

NORTH BEACH PLACE, 415 BAY STREET
(Building 1)
415 Bay Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS CA-2727-A
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

**North Beach Place, 415 Bay Street
(Building No. 1)
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HABS No. CA-2727-A

Location: 415 Bay Street

U.S.G.S. San Francisco North 7.5' Quadrangle

Present owner: San Francisco Housing Authority

Present use: Demolished during December 2001 to January 2003

Most recent use: Public housing project

Significance: North Beach Place was a public housing project that occupied two city blocks in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco for fifty years. Designed in 1941-1942, delayed by World War II, and constructed in 1950-1952, it was one of the early housing projects in the city. Originally, occupancy was intended to be restricted to Caucasians, according to a neighborhood patterning policy then in place; but a successful lawsuit by the NAACP overturned this policy. For many years the housing project was occupied by a mix of Asian, African-American, and Caucasian residents. Generally harmonious relations existed among residents, staff, and the surrounding neighborhood until the crack cocaine epidemic of the mid-1980s. The project has long had ties with a non-profit service organization, the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Center.

Architecturally, the housing project was an early example of modernism in San Francisco. Strongly horizontal in its lines, with balconies curved at the corners, and nearly devoid of ornament, the buildings that make up this project were a blend of the Streamlined Moderne and International styles.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Please refer to the "Narrative" report, HABS No. CA-2727.

B. Historical Context

Please refer to the " Narrative " report, HABS No. CA-2727.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Please refer to the "Narrative" report, HABS No. CA-2727.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions

Building 1 fronted on Bay Street and was oriented on an east-west axis. It was three stories in height and measured 84'-7" (east-west) by 27'-8" (north-south).

2. Foundations

When North Beach Place was designed in 1941-1942, the structural engineer, August V. Saph, consulted with geologists and soils engineers, Dames and Moore, regarding the most appropriate foundation to use on this landfill site. The decision was made to sink concrete piles into the ground as a foundation.

3. Walls and structural system

North Beach Place employed reinforced concrete exterior bearing walls, a reinforced concrete post-and-girder interior system, and reinforced concrete flat slab floors and roof.

Exterior wall surfaces were left unfinished, except for paint.

4. Balconies, stairwells, stoops, and garbage chutes

In North Beach Place, concrete balconies ran across the upper floors of one of the long sides of each building. All buildings in each block were

connected to each other by these balconies, which wrapped around corners to connect with each other. Where the balconies wrapped around corners, they formed distinct curves, giving the complex its Streamlined Moderne style. In Building 1, balconies ran along the full width of the upper stories of the Bay Street side of the building. At their ends, they connected with stairwells at the junctions of Building 1 with buildings 6 and 7.

Stairwells could be found at the junctions of east-west oriented buildings with north-south oriented buildings; and near the south ends of the north-south oriented buildings. Built entirely of concrete, these stairwells were rectangular in form, with flat walls. At each floor, the stairwells emptied onto continuous exterior balconies, which provided access to apartment entries. As mentioned above, two stairwells were associated with Building 1: where it joined with Building 6, and where it joined with building 7.

Separate stoops could be found at the entrance of each first story unit in buildings 1 through 5 and 13. These stoops were on the Bay Street side of each building. Each stoop consisted of several concrete steps, small concrete landings, and low concrete walls. These walls provided some privacy, screening each first story unit from Bay Street.

In buildings 1 through 5 and 13, basement access was via stairwells on the north side (Bay Street side) of each building. A low, concrete wall protected pedestrians from falling into the stairwells. Non-original wire cages blocked casual access to the basements.

Balconies provided access to garbage chutes. The chutes serving Building 1 and other buildings facing Bay Street were rounded, and could be found along the balconies between the buildings. This was in contrast to the chutes attached to north-south oriented buildings, which were rectangular.

5. Openings

Doorways were simple, rectangular punched voids in the concrete walls, without moldings or casings. All exterior doors in North Beach Place were replacement wooden hollow core doors. Many doors had protective metal grilles that did not match those over the windows, and which were probably installed later than the window grilles were.

Nearly all windows in the housing project were original, with wood frames and sash. Those to the bedrooms were paired double-hung windows. Those to living rooms were tripartite double-hung windows. Those to kitchens had two sliding lights that flanked, and could slide over,

two central fixed lights. The windows to bathrooms were two-light
hoppers.

6. Roof

Roofs were flat, with parapets about three feet in height. Solar heating
panels had replaced laundry-drying yards.

C. Description of Interiors

1. Floor plans

a. Basement

The basement of Building 1 contained storage rooms that
measured roughly eleven feet by twenty feet. The balance was
unused. All floor, wall, and ceiling surfaces in the basement
were concrete.

b. Apartment floor plans

The North Beach Place housing project contained living units of
one, two, three, and four bedrooms. All but one of the one-
bedroom units were located in buildings 1 through 5, the east-
west oriented buildings facing Bay Street.

Building 1 contained twelve one-bedroom living units, with four
units per story. Each unit measured 20'9" by 23'8", and
extended the full depth of the building, so that light poured into
each unit from two sides. The sole entrance to each unit was
from the balcony or front stoop directly into the kitchen.

In addition to a bedroom, each unit in Building 1 contained a
living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, a storage room, a small linen
closet, and a small coat closet. Linen and coat closets were
always located adjacent to the bathroom. Each bedroom also had
its own closet. Bathrooms contained a bathtub, a sink, and a
toilet. Kitchens contained a refrigerator, a range, a combination
sink and tray for dishwashing, a counter, and shelves. Plans
indicate that the dining area was to be in the living room, next to
the door between that room and the kitchen.

2. Flooring

At the time of demolition, some floors had original surfaces of nine-inch square tiles laid over concrete. These were probably vinyl asbestos tiles or vinyl composition tiles. Floors in other living units were surfaced with newer twelve-inch square vinyl tiles laid over the original tiles.

3. Wall and ceiling finish

Walls in all living units were made of gypsum-plaster board. Ceilings were concrete.

4. Openings and trim

In the units viewed for this report, all door and window openings had very shallow moldings around their perimeters. Doors to the outside balconies and stoops were replacement hollow-core doors. Many doors inside the units were original wood panel doors. There was a doorway with moldings, but no door, between the kitchen and living room in each unit. As described above, windows to bedrooms and living rooms were double-hung, those to kitchens were sliders, and those to bathrooms were hoppers, all made with wood sash.

Baseboards were wood, and were plain, lacking profiled molding.

5. Bedroom closets

All bedrooms had open closets. The walls, dowels, and shelves of these closets were made of wood.

6. Kitchen fixtures

In the units inspected, each original sink and counter fixture was made of iron, had an open base, and was supported by metal pipes. Counters were made of wood, with two drawers beneath and open shelves above. The countertops were particleboard surfaced with Formica.

7. Bathroom fixtures

In the units inspected, bathtubs and sinks were original, while the toilets, mirrored cabinets, and towel racks were not.

8. Mechanical equipment and fixtures

No central electrical or heating systems existed in Building 1. Such systems were located in the basements of other buildings.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation

North Beach Place occupied two adjacent blocks at the extreme north end of the North Beach neighborhood in San Francisco. To the south and southeast are buildings that are a mix of residential and commercial in character, the former predominating. The residential buildings are mostly wood framed flats two or three stories in height. These were built for an Italian blue-collar population in the years immediately after the earthquake and fire of 1906. Commercial buildings of various dates line Columbus Avenue. To the west the ground rises to become Russian Hill. Houses and flats from the 1930s and 1940s surround Bret Harte Terrace (just west of Jones), while to the south of these is the San Francisco Art Institute. North of Bay Street are commercial buildings associated with the Fisherman's Wharf district. Many of the buildings in this district date from after World War II.

The two blocks of North Beach Place are bisected by a cable car line, which runs along Taylor Street and terminates at Bay Street. The cable car line has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

Building 1 was located in the more eastern of the two blocks. It was oriented on an east-west axis, fronted on Bay Street, and was located a short distance west of Mason Street. It was connected by balconies to buildings 6 and 7, which ran on a north-south. By means of such connections, building 1 and the other buildings in the block formed a series of linked U-shapes.

2. Historic landscape

The buildings at North Beach Place were arranged so that courtyards were formed between the buildings. Two of the six courtyards were devoted mainly to parking, with small paved and planted areas for pedestrians north of the parking lots; half of another courtyard was devoted to parking, and half to pedestrian circulation; one courtyard was used as a playground; one was paved and planted as open space for pedestrians; and the sixth appears originally to have been an undeveloped lawn. Underpasses in three of the buildings facilitated pedestrian movement between courtyards. Rows of trees or narrow strips of vegetation surrounded the three parking lots.

To a certain degree this landscaping plan by Thomas Church remained intact through 2001. Most of the courtyard formed by buildings 1, 6, and 7 remained devoted to parking. A circular concrete planter at the north

end of this courtyard had been filled in with concrete. Some of the original trees surrounding these parking lots survived, but many had been lost and were not replaced, so that the original pattern of plantings was not easily discernable.

The pedestrian areas to the north of the parking lots were paved, and were raised relative to the parking lots. Concrete planters in these pedestrian areas consisted of raised beds with circular concrete curbs. These were a foot in height and several feet in diameter. They remained in place, but were devoid of vegetation, and one was filled with concrete.

Narrow strips of land between the buildings and the streets – for instance, along Bay, Francisco, Mason, and Taylor streets – were originally occupied by rows of trees or by concrete planters. The planters and some of the trees remained in 2001, though they clearly had not been maintained for many years.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

The original plans of 1941-1942 have not been found. Perspective drawings and site plans from that period, however, were published with an article entitled “North Beach Place Housing Project,” by John S. Bolles, in *Architect and Engineer* in July 1945.

As-built drawings dated July 1953 were supplied by the San Francisco Housing Authority. These drawings were revisions of plans dated August 1950.

B. Early Views

No early photographic views of North Beach Place have been found.

C. Interviews

The author of this report interviewed Denise McCarthy, Executive Director of the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Center, in June 2002. Ms. McCarthy had been associated with the Center for about twenty years, and has had close contact with residents of North Beach Place during that period.

The author interviewed Susan Cerny in March 2003. Ms Cerny has probably gathered more information on Henry Gutterson, one of the architects of North Beach Place, than anyone else.

D. Bibliography

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2. Design and construction

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"In the News." *Architect and Engineer*, November 1950, p. 45.

"New Buildings for Old." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 10, 1950, p. 7.

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4. Ethnic and occupational analysis

The reverse directories at the ends of the 1953, 1962, and 1972 San Francisco city directories listed the names of nearly all residents of North Beach Place. As the housing project had not fully opened when the 1953 directory was canvassed, only 112 names of residents were found in that year. In 1962 and 1972, 217 and 212 names were found, respectively. All of these names were then looked up in the front section of the directories, which listed occupations (if any) of the residents.

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10. Ernest Born

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Woodbridge, Sally. "From the Large-Small House to the Large-Large House." In Woodbridge, ed., *Bay Area Houses*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1988.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

San Francisco city directories for the years 1953-1982 could reveal how long residents of North Beach Place lived at that housing project. A random sample of names can be obtained from the reverse index at the rear of the directory. These names could be looked up in the front of directories and the dates of residency could thus be established. It might be useful to compare how long early residents of North Beach Place lived in the housing project, compared to how long residents from later in the building's history lived there.

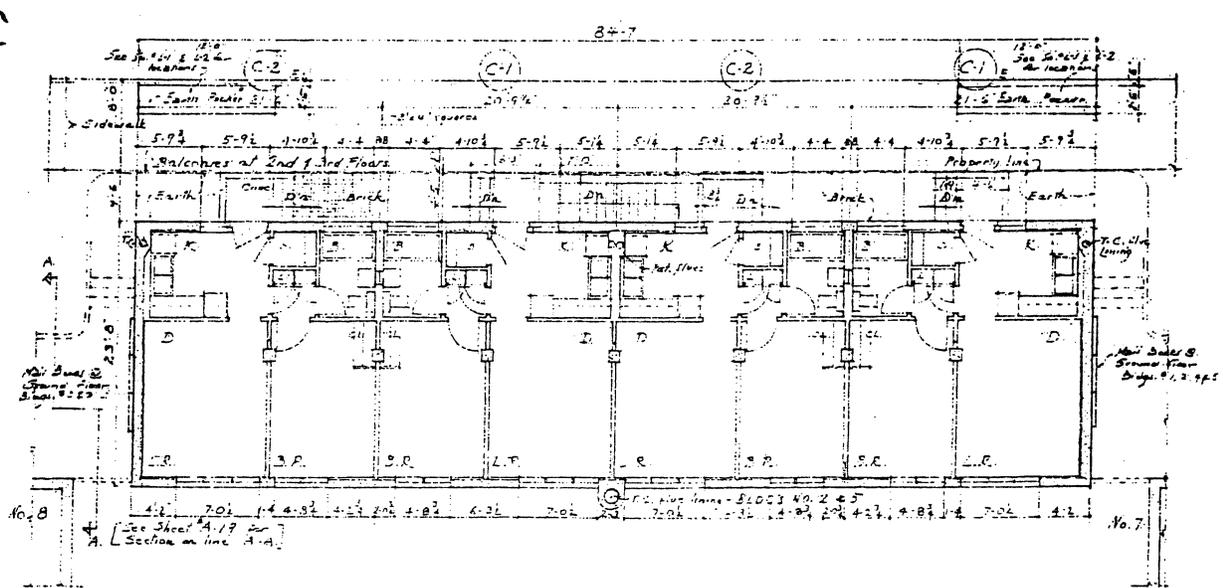
No residents of North Beach Place were interviewed for this report. Interviews with long-time residents would certainly provide useful information.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

In 2000, William Kostura, of Oakland, and Carey and Co., of San Francisco, produced *Historic Architecture Survey Report for the Replacement of North Beach Place Housing Project, San Francisco, CA* for Robert Shaw and Associates, BRIDGE Housing Corporation, and the Mayor's Office of Housing. The demolition and replacement of North Beach Place is using federal funds, and is subject to NEPA and CEQA. The 2000 report was produced to satisfy the historic preservation elements of NEPA and CEQA.

The 2000 report found North Beach Place to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, for its design and for its association with two important Bay Area architects, Henry Gutterson and Ernest Born. It was significant at the local level, within the broader historic context of public housing in the United States before and shortly after World War II.

This HABS report was written in 2003 as mitigation for the demolition of North Beach Place. The author was William Kostura, an architectural historian. In addition to this written report, large-format archival photographs have been taken to document the appearance of this housing project.



Plan of first through third stories
Building 1, North Beach Place