

ORDINANCE DESIGNATING LANDMARK

FILE NO. 90-75-9

ORDINANCE  
~~RESOLUTION~~ NO. 464-75

1 DESIGNATING the Alfred E. (Nobby) Clarke Mansion AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE  
2 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.

3  
4 Be it Ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

5 Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Alfred E. (Nobby)  
6 Clarke Mansion located at 250 Douglass Street, being lot 1 in Assessor's Block  
7 2700, has a special character and special (historical, architectural and aesthetic)  
8 interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will be in furtherance  
9 of and in conformance with the purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and  
10 the standards set forth therein.

11 (a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter  
12 II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the Alfred E. (Nobby) Clarke Mansion  
13 is hereby designated as a Landmark, this designation having been duly approved by  
14 Resolution No. 7378 of the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is on file  
15 with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No. 90-75-8.

16 (b) Required Data. The descriptions of the location and boundaries of the  
17 landmark site; of the characteristics of the landmark which justify its designation;  
18 and of the particular features that should be preserved; as included in the said  
19 Resolution, are hereby incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though fully  
20 set forth.

21  
22  
23 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

24 THOMAS M. O'CONNOR  
25 CITY ATTORNEY

RECOMMENDED:

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

26  
27 By [Signature]  
28 Deputy City Attorney

By [Signature]  
29 Dean L. Macris  
30 Director of Planning

LM #80

NOV 3 1975  
RECEIVED  
CITY CLERK

Passed for Second Reading  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

OCT 27 1975

Ayes: Supervisors Barbagelata, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, Kopp, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisor

WENDELSON

*W. Bauman* Clerk

90-75-9  
File No.

NOV 07 1975  
Approved

Read Second Time and Finally Passed  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

NOV 3 1975

Ayes: Supervisors Barbagelata, Feinstein, Francois, Gonzales, Kopp, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Nelder, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

~~Noes: Supervisors~~

Absent: Supervisor

KOPP

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

*W. Bauman* Clerk

*Quantin L. Fog*  
Acting Mayor

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 7378

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Alfred E. (Nobby) Clarke Mansion at 250 Douglass Street as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on September 3, 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 September 25, 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 Alfred E. (Nobby) Clarke Mansion at 250 Douglass Street 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:

Beginning at the point of intersection of the southerly line of Caselli Avenue and the westerly line of Douglass Street, thence along the westerly line of Douglass Street for a distance of 78 feet, thence at a right angle westerly for a distance of 106.667 feet, thence at a right angle northerly for a distance of 78 feet, thence at a right angle easterly along the southerly line of Caselli Avenue for a distance of 106.667 feet to the point of beginning; Being Lot 1 in Assessor's Block 2700; also known as 250 Douglass Street.

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. 132 as adopted on September 3, 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 LM75.6;

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 on September 25, 1975.

Lynn E. Pio  
Secretary

Ayes: Commissioners Finn, Fleishhacker, Mellon, Newman, Porter, Ritchie  
Noes: None  
Absent: Commissioner Rueda  
Passed: September 25, 1975

File Copy

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD  
Final Case Report - September 3, 1975

ALFRED E. CLARKE MANSION  
"CLARKE'S FOLLY"  
250 Douglass Street

OWNER: Mr. Robert T. Horine

LOCATION: Douglass Street, Southwest corner of Caselli Avenue

HISTORY: When this imposing structure was completed about 1891, at a reported cost of \$90,000, it was situated on the easterly boundary of a 17 acre tract owned by the builder, Alfred "Nobby" Clarke. The mansion was early dubbed "Clarke's Folly" and was occupied by him for five years at most.

The building is a fitting memorial to Clarke if for no reason other than the enigmatic character of both. In viewing the structure, one isn't quite sure what architectural image the builder intended; similarly in reviewing Clarke's activities various concepts of him emerge. Nevertheless, in each case an impressive -- if somewhat uncertain-image comes through.

Clarke received a great deal of publicity during his lifetime, indeed, particularly during his later years it seems to have been his lifeblood. One of his obituaries notes this fact and also that "... in his day he had played almost as unique a part in San Francisco's life as Emperor Norton".

Clarke was born in 1833 in the seaside town of Tramoan, County Wexford, Ireland, and at an early age he became a sailor on trans-Atlantic vessels belonging to Swallow and Company. On November 30, 1850, Clarke arrived in San Francisco, via Cape Horn, on the ship "Commonwealth". Like many seamen of that time, he proceeded to Nevada County to seek his fortune in the mining fields. He remained there for a short time before returning to San Francisco where he worked on the docks as a stevedore. Befriending the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, he secured a position as patrolman on the police force in 1856.

His first assignment was back to the waterfront and he quickly acquired a reputation for his methods. In one confrontation with a sailor his hand was bitten so badly that he never recovered the full use of it. Following the incident, he was assigned to special detail in breaking up gambling operations and subsequently he served for many years as clerk to the Chief of Police.

Clarke was removed from the force in 1867 but within three years he was reinstated. During his time as clerk he studied law and was admitted to the bar in which capacity he served as chief legal advisor to the department and personally handled cases for the Chief.

Clarke resigned from the force on December 31, 1887, and newspaper accounts at that time estimated his worth in the neighborhood of \$200,000. During his tenure on the force he was widely known for his money lending service to fellow officers -- a service eventually made available to other city employees.

Following his resignation he devoted his full time to the practice of law and among his principal clients were discharged patrolmen or widows or policemen with grievances. A newspaper account states:

As a lawyer Clarke became known as the man who had been sent to jail for contempt of court oftener than any other legal practitioner in America. For

HISTORY:  
(continued)

many years he employed his fertile brain in conjuring up causes for vexatious litigation, always appearing thereafter in propria personae as his own attorney, to the amusement of the court habitués.

Many of his litigations were filed against the Police Commissioners or were related to Police Department matters. In 1896 he filed suit against the members of the Board of Police Commissioners of 1894 on behalf of approximately 50 policemen who had been discharged from the force in April 1894. He sought \$40,000 for each, charging that those discharged "were dismissed without any cause whatsoever, owing to the evil eyes, depraved minds and abandoned hearts" of the Commissioners. In an 1898 situation, 45 of his cases on another matter were thrown out of court in one day. A newspaper account of that action also noted that he once brought suit against the Supreme Court for one-half million dollars damages for causing his imprisonment for contempt.

Of somewhat interest today, are the parties involved in an 1894 action in which suit was brought against Mr. Clarke by Eli T. Shepard, as assignee of some of Clarke's creditors. Clarke was represented by Frank M. Stone, whose home at 1348 South Van Ness was designated a landmark in June 1975. Eli T. Shepard's home at 1562-56 Taylor Street (better known as "House of the Flag") was designated in May 1972.

It was not known whether Clarke was formally involved in litigation with his neighbor, Behrend Joost, who lived further up the slope on Twin Peaks at present-day 3224 Market, but their encounters were well known in that area of the City. Joost had established the Mountain Springs Water Company whose supply came from a stream which originated on his property or a short distance above; the same stream flowed through Clarke's property at a lower elevation. Dissatisfied with Joost's service, "Nobby" established "Clarke's Water Works" also utilizing the stream for his water source. From the outset there was war between the two and "... there was an almost daily skirmish. Then Spring Valley extended its mains and ruined the business of both".

Clarke and his first wife were among the founders of Calvary Presbyterian Church in 1856 and he served the church as a Deacon. He was organizer of the "Widows and Orphans Aid Association of the Police Department" and served several times as its President. There are accounts of his other charitable activities.

In 1896, Clarke went through bankruptcy and moved from Douglass Street to 1208 Masonic where he remained until his death on February 3, 1902. In 1904, the house became the "California General Hospital" under the control of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. About 1909 it was converted to its present use, apartments.

ARCHITECTURE: Although the property carries a Douglass Street address, the principal facade of the mansion faces north into Caselli Avenue. A free-standing, rectangular, frame structure, it rests on a high masonry basement with two principal floors and attic above. All four floors are used for living quarters.

ARCHITECTURE: In terms of styling, the building is best described as "eclectic" (continued) which, in this case, combines popular architectural features of the waning Queen Anne epoch with elements of the emerging classical revival.

Principal entrance to the grounds is at the corner of Douglass and Caselli from which point a walk leads to a central portico whose floor is a full story above grade and from whose coffered ceiling a lamp is suspended. The portico itself is reached by flights of stairs on either side which are attached to and parallel to the facade. On its outward side, the roof of the portico is supported by four Ionic-type columns whose square bases are linked by a balustrade running the length of the front of the portico. Pilasters on the facade reflect the positioning of the columns. The edge of the flat roof reveals itself as a richly detailed cornice featuring carved, closely-spaced brackets. The central portion of the front of the roof is extended forward and the brackets below take on added horizontal length. A balustrade atop the roof is set in from the edge, and on it, four wooden urns are placed in a general alignment with the columns below.

Entrance to the house is provided by richly ornamented, paired doors under a fixed stained glass transom, all housed in paneling between the inner-most pilasters. Tall, double-hung windows, again with transoms, are set between the aforementioned pilasters and those which mark the width of the portico. Outward the latter pilasters, the windows are repeated.

Directly above the portico, at second story level, a section of the facade equal in width to the entrance is slightly brought forward and sheathed in paneling. The front wall contain a doorway, flanked by windows, which provided access to the portico roof. A cornice above this projection supports a balustrade with the cornice itself extending the width of the house.

Behind the balustrade, a dormer, equal in width to the second floor projection, houses two large windows on either side of a door. In the paneled pediment above its cornice, there is a single window. The sidewalls of the dormer repeat the paneling.

The surface of all exterior walls is shingled with tiers of regularly shaped shingles alternating with tiers which are scalloped. At first and second floor levels, the lower tiers flare outward from the planes of the facades.

The corners of the Caselli Avenue facade are curved, not in the projecting manner typical of Queen Anne towers but rather as an uninterrupted curve joining the front and sides of the building. The walls of the curves are slightly higher than the walls which they join and a cornice matching that along the front and sides follows the curves to the points where they become engaged into the hipped roof. Above this latter cornice, bell-shaped domes, sheathed in metal with vertical ridges, terminate in finials. Three tall double-hung windows are found in the curves at both floor levels.

The roof itself is worth noting for, when viewed from the northwest in particular, it becomes an olio of architectural details and forms not unmindful of some of the roofs of Loire chateaux (although decidedly lacking the finesse of their development).

ARCHITECTURE: Between the centered dormer and the bell-shaped dome on the left, (continued) there is a smaller arched dormer with a glassed front, above which, nearer the ridge of the roof, there is a third dormer with paired windows. Centered on the ridge, is a squat tower (actually the upper reaches of a ventilation shaft) with a cornice and steeply pitched roof, composed of four triangular elements, which terminates in a finial.

At first floor level, on the east side of the house, there is an off-centered shallow bay near the front. Centered above this facade is a small dormer (matched by one on the west wall) through which rises a chimney which originally was of greater height.

At the southeast corner of the building, hidden from the street by dense foliage, is one of the structures most prominent features, a Queen Anne tower differing from the typical residential tower in that: 1) it has a greater diameter (the interior space is the size of a small room), 2) its placement normally would be such that it could be viewed as part of the principal facade; and, 3) the windows at first and second floor level do not form continuous bands about the circumference. There are, in fact, significant amounts of shingled wall areas between the windows. At attic level there are moderate sized double-hung windows separated only by pilasters, which do form a continuous band. A conical roof rests on a cornice matching the other principal cornices; its apex, supporting a finial, is made up of small fixed windows allowing light to penetrate the uppermost reaches of the cone.

The rear of the building features a two story, bowed bay with nine windows at each level. Those at the first floor extend nearly from floor to ceiling; on the second floor, the five central windows are shorter than the pairs at each end. Centered above is an attic dormer similar in detailing to that found on the front.

The grounds are heavily landscaped particularly along Douglass Street. There is a one-story accessory building on Caselli along the westerly property line and a former coachhouse now occupied as a dwelling near the southwest corner of the property.