

File Copy

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 7324

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Mills Building and Tower at 220 Montgomery Street and 220 Bush Street, respectively, as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on April 23, 1975, and said Advisory Board, after due consideration, has recommended approval of this proposal; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a public hearing on May 29, 1975, to consider the proposed designation and the report of said Advisory Board; and

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

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, that the proposal to designate the Mills Building and Tower at 220 Montgomery Street and 220 Bush Street, respectively, as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the location and boundaries of the landmark site being as follows:

Commencing at the point of intersection of the northerly line of Bush Street and the easterly line of Montgomery Street, thence northerly along the easterly line of Montgomery Street for a distance of 159.5 feet, thence at a right angle easterly for a distance of 70 feet, thence at a right angle southerly for a distance of 22 feet, thence at a right angle easterly for a distance of 255 feet to the westerly line of Treasury Place, thence southerly along the westerly line of Treasury Place for a distance of 137.5 feet to the northerly line of Bush Street, thence westerly along the northerly line of Bush Street for a distance of 325 feet to the point of beginning; Being Lots 6, 7 and 8, in Assessor's Block 268.

Second, That the special character and special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are set forth in the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board Resolution No. 123 as adopted on April 23, 1975, which Resolution is incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though fully set forth;

Third, That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning Docket LM75.3;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commission hereby directs its Secretary to transmit the proposal for designation, with a copy of this Resolution, to the Board of Supervisors for appropriate action.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission at its regular meeting of May 29, 1975.

Lynn E. Pio
Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Finn, Fleishhacker, Newman, Porter,
Ritchie, Rueda

NOES: None

ABSENT: Commissioner Mellon

PASSED: May 29, 1975

OWNERS: Melvin M. Swig, Richard L. Swig and Dorothy B. Dinner

LOCATION: 220 Montgomery Street - Northeast corner of Montgomery and Bush Streets with a frontage of 159.5 feet on Montgomery Street of which the northerly 22 feet has a depth of 70 feet, the remaining 137.5 feet has a depth of 275 feet which also forms the Bush Street frontage; being Lots 7 and 8 in Assessor's Block 268. 220 Bush Street - Northwest corner of Bush Street and Treasury Place with a frontage of 50 feet on Bush Street and a depth of 137.5 feet along Treasury Place; being Lot 6 in Assessor's Block 268. 220 Montgomery also has frontages of 22 feet and 17.5 feet on Petrarch Place and a frontage of 25 feet on Century Place.

HISTORY: The Mills Building stands as San Francisco's oldest, intact and most certainly best, survivor of that universally recognized age in American architecture, "The Chicago School". Indeed it may well be the city's only tie with that era for it was designed in 1890 by Burnham and Root, a Chicago firm.

From 1883 to 1893, Chicago architects were engaged in an architectural revolution at frenzied pace. It was the infancy of the skyscraper. However, it was not merely the heights of the buildings that mark the era as singular, for by today's standards they were modest. But as important as the heights -- and in a certain measure, even moreso -- was the architectural treatment of these structures. The solutions generated were frequently as innovative and imaginative as the use of the steel frame, rather than masonry, for support of the structure.

One of the Chicago pioneers in the use of the steel frame (which was originally used only for the interior frame with exterior bearing walls of masonry) was William LeBaron Jenney who trained as an engineer before becoming an architect. In the early 1870's, he employed Louis Sullivan, mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright, and among others later employed there were Daniel Hudson Burnham and John W. Root.

In 1887, Michael de Young, publisher of the San Francisco Chronicle met Burnham and Root and subsequently engaged the firm to design a new building for the newspaper at the northeast corner of Kearny and Market Streets. Construction began in November 1888 and was completed in June 1890. The building was the first of its type, and also the tallest in the city at the time; there were ten floors of offices, 135 feet in height, above which a tower rose an additional 70 feet. The structure had one major distinction, however, that set it apart from steel frame buildings elsewhere: the provision of horizontal -- or lateral -- steel bracing to compensate for the fact that it would be subject to earthquakes.

Within four months after the completion of the Chronicle Building, two others were announced for San Francisco which would employ the same type of construction. The first of these was the eleven story, 154 feet high, Crocker Building at the gore corner of Post and Market Streets, by A. Page Brown, a San Francisco architect. The second was the Mills Building, 10 floors, also 154 feet high, at the northeast corner of Montgomery and Bush Streets. Its architects were the same as those employed in the Chronicle Building, Burnham and Root.

A portion of the original Chronicle Building still stands but alterations to it over a period of years have been so extensive that it bears no resemblance to its original state. The Crocker Building was demolished about 1967 and on its site now stands a 38 story office tower. Thus, of the first three steel frame buildings in the city, only the Mills Building remains essentially indistinguishable from its original state or at least from its 1907 reconstruction, if indeed, any exterior changes from the original design did occur at that time. Its stature is heightened because of its direct tie to "The Chicago School", which -- for better or for worse -- changed the face of the city as man had previously known it.

The original Mills Building occupied a frontage of 159.5 feet on Montgomery Street and 137.5 feet on Bush and was previously the site of Platt's Music Hall, one of the more celebrated places of assembly in the city. Most of the design was apparently the work of Root and his biographer, Harriet Monroe cites a letter to his wife, dated September 17, 1890, in which he says, "This Mills building is to be a great success -- I am very well please with it." Miss Monroe notes that four or five different facade treatments were explored and that atmospheric conditions in San Francisco permitted the use of materials on the exterior which would have been unacceptable or impractical had the building been designed for Chicago; e. g., the white marble used on the lowest two stories of the facade.

The building did suffer some relatively minor damage to the exterior in the 1906 earthquake and the entire interior was badly damaged by the fire. Reconstruction, undertaken in February 1907, is attributed to Willis Polk, which may be true inasmuch as Polk was affiliated with the local office of Daniel Burnham, whose name appears as architect on the building application taken out for the first addition in August 1907. This addition was 70 feet in width along Bush Street and rose the full height of the original building. In 1914, a five story addition, 68.75 feet in width, followed and in 1918, the sixth through tenth floors were added. The permit for the 1914 addition is missing but the 1918 permit bears the name, J. S. Bogard, Engineer, in place of an architect.

The last addition to the structure, the Mills Tower, occurred in 1930-31, reportedly at a cost of \$1,300,000, most of which had been realized from the sale of part of the Mills Estate to San Francisco for its airport in San Mateo County. The architect for the tower was Louis Parsons Hobart who adhered to the detailing of the first three floors of the original design for the tower base, and applied modified, but compatible, facade treatment for the 19 floors above.

That feature most reminiscent of recognized characteristics associated with many Chicago buildings is undoubtedly the Montgomery Street arched entry; if one compares its "genealogy" with the arched entry to the V. C. Morris Building, erected at 140 Maiden Lane 57 years later, he find them to be "first cousins, once removed".

DARIUS OGDEN MILLS:

Darius Ogden, born September 5, 1825, in North Salem, Westchester County, New York, was the son of James and Hannah (Ogden) Mills, both descendants of early American stock.

The father was influential in local affairs and as a successful businessman was able to educate his children in local private academies. Upon the death of James Mills, Darius, aged 16, inherited a modest fortune, and the following year he accepted a position as clerk in New York City. He remained there until 1847 when, through the influence of his cousin, E. J. Townsend, he was offered the position of Cashier in the Merchants Bank of Erie County in Buffalo. Despite the fact that at the time of employment or shortly thereafter, he acquired one-third interest in the bank, Mills' stay in Buffalo was to be relatively short.

Upon the news of the discovery of gold in California, his brothers, James and Edgar, left New York and established a general merchandise store, James Mills and Company, Merchants, in Sacramento in 1848. In December of that year, Mills began his westward trek via Panama. Unable to obtain further passage from that point, he traveled south and at Callao, Peru, boarded a ship which brought him to San Francisco on June 5, 1849.

He immediately set out for Sacramento where he joined his brothers in business. In late autumn of the same year, he returned to New York with the firm's \$40,000 profits which were to be reinvested in merchandise for shipment to the gold country.

He also closed out his affairs in Buffalo and returned to California accompanied by Townsend. Although successful as a merchant, he returned to banking and with Townsend founded D. O. Mills Company, Banking. (At least one source sets the date of establishment of the bank as October 1849, before his return to New York. A Sacramento source places the year of founding as 1850, noting also that the bank was the first in the United States west of the Rockies. The Bogardus Directory for San Francisco, Sacramento and Marysville of July 1850, carries a listing for the bank). A branch was established in Columbia, Tuolumne County, and remained in operation under the management of Edgar Mills until 1859; Mills himself had become sole owner in 1852.

In 1862, Mills sold one-third interests in the Sacramento Bank to Edgar Mills and Henry Miller. In 1872, the name of the bank was changed to the National Gold Bank of D. O. Mills and Company; in 1883, the word Gold was dropped from the title and it continued under the revised name until 1925, when it was merged with the California National Bank.

At the urging of San Francisco businessmen, Mills helped establish, and became President of, the Bank of California in June 1864, holding one-tenth interest in the \$2,000,000 capitalization. He resigned the presidency in July 1873, and following the failure of the bank under Ralston's management on August 26, 1875, he was called in to aid in reorganization. Towards this end, Mills himself subscribed \$1,000,000 of the \$5,000,000 capital; Thomas Bell, William Sharon and others subscribed the remainder. With Mills as President, confidence in the bank was restored. He resigned as President in 1878 and two years later, transferred his residence to New York where he directed his growing financial empire from a modest three room office in the Mills Building on Broad Street.

It has been noted in at least one source that very little has been written about Mills as compared with other 19th Century tycoons -- particularly Californians -- with whom he was deeply

involved. He helped finance the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad and owned stock in others, both major ones and short lines. Among the latter was the Virginia and Truckee road which served the Comstock Lode. In later years, he served directorships of both eastern and western railroads. He was deeply involved in mining interests and invested heavily in real estate, owning large tracts of forest lands near Lake Tahoe and 4,000 acres in San Mateo County. (He had purchased some of the latter for \$20 an acre; when sold by the Mills Estate in 1953, it brought \$3,500 an acre). In 1890, he suddenly cancelled plans to build a hotel in Chicago and in its stead elected to build the Mills Building in San Francisco. Following his death in 1910, his estate was estimated as being worth \$60,000,000.

Regarding other aspects of his personal life, he was married on his twenty-ninth birthday to Jane Templeton Cunningham of New York; two children, Ogden and Elizabeth, were born to them. Ogden was associated with his father in business and managed the estate after 1910. Elizabeth married Wilelaw Reid who served as Minister or Ambassador to both France and England as well as Editor of the New York Herald Tribune which was owned by the Reid family.

In 1866, Mills erected a 42 room mansion on his peninsula holdings near what was to become the town of Millbrae which was named for him. The mansion was used as a winter home following his return to New York. The San Francisco airport, originally known as Mills Field, was once a part of the Mills Estate.

In June 1874, Mills was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Andrew Hallidie as honorary Regent for the University of California and held that post until 1881. He served as treasurer of the university, endowed it with the "The Mills Professorship of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy" and established its observatory in Chile.

His philanthropies reflect the values of his era. He believed strongly in the moral fibre of an individual, as then perceived, and towards furthering that view, established three hotels with a combined total of over 1,500 rooms, "... where the worthy poor man with 15¢ or more in his clothes might find a clean, well-kept lodging, a bath, and decent surroundings for a little time at least." In Mills own words at the opening of the third hotel:

We are too extravagant in this country. There is more waste here than in almost any other country. Persons of large means as well as persons of small ones spend a great deal more money than is necessary for their needs. The value of money is not generally appreciated, and anything in the shape of an object lesson in that direction cannot fail to have a beneficial effect.

One of my objects in establishing cheap hotels in this city is to make men of very limited means practice economy by enabling them to live comfortably on a small outlay. The Mills Hotels were not built to help the vagabond, but to help the self-respecting man who cannot earn money enough to enjoy all the physical comforts that he ought to have.

Apparently, some indication of furthering personal or group responsibility was a major consideration of Mills in his philanthropies.

Directorships or trusteeships held by Mills at the time of his death were of both a business and a public nature. Among them were: The Carnegie Institute of Washington, Metropolitan Museum of Art, American Museum of Natural History, American Geographical Society, New York Central Railroad, Bank of New York and also others in trust companies and steamship lines. He had resigned similar positions in the Southern Pacific Company and Erie Railroad two years prior to his death.

In his eighty-fifth year, while spending the winter months at his Peninsula estate, Mills died on January 3, 1910; his wife preceded him in death 22 years earlier. He is buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown, New York.

ORIGINAL
ARCHITECTURE:

The following architectural description appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle of October 13, 1890, when construction of the Mills Building was announced. While some minor discrepancies appear between description and the building as it appears today, that portion describing the exterior is essentially correct. Some of the changes could have occurred in the course of design and construction; others, e.g., "the shelving roof made of circular tiles", may well have been the result of repairs undertaken following the earthquake and fire. Interior changes also have occurred through remodeling.

"THE MILLS BUILDING

Sketch of the Ten-Story Structure
Evidences of Confidence in San Francisco
Marble, Terra Cotta, Roman Brick
and Steel the Materials of Construction

"What one man has shown possible and practicable others will speedily imitate. The revolution in building started by the construction of the CHRONICLE building caused some to shake their heads in doubt, and still more to wonder whether any one else would venture to build on the same principles. It is not quite four months since the building which houses the CHRONICLE was completed, and two structures are already underway on parallel lines, embodying similar principles of construction, and showing once more that it is only necessary for one to make a beginning for many to follow. The Crocker building, which has been previously described, and the Mills building, illustrated herewith, are assured.

"The new structure, the foundation of which will be laid in a few days on the northwest corner of Montgomery and Bush streets, will cover a lot 159.6 by 137 feet. It is to be ten stories in height, with both finished basement and attic, thus giving to the edifice twelve tenantable floors. The style of architecture is best described as modern. The two main frontages on Bush and Montgomery streets will be almost exactly alike and will form a massive and imposing structure. For the first three stories horizontal lines will prevail, while the following five are to be marked by vertical lines, clustered pillars rising from the top of the third take in from the fourth to the eighth stories and there be finished by a series of arches, each arch spanning one flight of windows. Above the arches a return is to be made to horizontal lines, and the ninth, tenth and attic stories will be thus laid out. The corner of the

building, formed by the two frontages and the end of each frontage, is to be in the form of a wide, plain, projecting pilaster, built with a slight batter from the ground and rising clear to the roof. There is to be a shelving roof made of circular tiles, and immediately below is a handsome frieze from between the terra cotta medallion formed rosettes, lion and griffin heads, the attic windows will peep out. Below these long low windows, there will be a terra cotta belt course in basket pattern.

"The ninth and tenth stories will have flat, arched windows, and between the eight and ninth the designs show a very handsome belt course in the form of a series of arches upheld by corbels. The blank spaces between the windows of the ninth story will be decorated with carved brick in lozenge pattern.

"The triangular spaces between each pair of arches at the top of the clustered columns are to be filled in with large medallions and arabesques in alto relief, and the lintels of each window of the flights inclosed by the columns will be of terra cotta richly ornamented. The three stories from the ground up will be almost quite plain, the uppermost only having terra cotta trimmings and a belt course, which will form the footing for the clustered columns.

"The main entrance to the building is to be in the center of the Montgomery street frontage. It will be thirty-three feet eight inches across the outer lines of the arch, and the inside measurement will be just sixteen feet. In design it is not unlike the CHRONICLE building main entrance. The arch will be carved in acanthus leaf and egg and dart, and will rest partly on the solid stone piers of the building, partly on polished black marble columns each ten inches in diameter and seven feet high between base and capital. There will be four such columns on each side. Entrances, handsome but less imposing than the main one, are to be provided on Bush street and from Laurel place, which runs from Pine street south along the side of the Stock Exchange building. The steps of each entrance are to be of white marble, and in each instance will rise to the level of a fine mosaic pavement, the three hallways meeting at a central open court, 52:6x58:6 in area. The main hall will be eighteen feet wide and near the end - that is just before the court is reached, two fast running elevators will be provided for on each side, making four elevators in all. Just within the vestibule and dividing it from the hall are to be three arches of white marble, supported on marble columns each thirteen inches in diameter, with Corinthian capitals and molded bases. To the right and left will be marble staircases six feet wide, with balustrades of the same material. These stairs will rise only to the level of the third floor, where they will open on to a broad landing, which will run back to the open court and then divide to form a gallery around the four sides of the court. The ceilings of the vestibule, lobby and halls are to be of Italian marble, built in panels with projecting beams, and the wainscotings of Inyo colored marble. Around the balcony there will be a carved frieze of Italian marble. The contract for the carved marble work alone amounts to \$90,000.

"Over the court at the level of the third story there is to be a canopy of glass carried on duplex silver-plated iron frames. The interior walls above this canopy are to be of cream-colored imported glazed brick and all the iron mullions of the windows

will be heavily gilded. The staircase to the upper floors will rise from the court balcony and is to be of marble and iron and circular in form, occupying in this way a minimum of space.

"The construction of the building will be the same as the new CHRONICLE, that is to say, a steel frame independent of the masonry but anchored to it and the walls rising round it. All of the floors will be of hollow tile and the partitions also of the same material, and the building will be absolutely fire-proof. The hallways are to be all seven feet six inches wide on each floor, the woodwork will be quartered oak and the wainscotings of Inyo marble, will be nearly a mile in length.

"There are to be 420 offices as well as stores, and the average size of each office will be 14 by 20 feet. In the basement there will be three engines, four boilers, six pumps and three dynamos, arranged along the north side of the building. A safe deposit vault will occupy the space under the central court, and the remaining space will be devoted to a barber shop, vault and storage rooms. On the ground floor there are to be fourteen stores, with a bank on the corner of the building occupying an area 50 by 40. The second floor will be divided for thirty three offices, and the remaining nine floors will contain from forty to fifty offices each, all fitted in much the same style as those of the CHRONICLE building. In the attic story there are to be large lavatories, barber shop and janitors' quarters.

"The materials of construction for the exterior of the building will be white Inyo marble, sand finished, not polished, for the first two stories, and above that height buff-colored Roman brick and terra cotta, and inside steel beams composite columns and hollow fire tile will be used. The contrast promises to be very pleasing and the cost of the building will easily run up into seven figures. Contracts have been let for the plain and ornamental marble work, the masonry, architectural, terra cotta work and the fireproofing. It will take another two weeks to clear away the debris of the old building and then the construction will be at once commenced."

ZONING AND
SURROUNDING
LAND USE:

The property is zoned C-3-0 and has a 500-I height and bulk limitation. Surrounding land use is predominately that of office buildings associated with the financial interests of the city. Retail uses are frequently found at ground floor level.