

NORTH BEACH PLACE, 531 BAY STREET, 650 FRANCISCO
STREET
(Building No. 11)
531 Bay Street, 650 Francisco Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS CA-2727-K
CA-2727-K

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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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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

**North Beach Place, 531 Bay Street,
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HABS No. CA-2727-K

- Location:** 531 Bay Street/650 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 history of the construction of the North Beach Place project.

Regarding Building 11 specifically, a substantial alteration was made at an unknown date. In this alteration, the open pass-through at the northern end of the building was filled in, and the use of some of the original office and storage rooms was changed. The result of these changes was that the pass-through was filled in to become housing project's new Community Room, and a shop room became a new laundry room for the complex. Wooden trellises were laid over concrete walls on the west side of the building to mark the entrances to these rooms.

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 11 was located on the north side of Francisco Street, between Taylor Street and Columbus Avenue. Its long side stretched almost all the way to Bay Street. It was four stories in height and measured 35'-4" (east-west) by 245'-2" (north-south).

2. Foundations

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

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. In two of the buildings, Building 7 and

Building 8, the northern portion of the ground level was left open, allowing people to pass from one courtyard to another. In these buildings, the underpass occupied the northern 60'-0" of the ground floor level. Two rows of square reinforced concrete posts, each about one foot in diameter, supported the upper floors in these underpasses. Building 11 was built in the same manner, but at an unknown date the underpass in this building was filled in with new rooms, with exterior walls of reinforced concrete construction.

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 11, balconies ran along the full width of the third and fourth stories of the east side of the building. At their northern ends, they connected with a stairwell at the junction of Building 11 with buildings 4 and 5.

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. In the upper two stories, the stairwells emptied onto continuous exterior balconies, which provided access to apartment entries. Five stairwells were associated with Building 11. One was located where it joined with buildings 4 and 5. Another was on the east side of the building, about twenty feet north of its south end. Both of these rose to the fourth floor, and served all of the upper stories. The other three stairwells were almost evenly spaced along the east side of the building and rose only to the second story, where they each served two units.

Building 11 differed from the other buildings in the complex in that it did not have raised concrete entrance stoops and privacy walls for the ground floor units. In Building 11, first story entrances opened directly onto a sidewalk along the east side of the building.

Balconies provided access to a garbage chute. The chute serving Building 11 could be found midway along the balcony on the east 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, for a description of exterior openings in this building.

Alterations were made at an unknown time to add a new Community Room and laundry room to the first story. These rooms had doorways in the west wall of the building, and these doorways were marked by wooden trellises laid over concrete walls.

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

Building 11 had no basement. Utility rooms such as a garbage and boiler room, which in other buildings were located in the basement, were originally located in the first story of this building.

b. Apartment floor plans and common areas

The North Beach Place housing project contained living units of one, two, three, and four bedrooms. At the time of construction, Building 11 contained twenty-seven living units, including a one-bedroom unit, fifteen two-bedroom units, eight three-bedroom units, and three four-bedroom units. A number of utility, office, shop, and storage rooms were also located in this building. A pass-through was located at the northern end of the building, just as in buildings 7 and 8. At an unknown date, this pass-through was filled in with additional rooms.

The units and rooms in Building 11 were distributed as follows:

Upon the completion of construction, the ground floor was dedicated to a wide variety of uses. The northern end of the ground floor was open for use as a pass-through, enabling pedestrian passage between courtyards. Three living units – a one-bedroom, a two-bedroom, and a three-bedroom – occupied

most of the middle area of the first story. A boiler room, garbage room, and transformer room were sandwiched between two of these living units. The southern end of the first story was used as a manager's office, an office and workroom, a waiting room, a repair shop, and three storage rooms.

The second story contained seven three-bedroom units and one four-bedroom unit. The third and fourth stories each contained seven two-bedroom units and a four-bedroom unit. In each of these stories, the four-bedroom unit was located at the extreme south end of the building. A short eastward extension of the building at this end accommodated these fourth bedrooms.

At an unknown date, the pass-through at the northern end of the building was filled in, and the use of some of the original office and storage rooms was changed. One result of these changes was that the housing project's Community Room, consisting of a meeting room, an anteroom, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and three storage closets, occupied the space once occupied by the pass-through. Another result was that the former repair shop became a laundry room for the complex. This laundry room measured approximately twenty-five feet by thirty feet. One of the first story living units was converted into a "One Stop Shop," also at an unknown time.

The single one-bedroom unit measured roughly twenty feet by thirty feet. Each two-bedroom unit measured 23'-6" by about thirty feet. Each three-bedroom unit measured 29'-1" by about thirty feet. Each four-bedroom unit measured 32'-8" by 35'-4", minus a notch at the northeast corner of the unit. 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 11 contained a living room, a kitchen with dining area, a bathroom, and a small linen closet. Units on the third and fourth floors also had storage rooms. 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

For a description of the flooring of living units, please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

Flooring for both the Community Room and the laundry room was twelve-inch square vinyl tiles.

3. Wall and ceiling finish

For a description of the wall and ceiling finish of the living units, please refer to the outline report for Building 1, HABS No. CA-2727-A.

The Community Room and laundry room both had walls of the same gypsum-plasterboard as found in the living units. The ceiling of the Community Room was acoustic tiles, and that of the laundry room was concrete.

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. Community Room fixtures

Community Room fixtures appeared to date to the 1980s. They included fluorescent lights and wooden cabinets with Formica counters. The refrigerator, range, and dishwasher appeared to be of more recent date.

9. Laundry room fixtures

The structural elements of the building -- four concrete posts supporting concrete beams above -- were left exposed in this room. New washers and dryers surrounded the perimeter of the room. This room was also equipped with a plastic wash-basin. Lighting was fluorescent.

10. 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 11 was located on the north side of Francisco Street, between Taylor Street and Columbus Avenue, 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 4 and 5, which fronted on Bay Street and ran east-west. By means of such connections, Building 11 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 courtyard formed by buildings 4, 10, and 11 remained devoted to parking.

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.

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

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

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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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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.

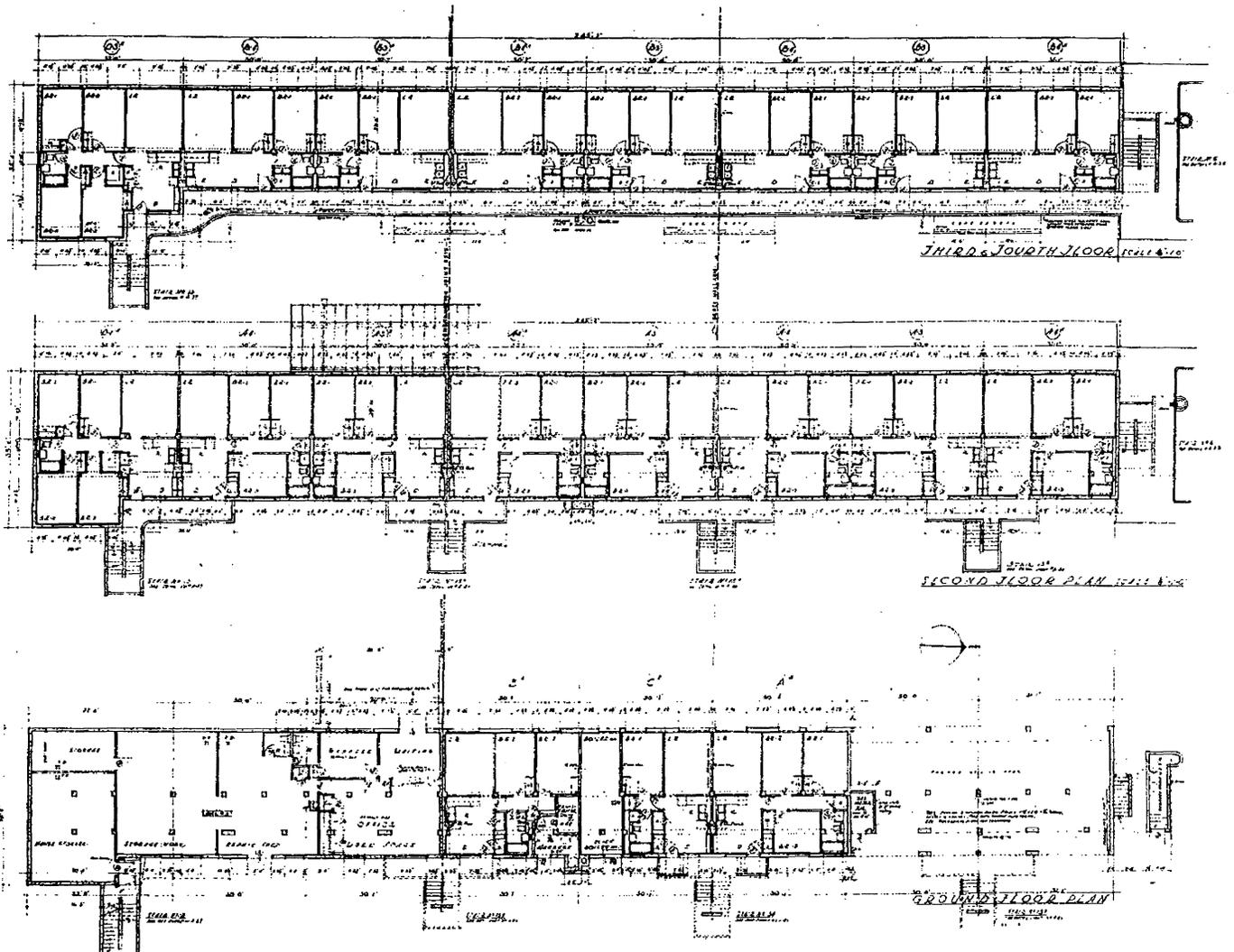
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

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.

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First through fourth floor plans
Building 11, North Beach Place