u> Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and/or represents the work of a master. (National Register Criterion C)</p>
<b>Period of Significance:</b>	<p>The period of significance for the Mother's Building is 1925 to 1938, reflecting the date the building was constructed to the time the WPA-funded murals and mosaics were created and installed at the building by Bay Area artists Helen K. Forbes, Dorothy Puccinelli, and Helen Bruton (along with Margaret Bruton and Esther Bruton).</p> <p>Although the building use was limited to women and their young children until the late 1960s, extending the period of significance to include these later decades does not best represent the building's historical and architectural significance nor would it capture additional significant features of the building not already listed as character-defining features below.</p>
<b>Statement of Significance:</b>	<p>The Mother's Building, constructed in 1925 for Herbert and Mortimer Fleishhacker to honor their late mother, was donated to the City and dedicated to serve as a resting place for mothers and young children. During the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era of the 1930's, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) and Federal Art Project (FAP), New Deal programs designed to employ artists and fund visual art in the United States, selected Bay Area artists Helen K. Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli, to paint interior</p>

	<p>murals, and Helen Bruton (assisted by her sisters, Margaret and Esther Bruton), to create tile mosaics at exterior. The Mother's Building is culturally and historically significant for its association with women's history, specifically, as one of the only recreation sites of the period focused on the comfort of mothers and their young children, and as the only large-scale WPA art project created solely by women. The building, which showcases the work of several of the region's finest female artists, is significant for association with these artists and their artworks, and for association with the history of the Works Project Administration's art programs. Further, as one of the few buildings remaining from recreational improvements made along the City's coastline during the 1920s and 1930s, the Mother's Building, which exemplified new patterns of recreation, is significant for its association with early recreational facilities in San Francisco. Lastly, the Mother's Building is architecturally significant as an excellent example of Italian Renaissance Revival architecture designed by architect of merit George W. Kelham.</p>
<p><b>Assessment of Integrity:</b></p>	<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>1</sup></p> <p>The Mother's Building maintains integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance. There has been little alteration to the building over time and a significant amount of historic fabric remains. The main interior space possesses a high level of integrity with a number of character-defining features, including wood paneling, original furniture, and the murals. The murals retain integrity although they are in deteriorated condition, exhibiting cracks and paint loss, particularly on west wall where water damage has been most severe. The tile mosaics at exterior also retain integrity.</p> <p>Overall, the Department has determined that the Mother's Building, inclusive of the WPA-era murals and tile mosaics, retains integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance.</p>
<p><b>Character-Defining Features:</b></p>	<p>(1) All those exterior elevations, form, massing, structure, rooflines, architectural ornament, and materials of Mother's Building, identified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(A) Siting of the building along the Pacific Coast and within the setting of the SF Zoo;</li> <li>(B) Relationship of the building with the terrace/plaza that extends along the east facade;</li> <li>(C) Three-bay composition in the Italian Renaissance style;</li> <li>(D) Mission-style red clay tile hipped roof;</li> <li>(E) Recessed loggia with vaulted ceiling and arches supported by Corinthian capitals and columns;</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," *National Register Bulletin*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995, 44.

- (F) Stucco finish with wavy texture (to resemble travertine);
  - (G) Tile mosaics on walls at north and south ends of recessed loggia by Helen Bruton (with assistance from her sisters Margaret and Esther Bruton);
  - (H) Recessed apses with decorative, pre-cast concrete panels and urns at east elevation;
  - (I) Frieze panels depicting cherubs and mythological figures at east and west elevations;
  - (J) Wood windows, consisting of:
    - (i) One 16-lite paired casement sash window at west elevation with a semi-circular pediment supported by Corinthian columns;
    - (ii) Six 5-lite paired casement sash windows, four at the east loggia and two at south elevation;
    - (iii) Two double-hung 6-over-9 sash windows with precast concrete surrounds, and triangular pediments at east elevation;
    - (iv) Eight double-hung 6-over-9 sash windows, two at north elevation and six at west elevation;
  - (K) Wood doors, consisting of:
    - (i) Panel main entrance doors with precast concrete semi-circular pediment with frieze depicting two female figures and a lintel listing dedication to Delia Fleishhacker in bronze letters;
    - (ii) French doors with transom and semi-circular precast concrete pediment supported by Corinthian columns at north elevation;
  - (L) Concrete balustrade delineating the east entrance terrace/plaza;
  - (M) Two-tiered, semicircular concrete and stucco planters at base of recessed apses on east elevation and at one window on west elevation;
- (2) The character-defining interior features of Mother's Building are those depicted in photos and written description in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, all of which were historically accessible to the public, including:
- (A) Symmetrical arrangement of a large central room (main lounge) flanked by two smaller rooms;
  - (B) Egg tempura on plaster murals by Helen K. Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli with wood wainscoting, embellished with a row of repeating metal motifs along the top panel, below;
  - (C) Decorative wood beam ceiling at main lounge;
  - (D) Hardwood flooring at main lounge;
  - (E) Wood panel doors with painted surrounds at main lounge;

	and, (F) Two walnut benches and octagonal tables.
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## Property Description and History

The Mother's Building is located within the San Francisco Zoological Gardens (SF Zoo), at the junction of Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard, in San Francisco's Lakeshore neighborhood. SF Zoo is bounded by Sloat Boulevard to north, Skyline Boulevard to east, Herbst and Zoo roads to south, and Great Highway to west. Within SF Zoo, the Mother's Building is located in the northwest portion of the facility, between Elinor Friend Playground and Koret Animal Resource Center.

The subject building is immediately edged on the west and south by narrow lawn with a few low shrubs, beyond which there are asphalt-paved walkways. At the north end of building is a paved walkway that extends eastward and adjoins the terrace/plaza along east façade. Adjacent to the terrace/plaza that extends along the east (main) façade, there is a large, paved area (in roughly the location of the site's original wading pool) that narrows into paved walkways that continue north toward Sloat Boulevard and south into the SF Zoo. The broader site is characterized by SF Zoo buildings and exhibits interspersed with landscaping and paved walkways.

Following building description is compiled from the *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*, prepared by Architectural Resources Group, Inc. in 2016, and the National Register nomination, prepared in 1979.<sup>2</sup>

The Mother's Building is a monumental one-story Italian Renaissance Revival style steel frame building clad with textured stucco, resembling travertine, and capped with mission-style red clay tile hipped roof. The building has a rectangular footprint and a three-bay composition. The wider central bay on the east (main) façade features broad steps leading from a paved plaza to a recessed loggia with vaulted ceiling and arches supported by Corinthian capitals and columns. The main entrance is centered in the loggia. The side bays include recessed apses containing urns. The exterior is embellished with decorative, pre-cast concrete elements that include frieze panels at the cornice level depicting cherubs and mythological figures, doors with circular pediments, Corinthian columns and capitals, and windows with triangular pediments and surrounds. Fenestration is multi-lite wood sash and wood paneled doors.

The primary, east façade faces onto a terrace or plaza paved with concrete pavers that are red, tan, and blue-green. The pavers are replacements as the original plans depict concrete pavers in a regular orthogonal pattern. The extent of the terrace was originally delineated with concrete balustrade and piers, but only limited remnants of these features are extant. From the terrace/plaza, entrance stairs comprised of a concrete structure with decorative parge finish rise to the loggia. At the head of the stairs, in front of the loggia, there is a wood frame

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<sup>2</sup> Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mothers Building Conditions Assessment*, prepared for San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department (February 2016); National Register of Historic Places, Delia Fleishhacker Memorial Building/Mothers House, City and County of San Francisco, California, National Register #79000529, 1979. For additional descriptive detail or information regarding condition of individual building elements, see the *Conditions Assessment*, which is included in the landmark designation case file.

trellis with horizontal metal mesh, constructed in 1989. The trellis structure, which was added to protect occupants from spalling concrete and plaster, extends into the recessed loggia.

Like the other exterior walls, the loggia walls and vaulted ceiling are clad with a decorative stucco finish in a wavy pattern. The flooring is concrete slab construction with a basketweave-pattern brick masonry finish. The main entrance doors are centered in loggia and consist of original paired 10-panel oak doors. There is a circular pediment above the door with a frieze depicting two female figures and a lintel listing dedication to Delia Fleishhacker in bronze letters.

The side, or end, bays of the loggia are ornamented with tile mosaics. Funded by the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), the mosaics, titled *St. Francis* and *Children and Their Animal Friends*, were done by Helen Bruton (with assistance from her sisters, Margaret and Esther Bruton) in 1934.

The north and south elevations each have two windows and an exterior door. The west (rear elevation) has a large central window, embellished by an ornate carved arch supported by two Corinthian columns. At the base of the window is a two-tiered, semicircular planter of concrete and stucco. The window is secured by a decorative wrought iron grill. Each of the side bays contains a small frieze complementing in miniature the large frieze above the main entrance.<sup>3</sup>

At the interior, the Mother's Building consists of a large central space (main lounge) flanked by smaller rooms at the north and south. Rooms at north and south have been altered and are back-of-house spaces – restrooms, storage, etc. – with plaster walls and composition flooring. The south room contained a storage room, a restroom, and a janitor's closet. Plumbing fixtures have been removed from the restroom, but the other rooms remain intact. The north room was originally a "Lunch Room" with a long wood counter and small pantry. In 1947, the room was converted to a men's and women's restroom and service closet.<sup>4</sup>

The main lounge has hardwood floors and walls with wood paneling/wainscoting, embellished with a row of repeating metal motifs along the top, with murals above. Painted surrounds highlight the doorways. The ceiling is painted plaster with decorative wood beams. The murals, which cover over 1200 square feet, depict the story of Noah's Ark: *Building the Ark* is shown on the north wall, *Loading of the Animals* on the west wall, *Landing of the Ark* on the south wall, and *The Ark's Passengers Disembark* on the east wall. Painted in egg tempera on plaster by Helen Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli, between 1933 and 1938, the murals were funded by the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Program, and by its precursor program, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP).

### Building History

The Mothers Building was constructed in 1925 on a tract of land located at the junction of Sloat Boulevard and the Great Highway – now the San Francisco Zoological Gardens (or SF Zoo). It was donated by the Fleishhacker brothers, Herbert and Mortimer, to honor their deceased mother Delia Fleishhacker's memory. The building was intended to serve as a lounge for mothers with small children – a place to change, nurse and relax. Distilled water, milk and refreshments were provided, including medical advice to mothers. It is noted to be the only

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<sup>3</sup> Mother's Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 1, Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mothers Building Conditions Assessment*, prepared for San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department (February 2016), 7.

structure in the west that was “designed to enhance comfort of mothers and young children spending the entire day in recreation”.<sup>5</sup> Originally, boys over the age of six were excluded; this restriction was removed in the early 1970s when the building was converted to serve as the Zoo’s visitor center and the general public was welcomed.

The site’s history as a “recreational facility goes back to the early 1920s, when philanthropist and civic leader Herbert Fleishhacker built a children’s playground, replete with a carousel”<sup>6</sup> on a 60-acre tract of land purchased from the Spring Valley Water Company in 1922-23.<sup>7</sup> In 1924, Fleishhacker added an immense outdoor swimming pool at the western edge of the parcel. Considered the largest in the world at the time of its construction, the 1000-foot by 100-foot swimming pool had space for 10,000 bathers and towers designed to accommodate all heights of diving feats.<sup>8</sup> Herbert and Mortimer Fleishhacker had the Mother’s Building and a “large wading pool constructed, at a cost of approximately \$50,000,”<sup>9</sup> at the eastern edge of the expanding complex in 1925. The Fleishhacker Pool and Playfield complex, which included a playground, swimming pool and bathhouse, and an athletic field with a baseball diamond and six tennis courts, opened, along with the Mother’s Building, on Labor Day weekend, 1925.<sup>10</sup>

In the *San Francisco Chronical* article about the opening, the Mother’s Building was described as:

... a handsome structure finished inside in heavy walnut settles and tables, the latter topped in Italian tiling. The hangings and reed furniture in the main hall are in mulberry and thistle tones. . . A wealth of potted ferns indoors and blooming plants outside give an added beauty to the structure.<sup>11</sup>

The wading pool and the Playfield were removed in the 1940s and replaced by a children’s zoo; however, the Mothers Building remained in use. The Pool was closed in the early 1970s and paved over shortly thereafter for the zoo’s parking lot. The pool bathhouse was demolished in 2012. In the late 1960s, the main portion of the Mother’s Building was closed when the matrons who had assisted mothers and young children retired. Access to the restrooms via side doors remained. The Mother’s Building was reopened as a visitor center for the zoo housing exhibits and providing a space for educational programs in the early 1970s. The use was changed to a gift shop in 1978. The building closed in 2002 and is currently unused.

The murals and tile mosaics that decorate the Mother’s Building were installed on the building between 1933 and 1938 as part of the Works Progress Administration program. The *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement (Draft)* notes that:

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<sup>5</sup> Mother’s Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 1, Page 1.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Graves and VerPlanck Historic Preservation Consultant, on behalf SF Heritage and San Francisco Planning Department, *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement, Rebuilding the City: 1933 to 1943 (DRAFT)* (August 31, 2020), 76.

<sup>7</sup> Mother’s Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 7, Page 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mother’s Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 7, Page 1.

<sup>11</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 7, 1915. Quoted in Mother’s Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 1, Page 1.

On December 13, 1933, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) . . . announced that it would hire 2,500 unemployed artists to “decorate” an unspecified number of public buildings throughout the Western Region, which included Northern California, Nevada, and Utah. . . . The largest and most prominent PWAP project was a series of frescoes painted inside Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill, which got underway in December 1933. All PWAP art projects were supposed to depict “the American Scene,” and the artists at Coit Tower were directed to depict California at the present time, including agriculture, industry, city life, recreation and leisure time, and home life. Additional PWAP projects included executing mosaic murals outside and fresco murals inside in the Mothers Building at Fleishhacker Playground (now San Francisco Zoo), painting a pair of murals inside the main lobby of Laguna Honda Home for the Aged (now Laguna Honda Hospital), as well as completing frescoes in “many of the city schools” and easel paintings for display in public places.<sup>12</sup>

Bay Area artists, Helen Forbes, Dorothy Puccinelli, and Helen Bruton were selected for the PWAP program and assigned the Mother's Building as the canvas for their artworks. Although the artists worked independently on the exterior and interior projects, both projects focused on depictions of animals and children. In addition to design and creation of their artworks, these female artists also oversaw a number of assistants – mostly other artists – employed by the PWAP (later the WPA Federal Art Project). Puccinelli and Forbes indicated that they had between 8 and 12 male assistants, including artist Matthew Barnes, who prepared the plaster underlying their murals just as he had done on many projects with Diego Rivera and for other WPA-era mural/fresco projects. In addition to her sisters, Bruton had several male assistants to help with installation of her project, including Italian master mosaicist Antonio Falcier, who was one of the Italian craftsmen that installed the mosaics in the Neptune Pool at Hearst Castle in San Simeon.<sup>13</sup>

Commissioned to create artwork for the building exterior, Helen Bruton selected the side walls of the building's loggia for her artworks. Each space measures thirteen feet high by six feet wide. She later credited her sister, Margaret, for the “idea of using mosaic, since the medium was durable and the murals would be exposed to the elements.”<sup>14</sup> Although Helen had made a series of mosaics for the Mudd Library at USC in the 1920s, those pieces had been created by assembling several painted tiles into a completed image, and she later admitted that she was not familiar with the technique used at the Mother's Building where tiny pieces of tile were used to create complex designs in the manner of traditional mosaics from ancient times.<sup>15</sup> One of the mosaics, *Children and Their Animal Friends*, depicts a boy and a girl with a horse, dog, and rabbit. The other, *St. Francis*, shows the patron saint of animals – and San Francisco's namesake – surrounded by a deer, a wolf, a snake, and birds.

Although the size, shape, and design for the mosaics were developed specifically for the Mother's Building, Helen Bruton and her sisters did much of the work for the project from their attic studio at their home in Alameda. Based on interviews of Helen Bruton and her sisters from the 1960s, archivist and foremost Bruton scholar in the

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<sup>12</sup> *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement (Draft)*, 29; quotes Alexander Fried, “CWA Artists to Start Work on Coit Tower,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 10, 1934), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, *Sisters in Art: The Biograph of Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton* (Berkeley, CA: West Margin Press, 2021), 88; The Bruton Sisters blog, “Helen Bruton's Zoo Mosaics,” May 2020, at [Helen Bruton's zoo mosaics \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com)

<sup>14</sup> Good, *Sisters in Art*, 88; The Bruton Sisters blog, “WPA Art Projects During the 1930s,” April 2020, at [WPA art projects during the 1930s \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com)

<sup>15</sup> Good, *Sisters in Art*, 44-46, 86-87.

nation Wendy Van Wyke Good describes the process for making the Mother's Building mosaics in her book, *Sisters in Art: The Biography of Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton*, and on her blog, "The Bruton Sisters":

... Once the preliminary drawings were complete, the time consuming, physically demanding, and intellectually challenging steps of laying out the mosaic began. The layout stage required copious amounts of space; fortunately, the Brutons could work out of their expansive attic studio in Alameda. The process began with the artist creating two full-size drawings that were cut into sections. The pieces of the drawing were placed on the floor, and the tiles were pasted on the paper according to the design, using Falcier's recipe for a simple paste made of flour, water, molasses, and vinegar. Finally, the duplicate drawing, already cut in pieces, was pasted to the face of the tiles, so that each section of the mosaic was sandwiched between two pieces of paper. The bottom layer of paper had to be soaked off before each section could be attached to the wall.

The installation process took about five days for each mosaic; during those two exhausting weeks, Falcier met the sisters at six o'clock every morning to help them carry the heavy mosaic sections onto the ferry and travel across the bay from Alameda to San Francisco. ... Once the plaster was placed on the wall, Falcier demonstrated how the sections of the mosaic were placed from the bottom and worked up; it was essential that "the section that you were mounting was square enough in shape so that it didn't sag or settle too badly at one side or another, and begin to throw the thing out of whack... it was a little like a jigsaw puzzle on a big scale."<sup>16</sup> Once each section was set in the plaster, the paper attached to the face was peeled off, and the surface of the mosaic was washed and polished. Helen estimated the entire project was completed by June 1934, in a surprisingly quick three months. ...<sup>17</sup>

Originally commissioned in 1933 to paint only the lunettes over the center doors on each wall, Forbes and Puccinelli were eventually able to expand the project – providing more work for themselves as well as many fellow artists – to include the full length and height of the walls above the approximately 10-foot-high wainscot. As with other WPA art projects, Puccinelli and Forbes were required to submit preliminary drawings and pass juried review. The murals, which measure approximately 11 feet by 28 feet (north and south walls) and 11 feet by 60 feet (east and west walls), covering nearly 1200 square feet, are egg tempera on plaster, a centuries old technique. The murals, begun in 1933 and completed in 1938, depict four scenes of the Noah's Ark story. The murals by Helen Forbes are *The Ark's Passengers Disembark*, on the east wall, and *Landing of the Ark* on the south wall. Dorothy Puccinelli's are *Building the Ark*, on the north wall, and *Loading of the Animals*, on the west wall.<sup>18</sup>

Using egg tempera involves combining a raw egg yolk with water to form an emulsion and adding powdered pigments ground in water to create a pigment that is then applied to dry plaster. In the analysis of the murals by Anne Rosenthal Fine Arts Conservation, the plaster support underlying the murals is described as consisting "of two layers, a scratch coat and finish coat, although there may be three layers" and "assumed to be lime based."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Helen and Margaret Bruton, interview, December 4, 1964. Quoted in Good, *Sisters in Art*, 91; The Bruton Sisters blog, "Helen Bruton's Zoo Mosaics," May 12, 2020, at [Helen Bruton's zoo mosaics \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Rosenthal Fine Art Conservation, "Examination and Condition Report of Mural of Noah's Ark by Dorothy Puccinelli and Helen Forbes, 1933-1938 at The Mothers' House," prepared for Architectural Resources Group, Inc. for *Conditions Assessment*, July 8, 2015, 1; Mother's Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 1, Page 1.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Rosenthal (2015), 6.

Puccinelli later recalled that the plasterer for the project was Matthew Barnes, who also prepared the plaster for the frescos at Coit Tower and for Diego Rivera's projects in San Francisco and Detroit.

Art conservator Anne Rosenthal notes that in using egg tempera the "artist must maintain a sufficient proportion of egg to pigment for the paint to be cohesive, and adhesive to the wall."<sup>20</sup> Close examination of the murals

...shows the typical application method of working with egg tempera, which, like fresco, can be very thin (like watercolors) or more robust like gouache. Building forms requires a great many cross-hatched lines, and the length of the artist's lines is remarkable, and unshaken. Shadows and dark colors require multiple applications, and light colors require few, as most highlights are composed of the bare wall revealing the brightest white.<sup>21</sup>

Although egg tempera is generally not recommended for large applications, Forbes and Puccinelli knew that it should be long-lasting, was readily available and easy to formulate, and could be applied to dry plaster, which was an important consideration for these female artists who needed to commute to the relatively remote worksite every day.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, it was a classical medium, "suitable for the stylistically Italian revival building."<sup>23</sup> In describing the Mother's Building murals, Rosenthal goes on to note that as the "...brush strokes are relatively thin, the vibrant white of the plaster was allowed to show through ... applying the paint in a translucent way adds to the luminous final effect of the painting."<sup>24</sup>

After the first mural was completed in about six months, the project went on hiatus. When the artists returned to the project, it had morphed into a larger undertaking under the newly formed Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project. Puccinelli recalled that in addition to working to "parlay this [project] into something bigger and better,"<sup>25</sup> she and Forbes had to take a break from the project due to changes in WPA program funding and in their own financial situations, stating that for a brief period both artists had too much money to qualify for the WPA program.<sup>26</sup>

Once completed, the murals were dedicated with fanfare as reported in *Time Magazine*:

... in San Francisco...last week, new murals were opened to the public in the midst of such community excitement that the paintings themselves were all but lost sight of. The San Francisco mural at

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Puccinelli interview, 'Work on Government Frescos.' In 'San Francisco Artists Series: Ruth Cravath: Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath: Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920–1975,' An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 70. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#).

<sup>23</sup> Anne Rosenthal (2015), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Puccinelli interview, 'Work on Government Frescos.' In 'San Francisco Artists Series: Ruth Cravath: Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath: Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920–1975,' An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 70. Quoted in Luciano Santollani, "Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *FoundSF*, accessed on May 10, 2022 at [Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20th Century - FoundSF](#).

<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Puccinelli interview, (1977), 14. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#).

Fleishhacker Zoo was a big, bright-colored affair done in egg tempera,\* portraying the story of Noah and the Ark. The work of Dorothy Puccinelli and Helen Forbes, it showed pretty animals embarking and debarking, a highly stylized Noah. But if the mural was restrained, its dedication was not: school children dressed as animals re-enacted the story of the flood, 2,000 pigeons were released during the ceremony.<sup>27</sup>

The murals were restored at least twice over the years. Dorothy Puccinelli is credited with one restoration in 1962. Emmy Lou Packard worked on the murals in 1975.

The condition of the murals, assessed in 2015, is detailed in the condition report prepared by Anne Rosenthal Fine Art Conservation, which is included in the landmark designation case file.

### **Events: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (National Register Criterion A).**

Constructed in 1925 as part of the Fleishhacker Pool and Playfield complex, the Mother's Building is culturally and historically significant in women's history as one of the only recreational structures in the west that was "designed to enhance comfort of mothers and young children spending the entire day in recreation."<sup>28</sup> Intended to be the "finest of its kind in the United States," the idea was of a place where restrooms, nurseries, and refreshments could be provided.<sup>29</sup> Distilled water and milk were provided and at one time tea was served from the Mother's Building and picnic lunches were provided for those wished to eat outside in the play area adjacent to the building.<sup>30</sup> Clinical rooms for the provision of medical advice were also considered, but do not appear to have been installed. The Mother's Building served as a place of respite for women and young children until the late 1960s when the last of the matrons that staffed the facility retired.

As site of two of the first projects funded through the Public Works Art Project (PWAP), and the only example that employed all female artists, the Mother's Building, which showcases the work of three (or five) of the region's finest female artists, is significant for association with New Deal-era Works Progress Administration art programs and with the artworks created by artists Helen K. Forbes, Dorothy Puccinelli, and Helen Bruton (along with her sisters Margaret and Esther Bruton).

In an article in *Women's History Review*, art historian Regina Palm details how the historical significance of the Mother's Building to women's history is twofold:

It not only houses monumental works by women artists who were working within fields of art traditionally dominated by men, but the building itself also serves as an example of the gendering of space within the modern city during the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Spaces designed and constructed specifically for women, like the Mother's Building, broadened the presence

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<sup>27</sup> "Publicized Murals" TIME Magazine, 6/13/1938, Vol. 31, Issue 24.

<sup>28</sup> Mother's Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

and participation of women within America's urban landscape. . . .these spaces also provided women artists with socially sanctioned venues in which to exhibit their work and abilities.<sup>31</sup>

Women's roles in and access to the public sphere expanded exponentially during the early decades of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, women, particularly middle-class white women, had access to transportation and the financial means to partake in recreation opportunities on the outskirts of the city. However, concerns over the propriety of the women occupying these public spaces were still paramount, as discussed in *Women and the Everyday City* by art historian Jessica Sewell.<sup>32</sup> Even within spaces considered appropriate for respectable middle-class women to occupy, such as transportation systems, shopping districts, tearooms, recreation facilities, and white-collar workplaces, they did not necessarily focus on the convenience or comfort of women. This is particularly true for mothers, or other female caregivers, of young children, who had an even more specific set of needs that were especially difficult to satisfy within public realm where women were still expected to be nearly invisible and minimally intrusive to continue to be considered respectable.

For these women, a "key aspect of the privacy provided by these gendered spaces was the ability to nurse [breastfeed] one's child outside the house" by incorporating aspects of the private (home) sphere into public buildings and urban landscapes via a ". . .gender-specific building. . .that evolved to accommodate the needs of the new, modern woman."<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the Mother's Building was unique as it

. . . was simultaneously a private space in an overtly-public locale. It was created for the sole use of women and their children and as a result was a feminine space – a private sphere – inaccessible to men. . . . It enabled women to traverse the boundaries of private and public and in doing so become active agents of the city. For they were not bound to the home, but rather were participants in the modern metropolis with designated spaces created specifically for their use.<sup>34</sup>

The Mother's Building is an excellent example of such adaptation within San Francisco's early recreational facilities. Further, gendered spaces, such as the Mother's Building, also provided employment opportunities, whether these were the female artists commissioned to decorate the building or those women employed as 'matrons.'

### Early Recreational Facilities in San Francisco

In the Historic Resource Evaluation for Buena Vista Park, prepared by Page & Turnbull, Inc., the development of San Francisco parks and open spaces is described as generally echoing national trends in municipal park development. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

. . .landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his colleagues designed municipal parks, such as Central Park in New York and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, based upon the principles of the European pastoral picturesque movement in landscape design. These early parks were meant to serve as romantic "pleasure grounds" and provide a refuge from the bustling cities around them. They included walking paths, water features, ball fields and other landscape features, but architecture was

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<sup>31</sup> Regina Palm, "The mother's house of the San Francisco Zoo: the art of engendering space in the modern city," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2019), 437-438.

<sup>32</sup> Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>33</sup> Palm, 442-3.

<sup>34</sup> Palm, 442.

discouraged as buildings were seen as intrusions into the scenic landscape. Buildings were accommodated only where necessary to avoid interfering with the appearance of landscape design features.<sup>35</sup> Pleasure grounds flourished in the United States from about 1850 to 1900 and laid the foundation for many of the country's most beloved parks.

Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, various progressive reforms led to a decrease in working hours and increased leisure time for the working class. The nature of public parks also shifted, as various "reform park" organizers promoted the idea of parks as "a moral defense against the potential for chaos they perceived in this new abundance of free time."<sup>36</sup> The playground movement also flourished during this period, as play came to be seen as an activity that molded children into good citizens. New playgrounds were constructed across the country, with many playgrounds inserted into existing parks. Organized activities were also promoted in reform parks, including athletics, crafts and dancing programs. As a consequence, facilities such as clubhouses, field houses, swimming pools and locker rooms were constructed to accommodate the growth in recreational programming.<sup>37</sup>

Although San Francisco was actively developing playgrounds in the early twentieth century, park development was more uneven. In 1909, the city closed the potters' field burial ground, which was located on land reserved in 1868 in the northwest part of the city, but it was not until 1919 that the Park Commission began converting its 200 acres into Lincoln Park. The Palace of Fine Arts, built for the Panama Pacific International Exhibition (PPIE) in 1915, was also deeded to the Park Commission following the Exhibition. By the 1920s, however, several major new park facilities were being completed, including the development of the 60-acre Fleishhacker Play Field at the junction of the Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard.<sup>38</sup> Development of San Francisco's public parks and recreational facilities is described further in the National Register nomination for the Mother's Building:

In 1855 numerous public plazas were set aside. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the City won worldwide acclaim with the development of Golden Gate Park. Its greatest period of growth [in parks], however, came in the 1920s and 1930s. There had been less demand for such facilities before when the general public did not have so much leisure time, when the more physical nature of work left people too tired for additional exercise, and when there was easily accessible undeveloped open space. In the twenty years to 1940, Aquatic Park, Marina Green, the Fleishhacker Pool, Playfield and Zoo, Stern Grove, Phelan Beach, the Palace of the Legion of Honor, Kezar Stadium, Harding Gold Course, Mt. Olympus and Mt. Davidson were all acquired by the City. These greatly extended free or low-cost recreational opportunities available to citizens and visitors.

This development reflected a changing perception of the role of City government which was now seen as obligated to involve itself in the lives of its citizens in an active way. And it reflected new patterns of recreational activity in which the family unit typically went on full-day outings.

Together with existing public and private facilities and natural features, there developed in this period a continuous recreation zone along the western rim of the City. Lincoln Park, Sutro Baths, the Cliff House,

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<sup>35</sup> Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 8, 15. Referenced in Page & Turnbull, Inc., *Buena Vista Park Historic Resource Evaluation (HRE), Part 1* (for San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, May 1, 2020), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Cranz, 62. Referenced in Page & Turnbull, Inc., *Buena Vista Park HRE*, 45.

<sup>37</sup> Cranz, 65, 72, 96. Excerpted from Page & Turnbull, Inc., *Buena Vista Park HRE*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Playland, Golden Gate Park, Fleishhacker Playfield, Pool (and later Zoo), and Balboa Park were all linked together by the beach. Excellent public transportation carried vast numbers of people to these facilities.

The July 16, 1925, issue of the *Municipal Record*, dedicated to recreation, stated: "Today San Francisco is spending millions of dollars to conjure away exhibitions of temper under the direction of the park and playground commission and Board of Education. The Children are being trained in sportsmanship. The citizens have voted 10 cents on every hundred dollars of assessed valuation shall be devoted to park purposes and that 5 cents shall be used for playgrounds." The same *Municipal Record* attributed San Francisco's prodigious park legacy to its Spanish heritage in which a pueblo or village was entitled to approximately seven square miles of land, or for San Francisco virtually the entire norther tip of the peninsula. This gave the City ample lands to sell for profit and other to be retained for municipal uses, including a park system.<sup>39</sup>

The "reform" or "rationalist" park and playground movement was part of broader Progressive Era social and political reforms in the early twentieth-century. This era marked a shift away from earlier romantic notions of parks as passive, "natural" areas, or "picturesque pleasure grounds,"<sup>40</sup> toward parks as places where the public could access open space as well as organized activities, including athletics, crafts and dancing programs. To accommodate the growth in recreational programming during the "reform" or "rationalist" park movement, many parks, including those in San Francisco, incorporated facilities such as playgrounds, clubhouses, field houses, swimming pools and locker rooms.<sup>41</sup> For reformers, such as the Fleishhackers,

...parks came to be seen as a means of reinforcing the family unit because of the activities in which families could partake. They were often praised for their ability to promote a higher standard of family life as a result of the 'pleasures' men could share with their wives and children.<sup>42</sup>

The Mother's Building, constructed as part of the Fleishhacker Pool and Playfield complex by philanthropists Herbert and Mortimer Fleishhacker, fit well into this pattern of development. It was a complex of recreational facilities meant to foster active recreation, constructed with private funds of "reform" minded philanthropists active in the City's fledgling park program – Herbert Fleishhacker was appointed to the Park Commission and served as its President in the 1920s. Further, having been constructed in 1925, the Mother's Building sits

squarely between two types of park reform – the reform park (1900-1930), which was rooted in the idea that the recreation offered through city parks could help alleviate urban problems caused by rapid industrialization; and the recreation facility (1930-1965), a reform movement that understood recreation as a municipal function and right unto itself.<sup>43</sup>

Following completion of the Mother's Building, in 1929, Herbert Fleishhacker continued to expand the complex by adding a "zoological garden."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mother's Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Pages 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Page & Turnbull, Inc., *Buena Vista Park HRE*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Cranz, 65, 72, 96. Referenced in Page & Turnbull, Inc., *Buena Vista Park HRE*, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Palm, 443.

<sup>43</sup> Galen Cranz, "Women in Urban Parks," *Signs* 5, no. 3, Supplement (Spring 1980), S80; Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 203. Quoted in Regina Palm, 443.

<sup>44</sup> "Fleishhacker Zoo Growing," *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 18, 1929), 7. Quoted in *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context*

The first animals were brought from Golden Gate Park, but Fleishhacker also purchased some overseas. Fleishhacker Zoo had just gotten underway when the stock market crash ended any hopes of its expansion. Plans to further develop Fleishhacker Zoo resumed in late 1933, when former Spring Valley Water Company land adjoining the facility became available for purchase.<sup>45</sup>

The availability of the land was fortuitous because clearing and grading land for the proposed zoo was exactly the type of project that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) could use to put hundreds of men to work during the Depression. Construction of the zoo “was one of the most ambitious WPA projects ever completed in the United States.”<sup>46</sup> As a WPA project, construction of the SF Zoo involved over 1,000 laborers assigned to the \$1,659,000 project. Work included

grading the 48-acre site; building two lagoons; installing underground pumps, irrigation, and utilities; building footpaths covered in “red rock” gravel, building stone-faced retaining walls and pedestrian underpasses; and trucking in loam to plant lawns, trees, and shrubs. The building program was extensive, including the Pachyderm House, the Lion House, and the Aviary; several dozen open-air animal enclosures; an exhibit called “Monkey Island”; an administration building and a café; several paddocks and barns; and a corporation yard with sheds and shops. Finally, in 1939-40, WPA workers erected chain link fencing around the entire zoo property, with a decorative stone wall facing Sloat Boulevard. Stone-faced pillars marked the driveway to the new surface parking lot. Transit riders were also provided for with the extension of the L Taraval streetcar line to its new terminus at 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Wawona Street – a block from the zoo’s entrance.

The Mothers Building, as part of the original Fleishhacker Playfield and Pool complex, was an element in a grand scheme of expansion and improvement of the City park system during the 1920s and 1930s, which provided a continuous recreation zone along the western edge of the city. The complex’s Pool and Playfield, which was “intended for picnics and general recreation, and ultimately featured tennis courts, a baseball diamond, a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round, a miniature railway, and donkey rides,”<sup>47</sup> as well as “sand boxes and wading pool,”<sup>48</sup> was designed to offer amusement and recreation opportunities to men, women, and children – advertised by the Spring Valley Water Company as a “children’s paradise” that includes a separate building to “afford shelter and rest room for the mothers of the children who come here to romp and play.”<sup>49</sup>

The Mothers Building is one of the few buildings remaining from the original Fleishhacker Playfield and Pool complex and the expansive recreational improvements made along the City’s coastline during the 1920s and 1930s. The building exemplified new patterns of recreational activity, designed to enhance the comfort of mothers and young children spending the entire day in recreation. It is believed to have been the only structure of this type in the West.

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Statement (Draft), 76.

<sup>45</sup> *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement (Draft)*, 76.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Palm, 438.

<sup>48</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, “‘Mothers’ House’ to Be Dedicated Today,” September 6, 1925, 15.

<sup>49</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, Spring Valley Water Company advertisement for Fleishhacker Playfield, September 7, 1925, 7.

### New Deal-era and artists

As one of the first project sites funded through the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), and the only example that employed all female artists, the Mother's Building, which showcases the work of five of the region's finest female artists, is significant for association with New Deal-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) art programs and with the artworks created by artists, Helen K. Forbes, Dorothy Puccinelli, and Helen Bruton (along with her sisters Margaret and Esther Bruton). The fact that female artists were selected to head the projects at the Mother's Building is fitting, given the nature of the building and its occupants, but it was unusual for the time and for the WPA.<sup>50</sup> While the WPA art projects were considered by many female artists as a prime opportunity to level the playing field for commissions, it was still the case that far more WPA contracts were awarded to men, making the Mother's Building project unique. Historian Regina Palm notes that "only around 13% of WPA recipients were women and the majority of those employed through the program worked in roles traditionally understood to be women's occupations including childcare, sewing, and education."<sup>51</sup>

Many female artists looked back on the New Deal-era as a "golden age of opportunity" when women artists "felt a great sense of camaraderie and equality with their male colleagues."<sup>52</sup> The PWAP and WPA Federal Art Project provided women opportunities to make a living from their art while also expanding their experience in helming large-scale commissions, supervising male assistants, and coping with complicated logistics.<sup>53</sup> Artist Lee Krasner noted that the programs were "required to follow an equal opportunity policy in hiring" and that, from her perspective, this was a unique period of time when "women were hired without discrimination."<sup>54</sup>

The skilled artists employed for the Mother's Building New Deal-era projects used the canvas wisely, employing centuries old techniques to modern effect. For Helen Bruton, and her sisters, the project marked one of their first forays into the use of tile mosaic, a medium that would play an important role in their long careers. With Helen Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli, the "design and execution of the Noah's Ark murals bears out their competency, as they are arguably among the most meticulous and largest murals in San Francisco, and certainly represent the skillful work of women as important contributors to the artistic legacy of the WPA period."<sup>55</sup>

### New Deal-era and Works Progress Administration art programs

The murals and tile mosaics at the Mother's Building were funded, and the work of the artists and their assistants was administered, through the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP) and its precursor, the

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<sup>50</sup> Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2011), referenced in Luciano Santollani, "Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *FoundSF*, accessed on May 10, 2022 at [Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20th Century - FoundSF](#).

<sup>51</sup> Palm, 445.

<sup>52</sup> Charlotte Streifer Rubenstein, *American Women Artists from Early Indian Times to the Present* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1982), 215. Quoted in Good, *Sisters in Art*, 86.

<sup>53</sup> Good, *Sisters in Art*, 85.

<sup>54</sup> Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 108, 174. Quoted in Good, *Sisters in Art*, 85. In this context, Krasner's statement can be construed as applying only to discrimination based on sex.

<sup>55</sup> Anne Rosenthal Fine Art Conservation, "Examination and Condition Report of Mural of Noah's Ark by Dorothy Puccinelli and Helen Forbes, 1933-1938 at The Mothers' House," prepared for Architectural Resources Group, Inc. for *Conditions Assessment*, July 8, 2015, 6.

Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). The Public Works of Art Project, created under the Department of the Treasury, was the first of the New Deal relief employment programs deployed for artists.<sup>56</sup> The Federal Art Project (FAP) was the visual arts component of the Federal Project Number One, a work relief program for thousands of unemployed actors, musicians, writers, historians, and other creative professionals and white-collar workers. Federal One was established in 1935 and operated until 1943. It was the longest and most productive of the New Deal arts programs. Federal One programs included the Federal Theater Project, Federal Writer's Project, Federal Music Project and the Historical Records Survey. The FAP's work focused on three main areas: production of artwork, art education through classes and community centers, and art research through the Index of American Design. The Federal Art Project employed numerous artists who were or would become famous, including Jacob Lawrence, Alice Neel, Henry Louise Freund, Mark Rothko, Lee Krasner, among many others.<sup>57</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the FAP, unemployed performing and visual artists found work through projects and programs funded through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA), two of the first New Deal agencies established after FDR took office in 1933. The two administrations employed thousands of San Francisco residents on infrastructure improvement and construction projects, including building, repairing, or upgrading roads, schools, housing complexes, parks, and playgrounds.

The first New Deal program to solely aid unemployed artists was the short-lived Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Also established in 1933 and funded through CWA, the PWAP operated from December 1933 to June 1934 and during that time more than 3,000 artists across the country decorated public buildings with murals and other works depicting everyday American life. The *Draft San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement* states:

On December 13, 1933, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) announced that it would hire unemployed artists to "decorate" an unspecified number of public buildings throughout the Western Region, which included Northern California, Nevada, and Utah. Dr. Walter Heil, director of San Francisco's M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, was appointed regional chairman of the PWAP. According to Dr. Heil, 60 Northern California artists would be put to work as soon as possible with salaries ranging from \$25 to \$45 a week. Other members of the board included Thomas Carr Howe Jr. (vice-chairman and director of the Palace of the Legion of Honor), "Mrs. Oscar Sutro," Templeton Crocker, "Mrs. Lewis Hobart," Harold Mack, and Charles Stafford Duncan.<sup>58</sup> The largest and most prominent PWAP project was a series of frescoes painted inside Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill, which got underway in December 1933. All PWAP art projects were supposed to depict "the American Scene," and the artists at Coit Tower were directed to depict California at the present time, including agriculture, industry, city life, recreation and leisure time, and home life. Additional PWAP projects included executing mosaic murals outside and fresco murals inside in the Mothers Building at Fleishhacker Playground (now San Francisco Zoo),

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<sup>56</sup> Laurel Bliss and Melissa Lamont, "Documenting WPA Murals in California," *Art Documentation* (Volume 29, Number 1, 2010), 5.

<sup>57</sup> *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement* (Draft), 28-29, 51, 117; Projects by Artist, <https://livingnewdeal.org/artists/>; Alice Neel, <http://edan.si.edu/saam/id/person-institution/3504>; Jacob Lawrence <https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1468.html>;

<sup>58</sup> "CWA Project Work Rushed," *San Francisco Chronicle* (March 11, 1934), 48. Quoted in *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement* (Draft), 29.

painting a pair of murals inside the main lobby of Laguna Honda Home for the Aged (now Laguna Honda Hospital), as well as completing frescoes in “many of the city schools” and easel paintings for display in public places.<sup>59</sup> The Coit Tower murals, consisting of fresco and egg tempera artworks by 25 artists and their assistants completed in fall 1934, are the first known and the largest PWAP/CWA-funded project.

Other New Deal-era art programs included the Department of the Treasury’s Section of Painting and Sculpture, later known as the Section of Fine Arts (1934-1942), and the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP, 1935-1938).<sup>60</sup> The breadth of artworks produced collectively from 1934 to 1942 is truly amazing: with approximately 100,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 13,000 prints, and 4,000 murals.<sup>61</sup> Through the FAP, artists created works in a variety of mediums, including photography, graphic arts, sculpture, and painting. The FAP operated over 100 community art centers nationwide and commissioned 2,566 murals during the course of the program. The sculpture division employed 500 sculptors and produced 17,744 works and the FAP funded 108,099 easel paintings and produced more than 2 million posters. The output of murals was small in comparison to the other visual arts divisions, but they were the most plentiful form of public art and they could be incorporated into the planning of new buildings funded by New Deal agencies or to update existing buildings. The scenes of American life decorating the walls of post offices and other public buildings throughout the country became one of the most recognizable artistic products of the New Deal era, and for many, the “mural division will forever be remembered in the public mind as the primary achievement of the entire project.”<sup>62</sup>

Hundreds of murals, sculpture, and other art works were commissioned for public buildings in San Francisco. In general, WPA (PWAP and FAP) artists were selected based on need, although the exact basis for determining need has not been well-documented, while Treasury Department artists were selected through competitions.<sup>63</sup> In practice, the program administrator

located the building and space for the mural, and sponsors for the paint and equipment. The subject and style of the mural were negotiated with the sponsors, usually the agency or institution in residence in the building. The muralists, because of the highly visible nature of their work located in public buildings, were required to please the government administrators, the sponsors, the denizens of the building, and the community.<sup>64</sup>

These included works at several San Francisco public schools: Victor Arnautoff’s “Life of George Washington” murals at George Washington High School; murals by Nelson Pool and George Wilson Walker at Roosevelt Junior High School; and Edith Hamlin’s murals at Mission High School. Other public artworks also included Diego Rivera’s Pan-American Unity mural at City College; the San Francisco Zoo’s Mother’s House murals and mosaics

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<sup>59</sup> Alexander Fried, “CWA Artists to Start Work on Coit Tower,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 10, 1934), 6. Quoted in *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement* (Draft), 29

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 24-32, 43-46; National Register of Historic Places, Coit Memorial Tower (Amendment), City and County of San Francisco, California, National Register #07001468, 2018, Section 8, Pages 25-26.

<sup>61</sup> Megan Hogan, “1934: A Stimulus Package for the Soul,” in *Common Ground*, Summer 2009, 25.

<sup>62</sup> *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement* (Draft), 117; Martin R. Kalfatovic, *The New Deal Fine Arts Projects: A Bibliography, 1933-1992*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994) xxxvi – xxxvii; Masha Zakheim, *Coit Tower, San Francisco: Its History and Art* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>63</sup> Bliss and Lamont, “Documenting WPA Murals in California,” 6.

<sup>64</sup> Bliss and Lamont, 5.

by Helen Forbes, Dorothy Puccinelli, and Esther Bruton, Margaret Bruton and Helen Bruton; Lucien Labaudt's frescoes at the Beach Chalet; Beniamino Bufano's outdoor granite animal sculptures; and interior and exterior art works at the Aquatic Park Bathhouse, among other locations.<sup>65</sup>

Program administrators encouraged the "artists to depict the 'American Scene' with representations of so-called traditional American values such as hard work, community, optimism, and family with many artists focusing on "recognizable and uplifting narratives customized to their geographic location and reflect[ing] the interests and history of the local area."<sup>66</sup> In California, murals created under these programs are typified by "representations of the region's mixed ethnicity...; the recreation, beach, and out-of-doors lifestyle; and the Hollywood and entertainment industry"<sup>67</sup> and exhibit influence of Mexican artists such as David Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera in figural representations and use of bold colors.

Although journalists and politicians often decried the art programs, particularly the murals since it was one of the most visible art forms, as producing poor quality, quasi-seditious artwork, many contemporary critics disagreed.<sup>68</sup> In reviewing the Mother's Building murals upon their completion in 1938, art critic Junius Cravens wrote in the *San Francisco News* that the "two murals harmonize perfectly, the painters have suited their work, one to the other, with great success. Their simple color schemes as well as their designs, are in perfect accord with the architectural elements of the interior." Cravens went on to say that the "Mother's Building room promises to be one of the crowning achievements among the projects which were instigated by the PWAP in Northern California."<sup>69</sup> Art editor of *The Argonaut*, Glenn Wessells, agreed, declaring the murals "among the most successful resulting from the Public Works of Art Project activities in the San Francisco region."<sup>70</sup>

#### Helen Katherine Forbes (1891-1945)

Born in San Francisco, Helen Forbes, was an artist and arts educator specializing in etching, murals, and painting. Forbes studied at the Mark Hopkins Art Institute (now San Francisco Art Institute<sup>71</sup>), where she earned a lifetime scholarship to the institution, the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich (now Akademik der Bildenden Künste, München), and with the Monterey/Carmel art colonies with artist Armin Hansen. She augmented these studies with extended painting trips to Europe and Mexico in the 1920s, to Death Valley in the 1930s, and the Sierra mountains throughout her life. Forbes was a member of the National Society of Mural Painters and San Francisco Mural Society, served as president of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists, furthered development of the Palo Alto Art Club, and was an exhibiting member of the Club Beaux Arts and San Francisco Art Center galleries. Reviews of Forbes work in the 1930s, called her style "conservative modernism," noting that she was a "...careful,

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<sup>65</sup> *San Francisco New Deal Historic Context Statement (Draft)*, 117-130, 167.

<sup>66</sup> Bliss and Lamont, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Junius Cravens, *San Francisco News*, 16 June 1934. As quoted in: Gene Hailey, ed., 'Helen Forbes,' in *California Art Research*, Vol. 16, San Francisco, 1937, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Glen Wessells, *The Argonaut*, 22 June 1934. As quoted in: 'San Francisco Artists Series: Ruth Cravath: Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath: Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920–1975,' An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 70. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf\(berkeley.edu\)](http://cravath_ruth.pdf(berkeley.edu)).

<sup>71</sup> San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) (1961-Present) or California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) (1916-1961) will both be used throughout this document. The school has also been known as the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art and San Francisco Institute of Art (1893-1916) and California School of Design (1874-1893).

sensitive and skillful designer” that “accomplishes just what she sets out to do”<sup>72</sup> with work that is “...refreshingly spontaneous and direct.”<sup>73</sup>

Forbes was born into a family identified with pioneer San Francisco, for her grandfather who came to California during the Gold Rush period and was an official with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company as well as her great-uncle, Captain Cleveland Forbes, the first captain of the first steamer to enter San Francisco Bay.<sup>74</sup> Her grandfather was also associated with the Wells Fargo Express Company and the Mutual Life Insurance Company, which Helen's father later managed.

When Forbes was twelve her family moved to Palo Alto and she was enrolled in a private school, which later became the Castilleja School for Girls, where she began to show artistic talent. Forbes graduated in 1908 with a scholarship to study art for an additional year.<sup>75</sup> Forbes then attended the Mark Hopkins Art Institute where she learned the fundamentals of drawing and

... studied with Frank Van Sloun, the muralist, who taught classes in composition.<sup>76</sup> After three years of figure and other forms of painting, Helen's work was awarded a scholarship for life in that school, which allows her to study there whenever she chooses. ... Forbes [then] went to Monterey and Carmel and studied with Armin Hansen, the marine painter. The picturesque seashore landscape, the old Spanish Mission, adobe houses and the Mexican and Portuguese fishermen were her subjects. Her studies under Hansen fired her with ambition to study under the best European masters.<sup>77</sup>

During her time in Monterey Bay area, Forbes may have spent time with the Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton, often referred to as the Bruton sisters, who also studied with Hansen and were active members of the artist colonies in that area. Forbes and Margaret Bruton had also both studied with Frank Van Sloun at the Mark Hopkins Institute, although it not known if the studies of the two women ever overlapped.

From Monterey, Forbes first went to Germany, where she studied from 1921 until 1925 at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich (also known as the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, München). During her studies in Munich, Forbes focused on draftsmanship, fresco painting, and study of human and animal anatomy, “...entering dissection classrooms with a zest for accuracy.”<sup>78</sup> These studies were invaluable to her later work, particularly WPA-era murals, when “...human and animal figures were done in heroic size,”<sup>79</sup> and for anatomical illustrations that Forbes prepared for scientific medical journals, presumably as a means of supplementing her income.

After leaving Munich, Forbes traveled to Amsterdam and Paris, where she sought out modern artists and visited museums and galleries filled with contemporary art. She undertook a short sketching tour of Wales, spent time in Florence, Italy, and then a month in Tangiers, Morocco before returning to California. Back in San Francisco,

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<sup>72</sup> Glenn Wessels, *Argonaut*, June 1, 1934, quoted in Gene Hailey, ed., ‘Helen Forbes,’ in *California Art Research*, Vol. 16, San Francisco, 1937, 84.

<sup>73</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 11, 1933, quoted in “Helen Forbes,” *California Art Research*, 85.

<sup>74</sup> “Helen Forbes,” *California Art Research*, 69.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. Margaret Bruton also studied with Van Sloun.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Forbes “exhibited infrequently but painted seriously until, after two years, she went to Mexico”<sup>80</sup> where she painted in Guanajuato before visiting Mexico City where she met Diego Rivera.

In the years following her time in Mexico, Forbes increased exhibiting her artwork with positive reviews. She also changed her focus to watercolors. Forbes demonstrated equal facility with watercolors as well as oil and tempera paint and “. . .always experimented with fresco.”<sup>81</sup> In 1928, Forbes partnered with two other female artists, Florence Alston Swift<sup>82</sup> and Marian Simpson, to develop frescos. The artists completed several projects for private homes before Forbes dove into the opportunities offered by the Works Progress Administration art programs. A biography of Forbes written during the WPA notes:

Since 1934 Helen Forbes has given almost her entire time to great fresco murals, commissions from the United States Government. . .under the WPA [art programs].

The original sketches for the design for the Fleishhacker Park “Mothers’ House” at the Zoo, in San Francisco, were passed by several art committees and the San Francisco Art Commission. Helen Forbes and her friend Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli, designed two of the walls. Their theme was “Noah and His Ark, the Embarkation and Debarkation.”

The preliminary studies of animals took about a year of sketching and composing. Helen Forbes read a huge book on “The Animals of the Bible,” and then decided to use the models at hand in the nearby zoo. She had to learn to draw animals as they paced in their cages, disdaining to pose; to study them asleep and to visualize them in action in their natural settings. She also went to several western ranches to study certain animals, among them a herd of imported “Sacred Cows.” These creatures, normally gentle, had proved resentful of their unfamiliar surroundings and would permit no one on foot to approach them. They were, however, accustomed to being herded by a man in a car. So Forbes followed them about in her automobile, sketching them as they grazed, and moving as they moved. . .

The first wall of the “Noah’s Ark” mural was finished in five months, amid many hazards of scaffolding and lighting. The final work has been in process for about three years, due to other commissions she has had to fulfill, and to changes in architectural plans and in the personnel of her artist-helpers under the Works Program Administration.

One year after the completion of the first two walls, the remaining two walls were assigned for design to the same women artists and they continued with their subjects, “The Embarkation and Debarkation,” making an entire frieze of animals. The final touches. . .were still in process of painting in August 1937.<sup>83</sup>

During work at the Mother’s Building, Forbes, along with Dorothy Puccinelli, won an open competition in 1937 for a commission through the WPA section of the Treasury Department (Treasury Section for Fine Arts) for the U.S. Post Office in Merced, California. Each of the artists painted a mural for this project; Forbes painted an egg tempera on plaster mural, titled “Jedediah Smith Crossing the Merced River,”<sup>84</sup> for this project, which was

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>82</sup> Swift later worked with Helen Bruton on tile mosaics for the Old Gallery Building at University of California, Berkeley as part of the WPA-FAP.

<sup>83</sup> “Helen Forbes,” *California Art Research*, 79-80.

<sup>84</sup> New Deal Art Registry, accessed on April 20, 2022 at [Artist: Helen Forbes \(newdealartregistry.org\)](https://www.newdealartregistry.org).

described as being “bold and vigorous in color, line and emotion”<sup>85</sup> and was favorably compared (presumably with the work of male artists) with other historical murals then being painted throughout the United States as part of the WPA art programs. Forbes also had several other commissions through the WPA art program: an oil on canvas mural for U.S. Post Office in Susanville, California in 1939 and two tempera murals at the Public Library in Monrovia, California in 1940. These murals all depicted animals (only one of the Monrovia murals is extant).

Forbes, with assistance from Dorothy Puccinelli, painted a mural, known as the “Duck Mural,” along the eaves of her newly constructed house at 60 Alta Street, known as “Duck House.”<sup>86</sup> The mural is said to have been painted using the true fresco technique where pigments are applied to wet plaster. In describing her assistance on this project during an oral interview in 1974, Dorothy Puccinelli noted that Forbes did this artwork “principally to see whether fresco would hold up in this atmosphere.”<sup>87</sup> The house was designed by architect William Wurster, founder of the Second Bay Area Traditional architectural style, for Helen Forbes in 1935. After working with Wurster on her own home, which was featured in the December 1937 *Architectural Forum*, Forbes, as part of the organizing committee representing the Women’s Club House Association for the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island, may have assisted Wurster in his winning the commission for the Yerba Buena Club, known as The Women’s Clubhouse, for the fair.<sup>88</sup>

Forbes taught in the Art Department at University of California, Berkeley, and is represented in the San Francisco Museum of Art, the San Diego Fine Arts Gallery, and Mills College, Oakland.<sup>89</sup>

#### Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli (Cravath) (1901-1974)

Dorothy Puccinelli, primarily known as a New Deal-era muralist, has been described as “one of San Francisco’s most versatile women artists,”<sup>90</sup> working in oils, watercolor, tempera, lithographs, sculpture, stage setting and interior decoration.<sup>91</sup> Born in Texas, she moved from Texas to Half Moon Bay, California as a young girl and attended the California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute) for four years. In 1925, Puccinelli moved to the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design where she studied for two years with Schaeffer and Beniamino Buffano.<sup>92</sup> Although her works have been described as having a “certain boldness of execution and originality in design” that makes them “distinctive,”<sup>93</sup> Puccinelli does not appear to have a large body of work,

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<sup>85</sup> “Helen Forbes,” *California Art Research*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> “Helen Forbes,” *California Art Research*, 88; Nancy Shanahan, “Telegraph Hill’s Architectural Survivors,” originally published in *The Semaphore* #215, Autumn 2016, accessed at FoundSF on May 16, 2022 at [Telegraph Hill’s Architectural Survivors - FoundSF](#).

<sup>87</sup> San Francisco Artists Series, “Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920-1975: Ruth Cravath and Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath,” an interview conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley & The Bancroft Library, 1977), 9. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#).

<sup>88</sup> Andrew M. Shanken, *Into the Void Pacific: Building the 1939 San Francisco World’s Fair* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 185-186.

<sup>89</sup> Mother’s Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 5.

<sup>90</sup> Gene Hailey, ed., “Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli: Biography and Works,” in *California Art Research*, San Francisco, 1937, 69. Accessed at [cara\\_v20\\_p1\\_puccinellis.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#).

<sup>91</sup> Mother’s Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 5.

<sup>92</sup> “Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli: Biography and Works,” *California Art Research*, 69. Accessed at [cara\\_v20\\_p1\\_puccinellis.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#); Mother’s Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 5.

<sup>93</sup> “Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli: Biography and Works,” *California Art Research*, 68. Accessed at [cara\\_v20\\_p1\\_puccinellis.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#).

although she seems to have remained actively involved in and connected with the Bay Area arts and artists community throughout her life. In the 1960s, she worked on restorations of several Bay Area WPA-era murals, including at Coit Tower and at the Mother's Building.

Puccinelli won first prize of \$100 at the Seventh Annual Exhibit of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists and had positive reviews for a one woman show she staged at the Palace of the Legion of Honor in 1933. This show was a collection of large drawings of animals and people that she had made from sketches done during early morning visits to the zoo with artist Helen Forbes. Puccinelli noted in an oral interview in 1974 that she and Forbes, prior to their work at the Mother's Building, had been "...working out at the zoo for several years, off and on ... going out in the morning before the people came in and sketch animals ... because [they] were both interested in people and animals."<sup>94</sup>

Shortly after her show at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, Puccinelli, along with Helen Forbes, was selected to paint murals for the Mother's Building as part of the Public Works Art Project (PWAP), a precursor to the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Program. Together, Puccinelli and Forbes designed a set of murals to go above the paneling on the four walls. Years later, Puccinelli noted that when the WPA mural projects at Coit Tower and Mother's Building began, few San Francisco artists knew anything about fresco painting. She says that not only was she not very interested in fresco painting, she thought frescos/murals "...were a mistake, because you can't move them. ... better was [sic] wall-hangings."<sup>95</sup> Puccinelli said that she learned most of what she knew about fresco painting from going and watching Diego Rivera work on his fresco projects at Ralph Stackpole's studio (in the Montgomery Block) or while Rivera was painting [*The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*] at the San Francisco Art Institute.<sup>96</sup>

The Mother's Building mural project, originally meant to consist of painting the lintels above the doors, grew to encompass the four upper walls on the main lounge, and spanned five years from 1933 to 1938. During the extended project, Puccinelli and Forbes "'set to and made designs for the whole place' instead of just the lintels, and were notably able to the sell their proposal to the famed architect behind the Mother's Building, George Kelham,"<sup>97</sup> who may have helped convince the WPA to extend and expand the project. Puccinelli recalls that in addition to working to "parlay this [project] into something bigger and better,"<sup>98</sup> she and Forbes had to take a break from the project due to changes in WPA program funding and in their own financial situations, stating that for a brief period both artists had too much money to qualify for the WPA program.<sup>99</sup> Several of the other mural projects that Puccinelli and Helen Forbes collaborated on also overlapped with their work at the Mother's

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<sup>94</sup>Dorothy Puccinelli interview. In 'San Francisco Artists Series: Ruth Cravath: Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath: Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920–1975,' An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 10. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Luciano Santollani, "Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *FoundSF*, accessed on May 10, 2022 at [Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20th Century - FoundSF](#).

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Luciano Santollani, "Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *FoundSF*, accessed on May 10, 2022 at [Forgotten Murals Empowered Women during the 20th Century - FoundSF](#).

<sup>99</sup> Dorothy Puccinelli interview. In 'San Francisco Artists Series: Ruth Cravath: Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath: Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920–1975,' An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, 14. Accessed at [cravath\\_ruth.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#).

Building, which may also have contributed to the multi-year timeline. In 1935, Puccinelli assisted Forbes in the painting of a true fresco on an exterior wall at Forbes' new house (60 Alta Street). In 1937, the pair entered an open competition and won another WPA (Treasury Section for Fine Arts) commission for the U.S. Post Office in Merced, California; Puccinelli painted a tempera on canvas mural, titled "Vacheros," for this project.<sup>100</sup>

Puccinelli was a member of the San Francisco Art Association, San Francisco Art Center, San Francisco Society of Mural Painters, San Francisco Society of Women Artists, and Foundation of Western Art, Los Angeles.<sup>101</sup> Her works are represented in the Palace Hotel (mural titled, "Rose Gatherers"), California Palace of the Legion of Honor, and San Francisco Museum of Art.

### The Bruton sisters<sup>102</sup>

In one of her inaugural posts on "The Bruton Sisters Blog," Wendy Van Wyck Good provides the following introduction and summary:

The three Bruton sisters, Margaret, Esther, and Helen, were prolific and inventive artists working in California from the 1920s through the 1970s. Together, and separately, they experimented with modernism in a wide variety of styles and mediums, collaborated with important artists and architects, were lauded by the press, and won countless art prizes, frequently besting male artists who went on to have more successful careers. Known as the "gifted sisters from Monterey" or the "three amazing Bruton sisters," they were called "geniuses" who "impress by the intelligence of their art." They earned commissions for important public art projects funded by the WPA, culminating in their masterful execution of a bas relief mural for the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. The Brutons were paid \$20,000 for the mural (more than \$350,000 in today's dollars), an astounding sum to earn in the final year of the Depression.

Despite their prominence in the early twentieth century, the Brutons were largely forgotten by the time of their deaths. Like many successful women artists of the early twentieth century, the "famous Bruton sisters" were victims of the changing post-World War II art scene; modernism came to be associated with its male practitioners, and women were left out of the canon. This was especially discouraging for women artists like the Brutons, who were afforded so many opportunities through the WPA art projects of the 1930s. Recently, however, the Brutons' art is reappearing in museum exhibits and has become increasingly attractive to collectors. Their works have been on display in recent museum exhibitions at the Monterey Museum of Art (2012), the Honolulu Museum of Art (2014), the Chaffey Community Museum of Art (2018), and the Pasadena Museum of History (2019). The Buck Collection, an extensive collection of early 20<sup>th</sup> century California art donated to UC Irvine in 2017, includes twenty-eight works by the Brutons.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> New Deal Art Registry, accessed on April 20, 2022 at [Artist: Dorothy Puccinelli \(newdealartregistry.org\)](https://www.newdealartregistry.org/artist/dorothy-puccinelli).

<sup>101</sup> "Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli: Biography and Works," *California Art Research*, 73A. Accessed at [cara\\_v20\\_p1\\_puccinellis.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.cara.v20.p1.puccinellis.pdf).

<sup>102</sup> Further information about the lives and artworks of the Bruton sisters is available in the "The Bruton Sisters" blog, maintained by Wendy Van Wyck Good, at [The Bruton Sisters](https://www.thebruton.com/), and in their definitive biography by Wendy Van Wyck Good, *Sisters in Art: The Biography of Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton* (Berkeley, CA: West Margin Press, 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, "Introducing the Brutons," March 21, 2019, at [The Bruton Sisters](https://www.thebruton.com/).

### Helen Bruton (1898-1985)

Helen Bruton, printmaker and mosaic muralist, said to be “among the earliest pioneers of the [mosaic] revival,”<sup>104</sup> was born in Alameda, California in 1898, the youngest of three sisters. Like her sisters, Margaret and Esther, who were also professional artists, Helen studied at several well-known art schools and travelled extensively. After attending Alameda public schools, she enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley where she majored in art. During World War I, after a time working in Washington, D.C. for the Navy Department, Helen returned to San Francisco, where she and her sisters worked in occupational therapy at Letterman Hospital at the Presidio.<sup>105</sup> After the war, Helen returned to the East Coast, attending the Art Students League in New York City in 1920, where she studied with famous sculptors Stirling Calder and Leo Lentelli.<sup>106</sup> After returning to California for a time, Helen and her sisters, along with their widowed mother, traveled to Europe where the sisters studied in Paris.

In 1929, Helen Bruton traveled to Southern California to pitch her design skills to Gladding, McBean and Company, a major manufacturer of decorative terra cotta tile, in Glendale, California. Her timing was fortuitous, and the company commissioned her to complete 22 panels in faience tile, representing famous philosophers, for the Mudd Memorial Library at the University of California (USC).<sup>107</sup> For the project, Helen designed and produced large drawings of each philosopher, including color theme, and then the designs were done on 12-inch tiles that were assembled to represent the full image and installed on the building. At the same time, she was working on this project, Helen also joined an exhibit in San Francisco with her sisters, exhibiting wood block prints inspired during a recent trip by the family to New Mexico.<sup>108</sup>

When her interest in sculpture waned, Helen joined her sister, Esther, in focusing on etchings and woodcuts. After compiling a portfolio of these works, the pair spent the winter of 1930 – the height of the Depression – in New York in an effort to obtain book illustrating commissions. During this sojourn, they were hired to produce nine detailed drawings as illustrations for *Bird Life at the Pole*, published in 1931.<sup>109</sup>

In 1934, images of the completed mosaics at the Mother's Building were published in the *San Francisco Examiner* along with a description and review:

Without the blow of trumpets, there is developing here in the West, specifically in San Francisco, a school of fresco painting and a modern mosaic revival. . . . It is quite probably that Ray Boynton and the Brutons are the only ones, so far in this country, who are attempting to adapt the ancient medium to modern motifs. . . . They treat it as a direct medium, make their own designs, cut their own stone and set

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<sup>104</sup> J. Mellentin Haswell, *Van Nostrand Reinhold Manual of Mosaic* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 176. Quoted in Wendy Van Wyck Good, *Sisters in Art*, 87. This manual is a survey of the craft that discusses mosaic history and techniques developed through the centuries.

<sup>105</sup> Gene Hailey, ed., “Helen Bruton,” *California Art Research* (San Francisco: Abstract from WPA Project 2874, 1937), Vol. 16, 51.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 52; Wendy Van Wyck Good, “The USC Mosaics: How Helen Bruton’s Contribution was Nearly Lost,” October 5, 2019, The Bruton Sisters blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at [The USC mosaics: How Helen Bruton’s contribution was nearly lost \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com).

<sup>108</sup> “Helen Bruton,” *California Art Research*, 53.

<sup>109</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, The Bruton Sisters Blog, “Esther Bruton and Helen Bruton Illustrate “Bird Life at the Pole,” June 3, 2019. <https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com/2019/05/esther-bruton-and-helen-bruton.html>

the design. . . . These two panels in tile mosaic “St. Francis” and “Children and Their Animal Friends” were designed by Helen Bruton, but her sisters, Esther and Margaret, worked equally hard in their execution as voluntary assistants. The work shows their skilled craftsmanship. . . .<sup>110</sup>

In addition to the Mother's Building project, Helen Bruton had several other WPA commissions. In 1936, Helen, in collaboration with Florence Alston Swift, were hired by the WPA Federal Art Project (WPA-FAP) to install mosaics in the niches on either side of the entrance of the “Old Art Gallery” on the University of California, Berkeley campus.<sup>111</sup> The performing arts were selected as the theme for the mosaics - Bruton's represents sculpture and dance, Swift's depicts music and painting - and each artist worked independently in their own studios, although they collaborated on style and color scheme. Like on the Mother's Building project, Bruton was assisted by experienced mosaicist Anthony Falcier as well as several other male assistants. The mosaics took nine months to complete and were described in the press at the time of their dedication as “. . . an outstanding adaptation of the ancient art of mosaic to present-day uses”<sup>112</sup> that are “rich in color, and every play of sunlight or shift of shadow changes them to the enjoyment of the beholder.”<sup>113</sup> For the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, in 1940, Helen created two terra cotta bas relief panels, titled “RFD 1” and “RFD 2,” each depicting children standing against a rural mailbox, for the U.S. Post Office in Fresno.

For Helen Bruton, and the Bruton sisters, association with the WPA culminated in two grandiose undertakings, both for the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE). Although not officially affiliated with the WPA, the administration and funding for the GGIE shared many commonalities with the Depression-era work programs and was organized, in part, to celebrate emergence from the suffering and impoverishment of the previous decade. For the Fair's Court of Pacifica, architect Timothy Pflueger commissioned the Bruton sisters to create artwork that would be the largest such component artwork of the complex. For this project, which included the largest commission - \$20,000 (approximately \$350,000 today) - awarded to anyone at the GGIE, and the largest contract the Bruton's ever received, the sisters created an enormous painted bas relief, titled *The Peacemakers*. The piece consisted of 270 panels of plywood backing carved masonite that stretched 144 feet by 57 feet.<sup>114</sup> The piece made news even before the Fair opened with local newspapers noting the gigantic scale of the artwork, singling out Ralph Stackpole's monumental statute, titled *Pacifica*, and the Bruton's *The Peacemakers* with the mural held out as the largest such artwork at the Fair and “one of the most outstandingly successful mural decorations” and an “outstanding artistic achievement.”<sup>115</sup> While most fairgoers responses to the artwork were favorable, if not overwhelmed with its colossal scale, contemporary critics have criticized the work as a clumsy

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<sup>110</sup> Ada Hanifin, *San Francisco Examiner*, August 5, 1934, quoted in Gene Hailey, ed., “Helen Bruton,” *California Art Research* (San Francisco: Abstract from WPA Project 2874, 1937), Vol. 16, 57-58.

<sup>111</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, “Helen Bruton and the UC Berkeley Mosaics,” May 30, 2020, The Bruton Sisters blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at <https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com/2020/05/helen-bruton-and-uc-berkeley-mosaics.html>.

<sup>112</sup> “Mosaics are accepted at U.C. ceremony,” *Oakland Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1936, p. 6-B. Quoted in Wendy Van Wyck Good, “Helen Bruton and the UC Berkeley Mosaics,” May 30, 2020, The Bruton Sisters blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at <https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com/2020/05/helen-bruton-and-uc-berkeley-mosaics.html>

<sup>113</sup> Junius Cravens, *San Francisco News*, May 6, 1936, quoted in Gene Hailey, ed., “Helen Bruton,” *California Art Research* (San Francisco: Abstract from WPA Project 2874, 1937), Vol. 16, p. 61.

<sup>114</sup> Shanken, 95.

<sup>115</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, “*The Peacemakers*,” July 10, 2019, The Bruton Sisters Blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at ["The Peacemakers" \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com).

and naïve attempt to portray non-western cultures, citing it as another example of the Fair's inappropriate cultural miscegenation.<sup>116</sup>

During the second season of the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1940, Helen was asked to organize the "Art in Action" program. "Art in Action" was an innovative program outlined by Timothy Pflueger as a solution to fill the empty space left in the Fine Arts building after the European works of art displayed during the fair's first season had been shipped home. The "Art in Action" concept was to put artists on display so that Fair visitors could view them while they worked.<sup>117</sup> Helen was put in charge of organizing the event and the participating artists, and she

encouraged all her artist friends to participate, especially women artists like Helen Forbes, who demonstrated tempera painting; Ruth Cravath, who sculpted a horse's head from stone; and Carmel artist Maxine Albro who painted in oils. . . . Helen, of course, expected her sisters to participate in her project, and they dutifully complied. Margaret Bruton demonstrated the "construction of murals" when the San Francisco Society of Women Artists took over the *Art in Action* pit on 18 September 1940. Esther Bruton also joined in, constructing a mosaic bird fountain she called *The Early Bird*.<sup>118</sup>

Although her sisters assisted on Helen's WPA projects, particularly on the Mother's Building, Helen was the only one of the three to receive commissions from any of the art programs of the WPA-era. It is possible that the incomes of the other sisters, which included inheritances from their father as well as from a rental property in San Francisco, exceeded whatever limits were imposed by the WPA. Helen noted in interviews in later years that while only one of them won each commission, payment was usually split between all three sisters since each of them could always depend on the others for assistance. Following the WPA-era, the Bruton sisters continued in this vein, collaborating on numerous projects and usually sharing studio space either in Alameda or Monterey.

In 1949 and 1952, the Brutons had two group exhibits of their terrazzo decorative arts. Critics said of the mosaics shown by Helen that her work "surpassed that of her sisters" being the "most vigorous of all—in their earth, or stony look" and that her pieces that depict animals and people were full of "humor and brilliance."<sup>119</sup> In 1954, Helen made a mosaic for Starr King Elementary School in San Francisco's Portrero neighborhood (extant). In the mid-1950s, the Brutons, with Margaret obtaining the commission, undertook artwork for the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines. The artwork that the sisters created consisted of 22 mosaics depicting battle maps that were 10-feet by between 10- and 30-feet.<sup>120</sup> One of the last major commissions by the Brutons was for Buddha's Universal Church in San Francisco in the early-1960s with each of the sisters creating a large Buddha. Margaret's, representing Buddha reaching enlightenment, is nearly two stories high and made of ceramic, crushed quartz aggregate, and cement with gold leaf; Esther's, of a young Buddha when he gave his first

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<sup>116</sup> Shanken, 95; Wendy Van Wyck Good, "The Peacemakers," July 10, 2019, The Bruton Sisters Blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at ["The Peacemakers" \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com).

<sup>117</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, "Helen Bruton and 'Art in Action,'" July 19, 2019, The Bruton Sisters Blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at <https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com/2019/07/helen-bruton-and-art-in-action.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, *Sisters in Art: The Biography of Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton* (Berkeley, CA: West Margin Press, 2021), 476.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 515-522.

teachings, is made of mosaic, wood, gold leaf, and abalone shell; and, Helen's, of Buddha in his thirties, is a more traditional mosaic made of colorful glass and ceramic.<sup>121</sup>

#### Margaret Bruton (1894-1983)

Margaret Bruton, a painter, muralist, and printmaker known for landscapes and portraits, was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1894, the eldest of three sisters.<sup>122</sup> Like her sisters, Esther and Helen, who were also professional artists, Margaret studied at several well-known art schools and travelled extensively. After attending Alameda public schools, she enrolled at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art (now San Francisco Art Institute) in 1913 where she studied with Frank Van Sloun, before winning a scholarship that took her to the Art Students' League in New York. During World War I, Margaret returned to San Francisco, where she and her sisters worked in occupational therapy at Letterman Hospital at the Presidio.<sup>123</sup>

In the early 1920s, Margaret went to Monterey to study with Armin Hansen. The Brutons ended up being so enamored of Monterey that they built a studio and home there, with Margaret moving there permanently in the mid-1940s. Prior to this move, Margaret, along with her sisters, lived with their widowed mother and worked from a studio in the attic of the childhood home in Alameda. In 1925, Margaret spent a year studying in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. In 1929, Margaret and her sisters spent half the year in Taos, New Mexico and went to Mexico in 1935. Both trips, as well as shorter sojourns to the Sierra Mountain foothills, resulted in well-received group exhibitions at galleries in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York.

Margaret was a member of the San Francisco Society of Women Artists, the Club Beaux Arts, California Society of Etchers, San Francisco Art Association, and the Progressive California Painters and Sculpture. She won numerous awards and her work is in the collection of the Monterey Museum of Art, Oakland Museum of California, and the San Diego Museum of Art.

#### Esther Bruton (Gilman) (1896-1992)

Esther Bruton, painter, printmaker, mosaicist, and commercial artist, was born in Alameda, California, the middle of three sisters. After attending Alameda public schools, she joined her sister Margaret in New York where she studied for a year at the Art Students' League of New York. Esther then studied commercial art at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts (now Parsons) and worked as an advertising illustrator for Lord and Taylor Department store in New York<sup>124</sup> and later as "resident fashion illustrator with I. Magnin's department store in San Francisco."<sup>125</sup> In a biography of the artist prepared during the WPA-era, Esther's work was described as an "outlet

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<sup>121</sup> Wendy Van Wyck Good, "The 'Bruton Buddhas' at Buddha's Universal Church," August 23, 2019, The Bruton Sisters Blog, accessed on May 20, 2022 at [The "Bruton Buddhas" at Buddha's Universal Church \(brutonsisters.blogspot.com\)](https://brutonsisters.blogspot.com).

<sup>122</sup> "Margaret Bruton Biography," The Annex Galleries, [Margaret Bruton Biography | Annex Galleries Fine Prints](#); Gene Hailey, ed., "Margaret Bruton," *California Art Research* (San Francisco: Abstract from WPA Project 2874, 1937), Vol. 16.

<sup>123</sup> "Helen Bruton," *California Art Research*, 51.

<sup>124</sup> [Esther Bruton Biography | Annex Galleries Fine Prints](#)

<sup>125</sup> Gene Hailey, ed., "Esther Bruton," *California Art Research* (San Francisco: Abstract from WPA Project 2874, 1937), Vol. 16, 33.

for her sense of humor” with her “capacity to decoratively depict her observations of current life add[ing] zest to her art.”<sup>126</sup>

In the mid-1920s, while her sisters moved to Monterey, Esther traveled with an artist friend, Ina Perham Storey, to Tahiti. She then rejoined her sisters for a trip to Europe, where all three attended art classes at Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Following her time in Europe, Esther gave up commercial art and joined her sisters in a group exhibit of artworks that they each created during a visit to Taos, New Mexico. Esther’s contributions to the exhibit were wood-block etchings and decorative screens that were well-reviewed by local art critics. In late 1934, architect Timothy Pflueger hired Esther to paint murals for the redesign of the Fairmont Hotel’s cocktail lounge, one of the first bars to re-open in San Francisco following Prohibition. Esther executed nine murals for the lavish and elegant Cirque Room, painting “brightly colored figures on the gold [leaf] background, including flying trapeze artists, acrobats, and ringmaster, and performing circus animals.”<sup>127</sup>

Esther was a member of the California Society of Etchers and the San Francisco Art Association. Her work is represented in the collections of the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama; the Wolfsonian, Florida International University, Miami Beach; the Monterey Museum of Art, California; the Chaffey Community Museum of Art, Ontario, California; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; the San Diego Museum of Art, California; the Fairmont Hotel and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

**Architecture/Design: Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values (National Register Criterion C).**

The Mother’s Building is architecturally significant as an excellent example of Italian Renaissance Revival architecture designed by architect of merit George W. Kelham. A prolific San Francisco-based architect who designed many notable buildings, Kelham, who generally worked in the Beaux Arts classicism style, may have been a self-taught architect despite his carefully curated pedigree. A number of his buildings, including those he designed on the University of California, Berkeley and UCLA campuses while serving as supervising architect for these institutions, have been listed on local and national registers for their architectural merit, and his contributions to the San Francisco skyline has been called the “most significant of the architects then practicing in terms of the number and size of the buildings he designed.”<sup>128</sup> The nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the Mother’s Building, notes that it is an excellent example of Italian Renaissance style on a smaller scale than much of Kelham’s other work.

Beaux Arts Classicism, Neoclassicism, and Italian Renaissance Revival architecture emerged from Europe and quickly became popular throughout the United States. During the late 19th century and into the 20th century, the styles would be employed by architects in every major metropolitan city in America and came to dominate commercial and institutional architecture during this period. Italian Renaissance Revival buildings are generally characterized by base-shaft-capitol expression, elaborate arched openings with special emphasis on

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<sup>126</sup> “Esther Bruton,” *California Art Research*, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Good, *Sisters in Art*, 74.

<sup>128</sup> Mother’s Building National Register nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 4.

monumental ground floor entries, ornament such as scroll patterns, broken pediments, statuary, pilasters, balustrades, and round windows, and were constructed in range of materials including brick, masonry, and stucco, often treated to resemble masonry.

George W. Kelham (1871-1936)

George W. Kelham was born in Massachusetts in 1871 and most biographical sources, including an obituary in the *New York Times*, indicate that he studied architecture at Harvard University and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, graduating from the latter institution in 1896. Recent research, however, has suggested that Kelham never studied at either institution and may have received his architectural training in the traditional manner, serving as an apprentice or draftsman in Boston architectural firms. Harvard alumni directories contain no listing for Kelham during the period when he would have been most likely to have been a student and city directories indicate that he was living and working as a draftsman in Boston at the time he was reported to have been in Paris.<sup>129</sup> Further, his passport application in 1924 includes the statement that he had never previously been abroad.<sup>130</sup>

Kelham moved from Boston to New York City in the 1890s. He worked for the firm of Trowbridge & Livingston in New York from the late 1890s to 1909. In 1906, the firm sent him to San Francisco to help design the reconstruction of the Palace Hotel and he continued to work on this project through 1909.<sup>131</sup> Kelham was principal of his independent architectural practice from 1910 to 1936, maintaining offices in the Crocker Building, then Sharon Building, and then 315 Montgomery Street.<sup>132</sup>

Throughout his architecture career in San Francisco, Kelham designed many notable structures. Most of his commercial and institutional projects were done in the Beaux Arts Classicism and Italian Renaissance or Romanesque Revival architectural styles that emerged from Europe and were popular in every major metropolitan city in American in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>133</sup> Many have received landmark designations such as the Palace Hotel at 2 New Montgomery Street (1909, Landmark #18), the Sharon Building at 39-63 New Montgomery Street (1912, Landmark #163), Hill Bros. Coffee Plant at 2 Harrison Street (1926, Landmark #157), Shell Building at 100 Bush Street (1928, Category I – Significant Building). Kelham designed both of San Francisco's first real skyscrapers, the Standard Oil Building (1921) and Russ Building (1927, 235 Montgomery Street), followed by his notable tower, the Shell Building (1928), which was the tallest building in the city until the 1960s.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "George William Kelham (Architect)," *Pacific Coast Architecture Database*, <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/294/> Accessed May 18, 2022

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> "George Kelham (1871-1936)," Bay Area Architects, <https://noehill.com/architects/kelham.aspx> and <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/294/> Accessed May 18, 2022

<sup>132</sup> <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/294/> Accessed May 18, 2022

<sup>133</sup> [https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/a5151e47-83da-41b7-ae95-dda56667848b/Beaux\\_Arts\\_Classicism\\_Neoclassicism\\_and\\_Italian\\_Renaissance\\_Revival\\_1895-1940.pdf](https://planning.lacity.org/odocument/a5151e47-83da-41b7-ae95-dda56667848b/Beaux_Arts_Classicism_Neoclassicism_and_Italian_Renaissance_Revival_1895-1940.pdf) Accessed May 18, 2022.

<sup>134</sup> Mother's Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 3.

From 1912 to 1915, Kelham served as Chairman of the Architectural Committee of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), which was held in San Francisco in 1915. One of his primary design goals for the design of the exposition was to combine art and nature. As he later wrote in *Pacific Coast Architect*:

If we have succeeded in combining art and nature so that each seems a part of the other, in bringing the wonderful Bay of San Francisco into our picture, in making our great group of buildings nestle into their surroundings both in form and color, then the real meaning of what we have tried for is made clear.<sup>135</sup>

An important consideration in Kelham's master planning for PPIE was creating a complex that would shield visitors from the prevailing winds and fog. This was accomplished with eight domed exhibition halls that were so compactly ordered that they read as one structure, inverting the typical trope of world's fairs that focused on monumental architecture. "... Although the buildings were still highly individualized and assertive, the courts took on a powerful presence, serving as outdoor rooms that were destinations themselves."<sup>136</sup> An editorial published in the *Pacific Coast Architect* praised Kelham's leadership of the PPPI, stating:

He [Kelham] has perhaps devoted more time and thought to the work of construction, and supervision of construction of the entire Exposition, than any other single individual, and to him is due the greatest credit for his important part in building this Exposition--a work of construction and beautification that represents an investment of approximately \$50,000,000." (See "Editorial: Art and Nature Personified," *Pacific Coast Architect*, vol. IX, no. 2, 02/1915, p. 51.)<sup>137</sup>

In the early 1930s, prior to his death in 1936, Kelham served as Chairman of the Architectural Commission of the San Francisco Bay Exposition. This exposition, also known as the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE), was held on Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay in 1939-1940. In design and planning for the exposition, Kelham worked closely with architect W.P. Day, who was appointed director of the works. In his book, *Into the Void Pacific*, historian Andrew M. Shanken, noted that Day and Kelham, if conventional, were competent and politically savvy, and "...were among the elite and enterprising architects who had rebuilt San Francisco after the earthquake and fire of 1906."<sup>138</sup> Kelham was further described as a "...versatile traditionalist who could move freely between Beaux-Arts classicism and the Art Deco and modern modes then in vogue."<sup>139</sup> For the GGIE, Kelham assigned himself the design of the entire north-south axis – the Court of the Seven Seas and Court of the Moon – as well as Administration Building (originally intended to become the city's airport terminal) and with W. P. Day, two airplane hangers.<sup>140</sup> The Administration Building (1938) and one of the hangers, known as the Hall of Transportation (1938), are extant and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to his role in formulating design expressions for two San Francisco-based expositions, Kelham served as Supervising Architect at the University of California, Berkeley campus from 1922 to circa 1930, and "...was a

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<sup>135</sup> <https://noehill.com/architects/kelham.aspx> Accessed May 18, 2022

<sup>136</sup> Robert J. Clark, "Louis Christian Mullgardt and the Court of the Ages," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (December 1962), 171. Quoted in Andrew M. Shanken, *Into the Void Pacific: Building the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2014. 42.

<sup>137</sup> "George William Kelham (Architect)," *Pacific Coast Architecture Database*, accessed May 18, 2022 at <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/294/>

<sup>138</sup> Shanken, 31.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 53.

pivotal figure in the development of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Campus.”<sup>141</sup> At UCLA, where he also served as Supervising Architect, his work included preparing a

... campus plan for the proposed southern branch of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), also designing four of its first buildings... During his tenure as Supervising Architect of the University of California, Kelham designed ten buildings on the Berkeley Campus.<sup>142</sup>

Buildings on the University of California, Berkely campus designed by Kelham, include Bowles Hall (1928, the first residence hall on campus and first state-owned residence hall),<sup>143</sup> the Life Sciences Building (1930), International House (1930), Moses Hall (1931), McLaughlin Hall (1931), Davis Hall (1931), Edwards Stadium (1931), and Harmon Gym-Hass Pavilion (1932).

According to architectural historians David Gebhard and Robert Winter, Kelham was hired in 1925 to prepare a master plan for the new Westwood location for the UCLA campus.

For this hilly site, Kelham developed a dramatic cross-axial Beaux-Arts scheme ... with an initial plan for 40 buildings to be designed in the Italian Romanesque style ... a fashionable style for educational buildings in all of California during the teens and 1920s.<sup>144</sup>

Kelham also designed several of the first buildings on the campus, including Powell Undergraduate Library (1927-9), Haines Hall/Chemistry Building (1928), Moore Hall of Education (1930), Men's Gymnasium (1932). Although only a few of the planned buildings were constructed during the depression years of the 1930s, Kelham remained as Supervising Architect until his death in 1936.<sup>145</sup>

Other than his campus projects, the majority of Kelham's work was on buildings located in San Francisco, although there are several exceptions. In downtown Los Angeles, he designed an office building for Standard Oil Company (1923-4) similar to the one he designed for the same company in San Francisco in 1921.<sup>146</sup> Early in his architectural practice, Kelham designed handsome office buildings in Fresno, the Helm Building (1914); in Stockton, for Farmer's and Merchant's Bank (1917), and in Palo Alto for Stanford university, Roble Hall (1917).

Kelham's impact on the San Francisco skyline was the most significant of the architects then practicing in terms of the number and size of the buildings he designed. Much of his work reflected the traditions of the Italian Renaissance. The Mother's Building is an excellent example of this influence on a smaller scale than much of his other work.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> “George William Kelham (Architect),” *Pacific Coast Architecture Database*, accessed May 18, 2022 at <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/294/>.

<sup>142</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Bowles Hall, Berkeley, California, National Register #89000195, 1989, Section 8, Page 2.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith, Publisher, 2003 Revised Edition), 144.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 146-147.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>147</sup> Mother's Building National Register Nomination (1979), Section 8, Page 4.

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**Photos**



Mother's Building, east elevation, view west, circa 2005.

Source: SF Planning Department Case File Nos. 2005.1136L and 2005.1137L



Mother's Building, side bay at east elevation, circa 2005.

Source: SF Planning Department Case File Nos. 2005.1136L and 2005.1137L



Mother's Building, east elevation and terrace/plaza, view southwest, 2015.  
Source: SOHA Engineers



Mother's Building, east elevation and terrace/plaza, view south, 2015.  
Source: SOHA Engineers



Mother's Building, north elevation (L) and south elevation (R), 2015.  
Source: SOHA Engineers



Mother's Building, main entrance, view west, 2016.  
Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, terrace/plaza and entrance stairs at east elevation, view northwest, 2016.  
Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, window and surround, 2016.  
Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, loggia with tile mosaic by Helen Bruton, titled *Children and Their Animals*, in background.  
Source: [Richard Rothman, San Francisco](#)



Mother's Building, tile mosaics by Helen Bruton with assistance from Margaret Bruton and Esther Bruton, completed in 1934.

Above: *Sty Francis*

Right: *Children and Their Animals*

Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, main room with murals depicting scenes from Noah's Ark, view north, 2016.

Source: Caille Millner, "Mother's Building could use some love this Mother's Day," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 2016. Photographer: Gabrielle Lurie. Accessed at <https://www.sfchronicle.com/art/article/Mothers-Building-could-use-some-love-this-7383823.php#photo-9896877>



Mother's Building, detail of metal motifs at wainscoting in main lounge, 2016.

Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*

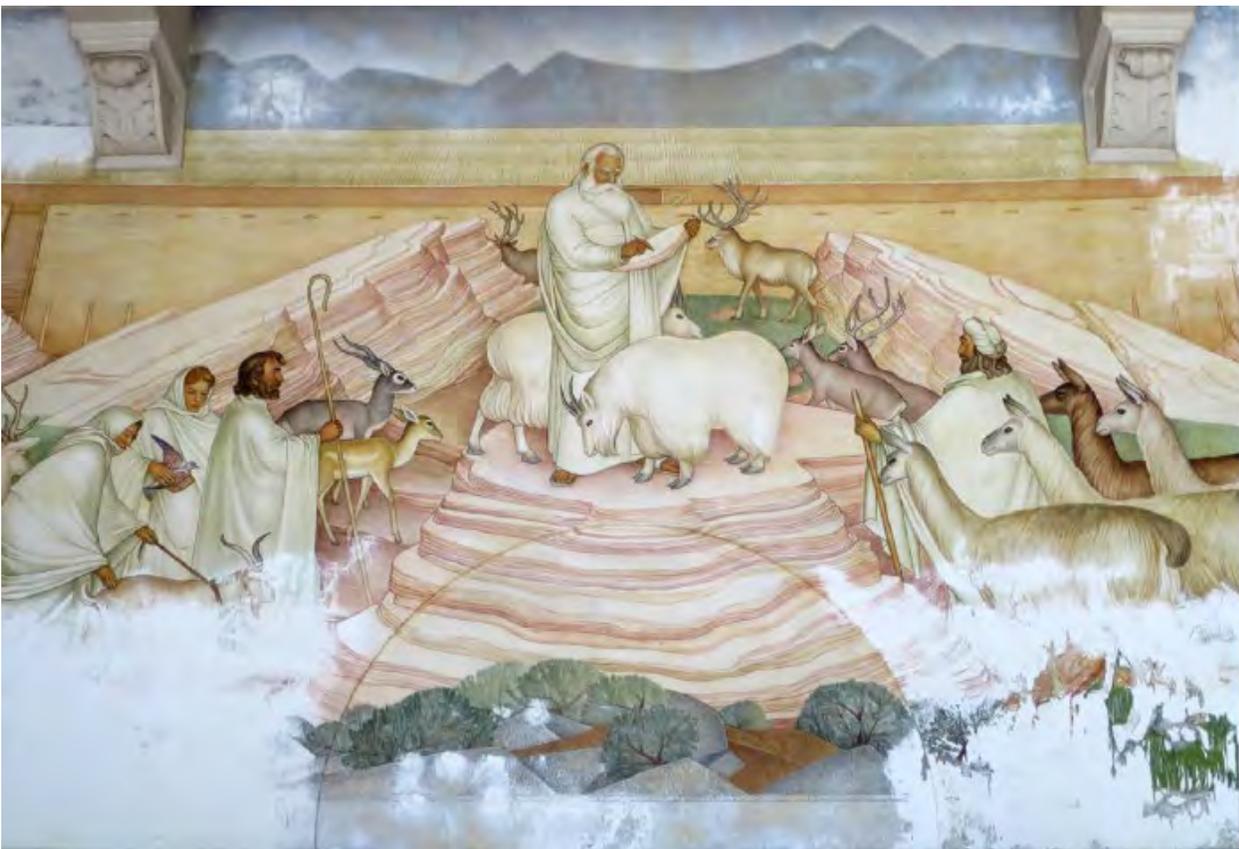


Building, detail of painted door surrounds in main lounge, 2016.

Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, *The Ark's Passengers Disembark* on east wall of main lounge, 2016  
Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, west wall of main lounge, detail of *Loading of the Animals*, 2016.  
Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, west wall of main lounge, detail from *Loading of the Animals*, 2016.  
Source: [Richard Rothman](#), San Francisco





## MOTHER'S BUILDING MURALS, SF ZOO

Mural of Noah's Ark in Mother's Building at San Francisco Zoo by Dorothy Pucinelli.

*Photo: Gray Brechin*

Source: [San Francisco Zoo, Mothers Building Murals - San Francisco CA - Living New Deal](#)



O. P. 465-03-2-669 Interior-Mothers' House  
Zoological Gardens - San Francisco - Calif.



## MOTHER'S BUILDING INTERIOR

Interior-Mother's House, Zoological Gardens- San Francisco- Calif." - WPA Photo, National Archives and Records Administration

Source: [San Francisco Zoo, Mothers Building Murals - San Francisco CA - Living New Deal](#)



Mother's Building, main lounge, view north, 1939.

Source: Works Progress Administration. From Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, east elevation, circa 1996.

Source: Historic Landscape and Architecture Survey of the San Francisco Zoological Gardens, 1996. San Francisco Planning Department Case File Nos. 2005.1136L and 2005.1137L.



Mother's Building, east elevation, view west, circa 1990.

Source: Architectural Resources Group, Inc., *Mother's Building Conditions Assessment*



Mother's Building, east elevation and terrace/plaza, view northwest, circa 1945.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp25.5241 at [SF Zoo - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.sfnzoo.org/learn/neighborhoods-project)



Mother's Building, east elevation, view west, circa 1940.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp27.4386 at [SF Zoo - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.sfbayhistory.org/)



Mother's Building and wading pool, circa 1934

Source: OutsideLands.org, photograph from private collection, accessed May 23, 2022 at [Fleishhacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.outsidelands.org/)



Wading pool in front of Mother's building, carousel and playground in background, circa 1925.

Photographer: Gabriel Moulin, April 3, 1947

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp27.4762 at [Fleishacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.outsidelands.org/)



Mother's Building in background of crowd gathered for Easter Egg Hunt at Fleishhacker Playground, April 11, 1926.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp100.00314 at [Fleishhacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.sanfranciscohistory.org/neighborhoods/fleishhacker-playground)



Easter Egg Hunt at Fleishhacker Playground, near Sloat Blvd & 45th Ave. Overall view looking south of crowds, wading pool, swings, merry go round. Mother's Building at right. April 11, 1936

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp100.00315 at [Fleishhacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.outsidelands.org/)



Fleishhacker Playground with north elevation of Mother's Building at right, March 20, 1927.

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp36.04554 at [Fleishhacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.outsidelands.org/)



Mother's Building with playground and wading pool and merry-go-round in background, circa 1925.  
Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp27.2995 at [Fleishhacker Playground - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.sanfranciscohistory.org/neighborhoods/western-neighborhoods-project)



San Francisco (Fleishhacker) Zoo. Newly completed Mothers Building at what was then Fleishhacker Playground. 1925

Source: Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp15.1412 at [SF Zoo - Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History \(outsidelands.org\)](https://www.outsidelands.org/sf-zoo-western-neighborhoods-project-san-francisco-history)



Fleishhacker Pool, aerial view, Dec. 5, 1925. Mother's Building at upper right corner.

San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection [[Fleishhacker Pool, aerial view, Dec. 5, 1925](#)] | [San Francisco Public Library \(digitalsf.org\)](#)



Helen K. Forbes (left) and Dorothy Puccinelli (right) painting Mother's Building mural, June 4, 1938.  
Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection at [\[Helen K. Forbes \(left\) and Dorothy Puccinelli \(right\), San Francisco artists\]](#) | [San Francisco Public Library \(digitalsf.org\)](#)



Helen K. Forbes (left) and Dorothy Puccinelli (right) in front of Mother's Building mural, June 4, 1938.  
Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection at [\[Helen K. Forbes \(left\) and Dorothy Puccinelli \(right\), San Francisco artists\]](#) | [San Francisco Public Library \(digitalsf.org\)](#)



Helen Bruton working on tile mosaic for UC Berkeley Old Art Gallery, May 6, 1936.

Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection at [\[Helen Bruton working on the Federal Art Project for the Universal California Art Gallery\]](#) | [San Francisco Public Library \(digitalsf.org\)](#)



Helen Bruton installing a tile mosaic, May 20, 1937.

Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection at [\[Artist Helen Bruton at work\] | San Francisco Public Library \(digitalsf.org\)](#)



Preliminary drawing for *Children and Their Animals*, 1934.

Source: Wendy Van Wyck Good, *Sisters in Art: The Biography of Margaret Bruton, Esther Bruton, and Helen Bruton* (Berkeley, CA: West Margin Press, 2021), 90.