

NORTH BEACH PLACE, 561 BAY STREET, 1120 COLUMBUS
STREET
(Building 12)
561 Bay Street, 1120 Columbus Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS CA-2727-L
CA-2727-L

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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**North Beach Place, 561 Bay Street,
1120 Columbus Avenue
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HABS No. CA-2727-L

- Location:** 561 Bay Street/1120 Columbus Avenue
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 12 was located on the north side of Columbus Avenue, just east of Jones Street. Its long side stretched almost all the way to Bay Street. The height of the building was staggered to follow the slope of the ground, which descended gradually from south to north. The second and third stories ran the full length of the building. The first story was present only for the northern two-thirds of the length of the building, and the fourth story was present for only the southern third of the length of the building. A basement could be found beneath the southern third of the building. No part of the building was a full four stories in height. The building measured 29'-1" (east-west) by 184'-4" (north-south).

2. Foundations

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

3. Walls and structural system

Please refer to the outline report for Building 7, HABS No. CA-2727-G.

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 12, balconies ran for almost the full width of the second and third stories, and a portion of the fourth story, on the west side of the building. At their northern ends, they connected with a stairwell at the junction of Building 12 with buildings 5 and 13.

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. Four stairwells were associated with Building 12. One was located where it joined with buildings 5 and 13. Another was located on the west side of the building, about twenty feet north of its south end. Both of these rose the full height of the building. In addition to these, two other stairwells on the west side of the building rose only to the second floor level. One (nearer the south end) was at an acute angle to the building, while the other was perpendicular to it.

Unlike in most other buildings in the complex, no raised concrete stoops were present to provide access to ground floor level units. Instead, the doorways to these units opened directly onto the paved courtyard on the west side of the building.

Balconies provided access to a garbage chute. The chute serving Building 12 could be found along the balcony on the west side of the building, and was rectangular in form. This was in contrast to the rounded chutes that served buildings facing Bay Street.

5. Openings

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

6. Roof

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

C. Description of Interiors

1. Floor plans

a. Basement

A basement was present at the extreme south end of Building 12. It was partially below grade. (On as-built plans, this basement is shown as being part of the ground floor, but in appearance and function, this area was more like a basement than otherwise.) A portion of this basement was devoted to a boiler room, a transformer room, and a storage room. The balance of the basement 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. Building 12 contained eighteen living units, ten of which were two-bedroom units, and eight of which were three-bedroom units. These units were distributed as follows:

The ground floor was occupied by four three-bedroom units. The second floor was occupied by four two-bedroom units and two three-bedroom units. The third story was occupied by five two-bedroom units and one three-bedroom unit. The fourth story was occupied by a two-bedroom unit and a three-bedroom unit.

Each two-bedroom unit measured 23'-6" by 30'-0". Each three-bedroom unit measured 29'-1" by 30'-0" or 31'-1" by 31'-7" (the latter being end wall units). Each unit extended the full depth of the building, so that light poured into each unit from two sides. The sole entrance to each unit was directly into the dining area.

In addition to bedrooms, each unit in Building 12 contained a living room, a kitchen with dining area, a bathroom, a storage room, and a small linen closet. Linen closets were 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.

2. Flooring

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

3. Wall and ceiling finish

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

4. Openings and trim

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

5. Bedroom closets

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

6. Kitchen fixtures

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

7. Bathroom fixtures

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

8. Mechanical equipment and fixtures

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation

Building 12 was located on the north side of Columbus Avenue, between Taylor and Jones streets, in the more western of the two blocks of North Beach Place. The building was oriented on a north-south axis and stretched north almost to Bay Street. It was connected by balconies to buildings 5 and 13, which fronted on Bay Street and ran east-west. By means of such connections, Building 12 and the other buildings in the block formed a series of linked U-shapes.

2. Historic landscape

According to plans shown in John S. Bolles' article "North Beach Place Housing Project" (1945), the courtyard formed by buildings 5, 11 and 12 was originally intended to be surfaced with paving and lawns, with the former predominating. This surfacing was still largely in place in 2001. The northern half of this courtyard was lower in elevation than was the southern half. This elevation change was effected by a concrete staircase (to the east) and a concrete ramp (to the west).

The plans mentioned above show that this courtyard was originally intended to be used for a "Social Center." It is unknown if this use was

ever realized. In 2001 a rectangular prefabricated building occupied a part of the courtyard. This building was used as an office for North Beach Head Start.

The courtyard bounded by buildings 12 and 13 was converted into a community garden at an unknown time.

Please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A, for more detail on the historic landscape of North Beach Place.

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

1. Title history

Sales Ledgers, 1939-1947. At the San Francisco Assessor's Office, City Hall.

2. Design and construction

“Bids Asked on North Beach Place,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 5, 1945, p. 10.

Bolles, John S. “North Beach Place Housing Project,” *Architect and Engineer*, July 1945.

“Housing Projects Postponed by High Building Costs.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 24, 1946, p. 9.

“In the News.” *Architect and Engineer*, October 1950, p. 46.

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

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

“North Beach Housing.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 10, 1950, p. 30.

“North Beach Place to Be Built by 1952.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 16, 1949, p. 10.

3. Opening and NAACP lawsuit

Calene, John. “North Beach Housing Will Ban Negroes.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 22, 1952, p. 1.

“Court Acts on Housing Race Issue.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 4, 1952, p. 1.

“Court Voids S.F. Policy on Housing.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 27, 1953, p. 1.

“New Housing Project Opens.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 14, 1952, p. 3.

“S.F. Negro Housing Ban Is Outlawed.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 2, 1952.

“S.F. Housing Segregation Loses Again.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 23, 1953, p. 1.

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.

5. Crime and drug issues, 1979-1980s

Anders, Corrie, and Leslie Guevarra. "Drug trade booming at S.F. housing projects." *San Francisco Examiner*, October 4, 1995, p. B-1.

D'Emilio, Frances. "Fed-Up Tenants Fight City Hall." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26, 1979, p. 6.

Linn, Amy. "Politics '84 – the view from the projects." *San Francisco Examiner*, July 23, 1984, p. A-1.

_____. "Shelter Skelter." *S.F. Weekly*, November 1, 1995

McCarthy, Denise. Telephone interview by William Kostura, June 3, 2002.

O'Connor, John D. "Crack gangs at war in S.F." *San Francisco Examiner*, January 4, 1989, p. A-18.

_____. "S.F. cops on trail of gang gunplay." *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1988, p. A-1.

6. Demolition and replacement of North Beach Place

Hatfield, Larry D. "S.F. gets millions to redo housing." *San Francisco Examiner*, August 25, 1993, p. 1.

Karakasevic, Laura. "Reconstruction of North Beach Housing Development Under Reconsideration." *North Beach Now*, April 1997.

Lelchuk, Ilene. "North Beach project residents ready to fight eviction." *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 9, 2001.

_____. "Strapped tenants hesitant to move." *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 23, 2001.

Mullman, Jeremy. "A Moving Experience." *S.F. Weekly*, December 12, 2001.

7. Early history of housing project construction in the United States

Robinson and Associates, Inc., and Jeffrey Shrimpton. "Historic Context: Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1939" (Draft). Prepared for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1997.

8. Early Housing Projects in San Francisco

Andreini, Don. "San Francisco Marks 50 Years of Public Housing." *Heritage Newsletter*, Vol. 17, no. 3 (1989).

"Chinatown Project First of Six Local Developments." *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 3, 1949, p. 2.

"San Francisco Builds Low Rent Homes." *Architect and Engineer*, July 1942.

9. Henry Gutterson

Cerny, Susan Dinkelspiel. *Berkeley Landmarks*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, 1994. See listings of buildings by Gutterson.

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_____ (writing as Susan Dinkelspiel Stern). "Henry Higby Gutterson: Residential Work in Berkeley." Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, n.d.

_____. Telephone interview by William Kostura, March 15, 2003.

10. Ernest Born

"Ernest Born, 1898-1992." *California Monthly*, December 1992.

"In Memory." *AIA/SF*, October 1992, p. 15.

"Milestones." *CED News* (University of California), Fall 1998, p. 41.

DeMars, Vernon Armand. Interviewed by Suzanne B. Reiss. "Ernest Born." Berkeley Digital Library SunSITE (The Library, University of California, Berkeley). 1988-1989.

Joncas, Richard, et. al. *Stanford University*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1999.

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.

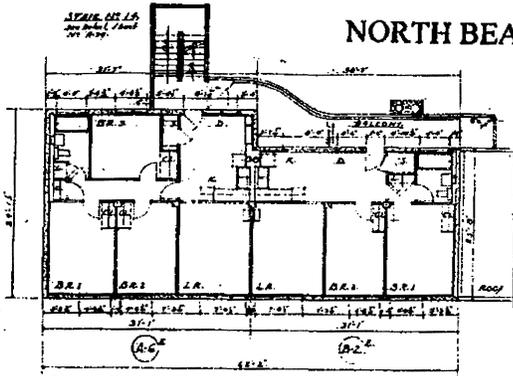
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

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.

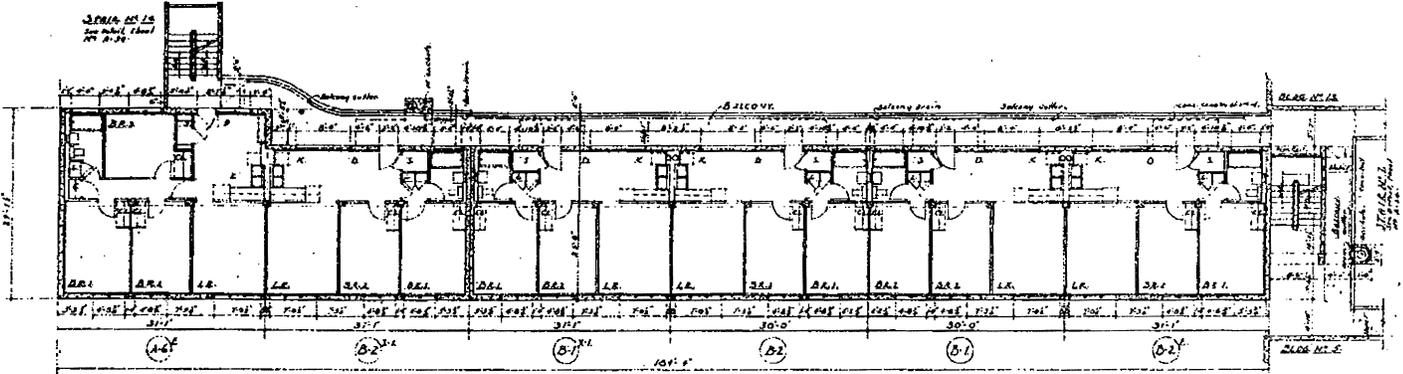
The 2000 report found North Beach Place to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, for its design and for its association with two important Bay Area architects, Henry Gutterson and Ernest Born. It was significant at the local level, within the broader historic context of public housing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

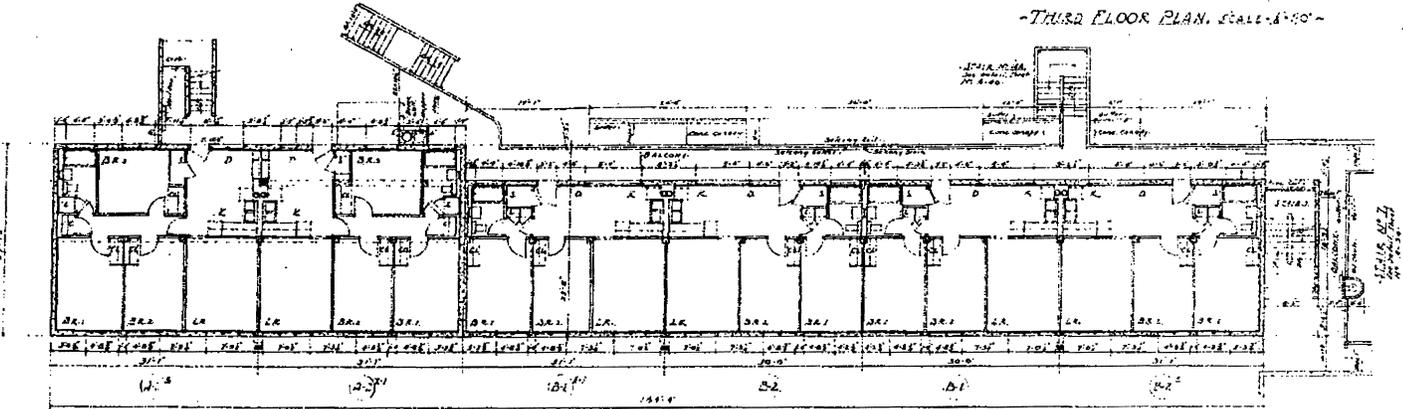
NORTH BEACH PLACE, 561 BAY STREET, 1120 Columbus Avenue
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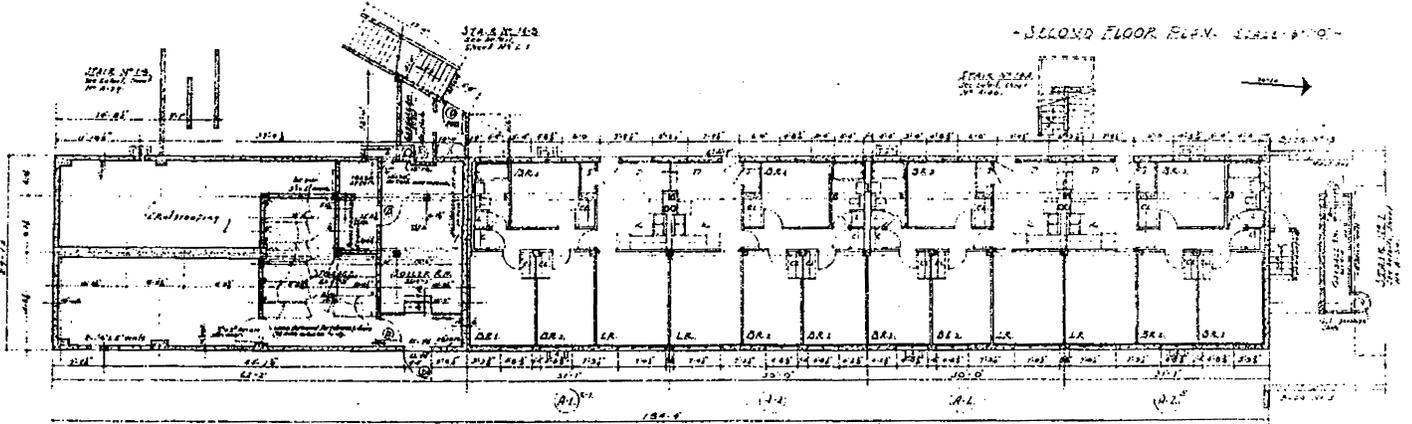
BLDG. NO. 12. FOURTH FLOOR PLAN. SCALE 1/4"



THIRD FLOOR PLAN. SCALE 1/4"



SECOND FLOOR PLAN. SCALE 1/4"



GROUND FLOOR PLAN. SCALE 1/4"

First through fourth floor plans
 Building 12, North Beach Place