NORTH BEACH PLACE, 401 BAY STREET, 500 FRANCISCO STREET
(Building No. 6)
401 Bay Street, 500 Francisco Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS CA-2727-F
CA-2727-F

HABS
CA-2727-F

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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Oakland, CA 94607

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HABS No. CA-2727-F

Location: 401 Bay Street/500 Francisco 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 for the construction history of North Beach Place.

At an unknown date, unit 103 in Building 6 was altered for handicapped access. This was one of a small number of ground floor units in the complex that were so modified.

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 6 was located at the northwest corner of Francisco and Mason streets. Its long side stretched along Mason almost all the way to Bay Street. It was three stories in height and measured 29'-4" (east-west) by 243'-7" (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 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

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 6, balconies ran along the full width of the upper two stories of the west side of the building. At their northern ends, they connected with a stairwell at the junction of buildings 1 and 6.

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. Two stairwells were associated with Building 6. One was located where it joined with Building 1, and the other was on the west side of the building, about fourteen feet north of its south end.

Separate stoops could be found at the entrance of each first story unit in Building 6. These stoops were on the west side of the 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 the courtyard between buildings 6 and 7.

Balconies provided access to a garbage chute. The chute serving Building 6 could be found midway 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 portion of the basement of Building 6 was devoted to a boiler room, a transformer room, a storage room, a garbage room, and a small hallway. Collectively, these rooms filled an area almost thirty feet square, plus an ell for the garbage room, in the middle part of the basement of this building. 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 6 contained twenty-four living units, fourteen of which were two-bedroom units, and ten of which were three-bedroom units. These units were distributed as follows:

The ground floor was entirely occupied by eight of the three-bedroom units. The second floor contained seven two-bedroom units and one three-bedroom unit, the latter of which was located at the south end of the building. The third story was identical in plan to the second story. A short westward extension of the building at this end accommodated these third bedrooms.

Each two-bedroom unit measured 23'-6" by 30'-0". Each three-bedroom unit on the ground floor measured 27'-6" by 30'-0". The three-bedroom units on the second and third stories measured 29'-4" by 31'-1". 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 from the balcony or front stoop directly into the dining area.

In addition to bedrooms, each unit in Building 6 contained a living room, a kitchen with dining area, a bathroom, a storage room, and a small linen closet. In two-bedroom units, linen closets were located adjacent to the dining area, while in three-bedroom units, they 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.

9. Handicapped access features

At an unknown date, unit 103 in this building was altered for handicapped access. The hallway in this unit was widened for a wheelchair, the shower was wheelchair accessible, the closets had variable-height racks, and the unit had been generally remodeled with new sheetrock walls, new door moldings, vinyl baseboards, a new kitchen sink, and new cabinets.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation

Building 6 was located at the northwest corner of Mason and Francisco streets, in the more eastern of the two blocks of North Beach Place. The building was oriented on a north-south axis and stretched north along Mason almost to Bay Street. It was connected by balconies to Building 1, which fronted on Bay Street and ran east-west. By means of such connections, Building 6 and the other buildings in the block formed a series of linked U-shapes.

2. Historic landscape

To a certain degree the landscaping plan for North Beach Place by Thomas Church remained intact through 2001. The 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.

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

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

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"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

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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.

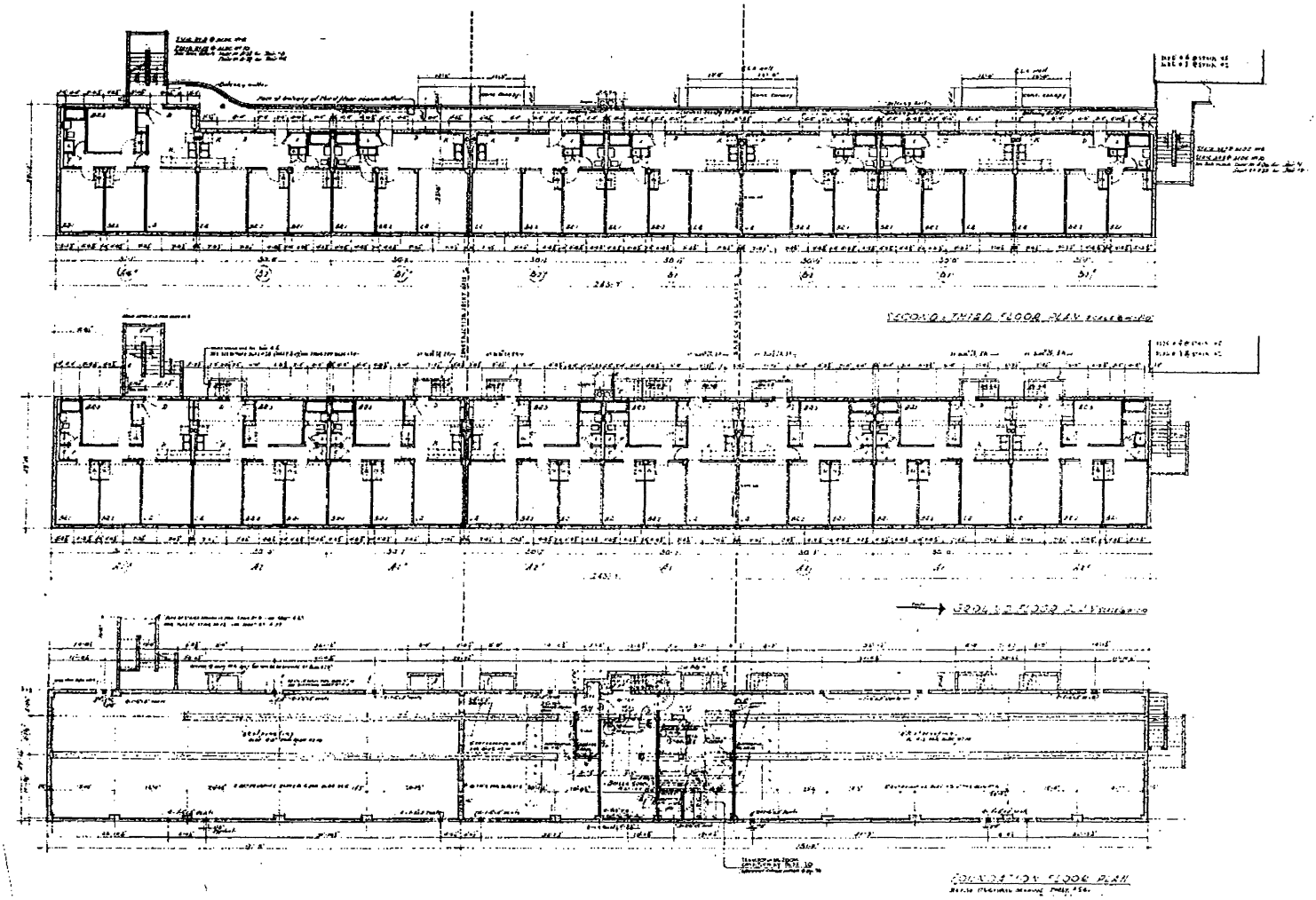
No residents of North Beach Place were interviewed for this report. Interviews with long-time residents would certainly provide useful information.

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.



Foundation through third floor plans
Building 6, North Beach Place