

Pacific Telephone Building
140 New Montgomery Street,
City of San Francisco,
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2870

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Pacific Telephone Building

HABS No. CA-2870

Location:

140 New Montgomery Street (AKA South Montgomery Street) (formerly 134-140 New Montgomery Street) San Francisco, California, 94105

The coordinates for the Pacific Telephone Building are +37° 47' 12.55", -122° 23' 59.66"; these were obtained using Google Earth in February 2012. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Photographer:

Stephen D. Schafer, HABS 5x7 views photographed, Feb 8, 2010.

Description:

Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co., 1925, *Financial District*,
134-40 New Montgomery St., San Francisco.
Designed by James R. Miller, Timothy Pflueger and Alexander A. Cantin.

Though the building appears as a stepped block from New Montgomery Street, it is a notched L from the southwest, contributing a welcome variety to the skyline. The eclectic but original ornament is well integrated into the building's form. The recent restoration included the (1986 fiberglass over stainless steel frame) recreation by sculptor Manuel Palos of the original 13-foot terra-cotta eagles that were removed from the top parapet in the 1950s. The black marble Moderne lobby is embellished with a stenciled ceiling *a la Chinois* and elaborate elevator doors ([Woodbridge and Woodbridge 1992: 25](#)).

The post 1906 earthquake skyline became home to the new corporate San Francisco as many of the city's and the West's largest companies--the Southern Pacific, Standard Oil of California, the Bank of America, PG&E, the Matson Steamship Company, and Pacific Telephone and Telegraph. ([Wiley 2000: 65; 120](#)).

One of San Francisco's finest skyscrapers of any period and one of only two illustrated in Francisco Mujica's 1929 *History of the Skyscraper*. Mujica wrote: "The Telephone Building of San Francisco marks the end of the preparatory and experimental stage in skyscraper architecture," in reference to its original and entirely ahistorical ornamentation, and its reliance on Eliel Saarinen's Tribune Tower Competition design as a precedent.

It is a steel frame building, originally planned in an E shape, but built as an F, and designed to be seen from all sides. The New Montgomery side appears quite

massive, while the rear is broken up in wings, each suggesting the main facade at a smaller scale. The fine terra cotta ornamentation, speckled like granite, has the quality of Gothic detail at times but is entirely original in reference. The lobby is a superb example of Moderne design with black marble walls, fantastic "Chinese" stenciled ceilings, and bronze elevator doors. At the time it was built, it was the largest corporate office building on the Pacific Coast. ([Corbett and Hall 1979: 107](#)).

History:

Designed by the architecture firm of Miller and Pflueger in 1925 it is associated with three architects, Alexander A. Cantin, architect for the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, and James R. Miller, and Timothy Pflueger of the firm Miller and Pflueger which operated from 1920s through 1936, when Miller retired. It was built as the headquarters for Pacific Telephone & Telegraph during the early boom years of telephone service.

The Pacific Telephone building is significant as one of the first skyscrapers to be built in San Francisco and as the tallest building constructed west of Chicago when completed in 1925. The building was constructed in response to the earthquake and fire of 1906 and associated with the development of the telephone in San Francisco and the greater Pacific region.

The Pacific Telephone building is one of the first skyscrapers in San Francisco and was the first high rise building on the west coast to be occupied entirely by one company. Additionally the building is architecturally significant as an excellent example of the Art Deco style in the Bay Area. (Page & Turnbull, 2007)

Sources:

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San Francisco Architecture: The Illustrated Guide to Over 1,000 of the Best Buildings, Parks, and Public Artworks in the Bay Area . San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

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Corbett, Michael R. 1979.

Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage . San Francisco: California Living Books.

Poletti, Therese. 2008

"Art Deco San Francisco: The Architecture of Timothy Pflueger," published by Princeton Architectural Press, October 2008.

Mujica, Francisco. 1927

History of the Skyscraper, Archaeology and Architecture Press, 72 Pages

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The Architect and Engineer.

Articles or illustrations: Dec 1925, March 1926, May 1925, June 1925, March 1930.

www.preservationnation.org/magazine/story-of-the-week/2009/san-francisco-telephone-building.html