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FILE NO. 90-77-5

ORDINANCE NO. 20977

DESIGNATING THE POTRERO HILL NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE AS A LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE

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

Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, 953 De Haro Street, Northeast corner of Southern Heights Blvd., being Lot 41 in Assessor's Block 4096 has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a landmark will be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and the standards set forth therein.

(a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House is hereby designated as a landmark, this designation having been duly approved by Resolution No. 7666 of the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No. 90-77-5.

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

Passed for Second Reading  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco  
MAY 23 1977

Ayes: Supervisors Barbogalata, Feinstein, Francisco, Gonzalez, Nepp, Mendelsohn, Molinari, Neider, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

Noes: Supervisors

Absent: Supervisors

*[Signature]* Clerk

90-77-5  
File No. JUN 9 1977  
Approved

Read Second Time and Finally Passed  
Board of Supervisors, San Francisco  
MAY 31 1977

Ayes: Supervisors Barbogalata, Feinstein, Francisco, Gonzalez, Nepp, Molinari, Neider, Pelosi, Tamaras, von Beroldingen.

Noes: Supervisors

Absent: Supervisors BARBAGALATA MENDELSON

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

*[Signature]* Clerk

*[Signature]* Mayor

SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 7666

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House at 953 De Haro 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 December 15, 1976 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 February 10, 1977 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, the proposal to designate the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, 953 De Haro Street as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the precise location and boundaries of the Landmark site being Lot 43 in Assessor's Block 4096.

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. 156 as adopted on December 15, 1976, 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 LM76.14.

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 has been ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission at its regular meeting of February 10, 1977.

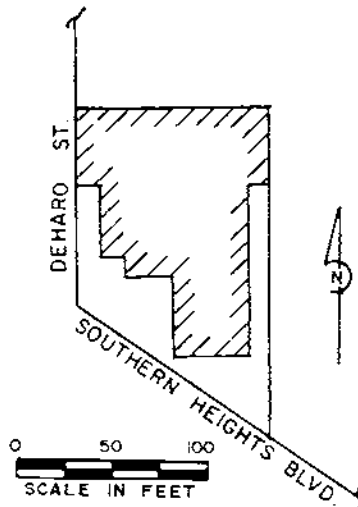
Lynn E. Pio  
Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Bierman, Dearman, Elliott, Finn, Lau, Rosenblatt, Starbuck.

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

PASSED: February 10, 1977.



Owner: Board of Missions of the  
Presbyterian Church

Location: 953 DeHaro Street;  
Northeast corner of  
Southern Heights Blvd.  
Lot 43 in Assessor's  
Block 4096

STATEMENT OF  
SIGNIFICANCE:

Designed by Julia Morgan, noted Bay Area Architect, the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House was established in 1919 by the Presbyterian Church to provide newcomer services to Russian immigrants. It commemorates neighborhood houses across the country which served as havens to newcomers and helped to integrate the foreign born into the American way of life.

HISTORY:

The woodshingle neighborhood house, with its magnificent hill-top view of San Francisco, stands at 953 De Haro, a street named for San Francisco's first Alcalde (Mayor), Francisco De Haro, elected in 1834. De Haro was awarded Potrero Nuevo, a portion of Potrero Hill, in a land grant from the Mexican Government, in 1833. In addition to a dairy industry which flourished on the hill through the 1890's, lumber shipping, and other heavy industry were established around the natural seaport at Mission Bay.

The 1849 gold rush brought an onslaught of immigrants to San Francisco, many of whom set up shops on the bay, rather than following the throng to the Sierra foothills.

In the 1880's, when Union Iron Works (now Bethlehem Steel) moved to the base of the hill, Potrero Hill was known as Scotch Hill because of the origin of the men who worked there and lived on the hill.

The history of the neighborhood house is indissolubly connected with the Russian immigrants who first came to the hill in 1905, fleeing Tsarist oppression. Called Molokans, which translates "milk drinkers", these people were a stoic Protestant sect known for their puritanical, pacifistic and paternalistic attitudes. With reference to the Molokans, William Saroyan noted that, "Apart from the simple necessities of life, most worldly things were considered evil... regarded as so much sin and nonsense". Social problems on the hill were rooted in the religious beliefs of the Russian group, which had, during centuries of persecution in their homeland, developed religious beliefs and rites which served to tightly unite them. The social, religious and intellectual posture of the Molokans was thrown into a state of turmoil in the new country.

HISTORY:  
(Continued)

Responding to the religious, social and cultural difficulties that prevailed among Russian residents of the hill, in 1908, Dr. W. E. Parker, Jr., pastor of the Olivet Presbyterian Church at 20th and Missouri, opened his home to the Russians, offering English classes for men. Later, Dr. John M. Rose, of the Olivet parish, organized the first classes for youth and within a short time, Mrs. Parker developed English classes for women and led girls' clubs.

By 1919, interest and participation in the work had become so great that both larger quarters and a professional social work staff became necessary. Julia Morgan, the renowned architect who designed many public buildings, and churches and other neighborhood facilities for the Presbyterian Church, was commissioned to design a permanent neighborhood house. Although perhaps her best known work is the flamboyant "Hearst Castle" at San Simeon, she was also sensitive to the particular needs of smaller buildings and this is evident in the pleasant character of the entry and lobby areas of the Neighborhood House. An image of the Russian colony in the Neighborhood House was created in a July 1925 article from the San Francisco Chronicle, "...sunlight streams through broad windows, silhouetting bowed, heavily shawled heads...through the doors, heavy eyed Russian women pass, sweeping broods of children before them."

The main part of the Neighborhood House building erected in 1922, was made possible by gifts totaling \$30,000, of which \$25,000 came from interested boards and agencies in the Presbyterian church and the balance from friends. Around 1925, the main building, including what is now the Julian Theatre, was moved approximately 100 feet to the north, to make way for a new road, Southern Heights Boulevard. At that time, the gymnasium was added at a cost of \$9,500 which was donated by the City in exchange for the property to the south, acquired to make way for the road.

During the late 20's and early 30's, the Russians made intensive use of the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House and their customs made a major impact on the Potrero Hill community. A "Potrero Hill Neighborhood Item" dated February, 1928, relates, "During the past three days and nights, our Potrero Hill Neighborhood House gym had accomodated a Russian funeral assemblage of some fourteen hundred mourners, many from a distance. When interment finally took place, a cortage of several hundred persons on foot and chanting in subdued tones as they went, and 87 autos, followed the open casket to the foot of the long hill where awaited the hearse; a number of grown boys and girls carrying the many floral offerings of the procession. Returning from the burial, the many hundreds attending the obsequies, during the remainder of the day and night, feasted upon the customary menu provided in great abundance on such occasions: viz, noodles, meat, bread, fruit, and tea a la Russe; thus ending a strictly Russian ceremonial in a great American City."

Following reports that the Potrero Hill district had the highest juvenile delinquency rate in San Francisco, the Neighborhood House assumed an active role in the rehabilitation of the youth. The delinquency problem stemmed chiefly from "vigorous Russian behavior," a result of the breakdown of Russian families, their social and religious habits. From the time the American-born Molokan children were able to go to school and speak English, the conflict between the first and second generations became acute.

**HISTORY:**  
(Continued)

The Russian children were estranged from their parents, many of whom still did not speak English after 15 years in the country. In addition, heavy labor on the docks, in steel mills, and in laundries and canning factories kept both parents busy for twelve hours a day, so the children grew up largely unsupervised.

Although under the auspices of a religious institution, denominationalism was dropped at the neighborhood house in an effort to assimilate the Russian youth into activities. Later, the neighborhood house instituted a recreation program exclusively for the Russians.

In 1935, the new resident director, Amelia Anderson, solicited police volunteers to organize and instruct classes in boxing, as well as stimulate communication and better relations between the police and youth of the community. Miss Anderson expanded language, cultural instruction and day care services, as well as organizing a women's group which met to voice concern about bootlegging in the district.

Following World War II, another Russian group of Estonian origin immigrated to the United States, and they, too, settled on Potrero Hill. The reception of new immigrants and their entrance into the American way of life continued to be the objective of the house.

In 1955, a Coro Foundation Study indicated that Potrero Hill had the potential for major new development. Later, in 1959, when it was made known that the then-proposed city-wide re-zoning would not preclude the construction of high-rise apartments on the crest of Potrero Hill, residents organized opposition at the Neighborhood House; by providing translations in Slavic and Russian to interested residents, they were successful in obtaining a much lower permitted density with a height limit of 40 feet.

In 1956, the Neighborhood house incorporated with a Board of Directors from the Community. Although Russian religious services, pageants and costumes no longer dominate activities at the neighborhood house or on Potrero Hill, photo collages and a memorial plaque to the Russian preserve the older history of the house.

**ARCHITECTURE:**

The Potrero Hill Neighborhood House is an attractive, low, rambling structure, without architectural pretension. In character with other Julia Morgan structures, the woodshingle building conforms to the contours of the hill on which it is constructed. Its many broad windows look out on a panoramic view of the city below.

**SURROUNDING  
LAND USE  
AND ZONING:**

The property is zoned R-3 (Low Medium Density Multiple Residential District) and has a height and bulk limit of 40-X. The surrounding land use is overwhelmingly single-family dwellings with an occasional two or three unit building interspersed.

**RESEARCH:**

The information contained in this case report by researched by Leslie Friedman of the Mayor's Office of Community Development.