



LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



2173 15th Street

City and County of San Francisco
Edwin M. Lee, Mayor

Planning Department
John Rahaim, Director

Landmark No.
XXX

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The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is a seven-member body that makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the designation of landmark buildings and districts. The regulations governing landmarks and landmark districts are found in Article 10 of the Planning Code. The HPC is staffed by the San Francisco Planning Department.

This draft Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the initiation and designation process. Only language contained within the Article 10 designation ordinance, adopted by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, should be regarded as final.

2173 15th Street

Built: Circa 1875
Architect: Unknown

Overview

2173 15th St. is one of the earliest extant residential buildings constructed in the Duboce Triangle neighborhood. The building is a two-story, wood-frame, single-family house designed in the Greek Revival/National style. It is located on a 25' x 125' lot on the south side of 15th Street, between Sanchez and Noe Streets. The building is significant as an early expression of the Greek Revival / National style in San Francisco. It represents a pre-Victorian form and style that is rare in San Francisco and provides a tangible connection to earliest residential development outside of San Francisco's center city core.



Primary façade of 2173 15th Street



Building Description

The rectangular plan building, clad in modern face brick and rustic channel siding, sits on a brick perimeter foundation and is capped by a gable roof. The primary façade, which is three bays wide, faces north. The first floor, which is sheltered beneath a continuous porch supported by square posts with Tuscan capitals, features a flush entry in the left bay. The center and right bays contain double-hung wood windows. The upper floor, encompassed within an angled raking cornice, contains a single double-hung window with an Italianate style hood and casings.

The exact construction date of 2173 15th Street is unknown. Although original construction permits for the building were destroyed during the 1906 earthquake and fire, several factors point to an early 1870s construction date. Evidence from Sanborn maps and the unusual siting of the residence toward the center of the lot, preserving a large yard in front, indicates that 2173 15th Street suggests an 1870s construction date.¹ Likewise, the vernacular interpretation of Greek Revival / National style was only primarily constructed in San Francisco in the 1860s-1870s. According to the 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, the building was in place at that time. It was shown as a single-family dwelling and it continues to be used as such today.

The Greek Revival / National style is based on the architecture and decoration of Greek temples and is characterized by simple detailing, flat-arched openings and low-pitched gable roofs, often front-facing. The style was frequently employed for institutions, commercial and domestic buildings.² Scattered examples of the Greek Revival / National style are found in San Francisco.



¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1889-1893.

² The description of styles is excerpted directly from the San Francisco Planning Department, *Preservation Bulletin #18*, page 5.

Alteration History

The subject building was constructed circa 1875 (exact construction date unknown). The roof was repaired in 1926, and in 1957, the wood entry steps were replaced with brick steps and a handrail was installed. In 1959, a roof was installed on the rear porch, and brick veneer was applied at the first story level of the front façade. The post bases were repaired, the windows were replaced, and the base of the wall and floor were repaired in 1989. In 1990, two wood windows were installed in the existing frames in the bedroom, and in 1994, the bathroom was remodeled.

Duboce Triangle Development

Overview

2173 15th Street was part of the early development of the Duboce Triangle neighborhood, which burgeoned as a residential area after the opening of the Market and Castro Street cable car line in 1887. The line made commuting to jobs downtown and in the South of Market Area feasible, and residential construction began to overtake the area, which had previously been marked by small farms.

Duboce Triangle, historically known as Gaffney's Triangle, is located on the north side of Market Street, opposite Eureka Valley. It receives its name from the polygon formed by its boundaries: Market Street, Duboce Avenue, and Castro Street.⁸⁵ Unlike its neighbors north of Market Street, Duboce Triangle was not originally surveyed as part of the Western Addition. Rather, it was surveyed as part of the Mission Dolores Tract before the southwesterly extension of Market Street cut a diagonal swath through the tract, severing Duboce Triangle from the rest of Mission Dolores. Clues to the neighborhoods' historical relationships include the fact that the east-west streets in Duboce Triangle are numbered like the rest of Mission. It was laid out in the 1860s as part of the Mission Dolores subdivision and remained sparsely developed until the 1890s. The 1869 Coast Survey map indicates that Duboce Triangle was at the time comprised of small farmsteads. Its development as a residential district did not begin in earnest until Upper Market Street was graded west of Dolores Street in the 1870s.

The provision of mass transit to the Upper Market area ushered in successive waves of residential building in Duboce Triangle. Even more development arrived with the extension of the Market Street Cable Railway from Valencia Street to Castro Street in 1886.⁸⁶ Data from the 1886 Sanborn maps and a photograph taken of snow-covered Twin Peaks that same year suggest that Duboce Triangle neighborhood was approximately fifty percent developed. Aside from Market Street, most of the neighborhood was residential, consisting primarily of older single-family houses and two- and three-story flats. Many of the older houses still sat on large lots with water tank structures and other rural outbuildings at the rear of the lot. The maps also reveal some larger vacant tracts of land, suggesting that speculators were waiting for the right time to subdivide. Some tracts, though, such as the present site of the New Mint, were vacant because the topography made building difficult. Away from Market Street the only major non-residential use was the German Hospital, a complex occupying the block bounded by Duboce Avenue (formerly Ridley Street), Noe, Fourteenth, and Castro streets. Largely built out by 1906, Duboce Triangle continued to grow after the earthquake as speculators redeveloped underutilized corner lots with larger apartment buildings. By the 1913-15 Sanborn map, Duboce Triangle was completely built out.

Historically the center of the Bay Area's Scandinavian immigrant population, Duboce Triangle became populated by defense workers during the Second World War, and many of the remaining houses were carved up into smaller

apartments. Duboce Triangle narrowly avoided urban renewal during the 1960s, instead becoming a testing ground for innovative and largely successful code enforcement and street beautification programs. Today, Duboce Triangle is comprised of a mixture of single and multiple-family frame housing developed between the 1870s and early 1900s.



Duboce Triangle neighborhood looking southwest from Mint Hill, 1886.
Source: Postcard collection of Glenn Koch

Scandinavians

Many Scandinavian immigrants (those from Sweden, Denmark, and Norway), as well as Finnish immigrants, came to San Francisco in the late nineteenth century. They initially arrived from Chicago and other Midwestern cities in the 1870s and 1880s. Emigration directly from their Scandinavian homelands, especially Sweden, intensified following an economic depression there, which put many shipyard and construction workers out of work. Other Scandinavians and Finns came as merchant seamen. The first recorded Swedish community organization in San Francisco was founded in 1873. Originally called the Original Orpheus Singing Club, the group was renamed the Singing Society Svea. After 1875, the group changed its name to the *Svenska Sällskapet*, or the Swedish Society.⁸⁸ Today the organization is known as the San Francisco Swedish Society and its headquarters are located in the Swedish-American Hall at 2174 Market Street in Duboce Triangle, built in 1907.

San Francisco's Scandinavian communities initially settled in the South of Market area, but by the 1880s a neighborhood was emerging in the Duboce Triangle area. Many worked in seafaring occupations including ship owners and master mariners, sailors, engineers, and fishermen. Others were building tradesmen, such as carpenters, masons, and painters. Many of the builders settled where the houses were being built, and by the mid-1880s the suburban frontier was Duboce Triangle. As a consequence, Scandinavian contractors appear to have been responsible for much of the residential construction in the area.

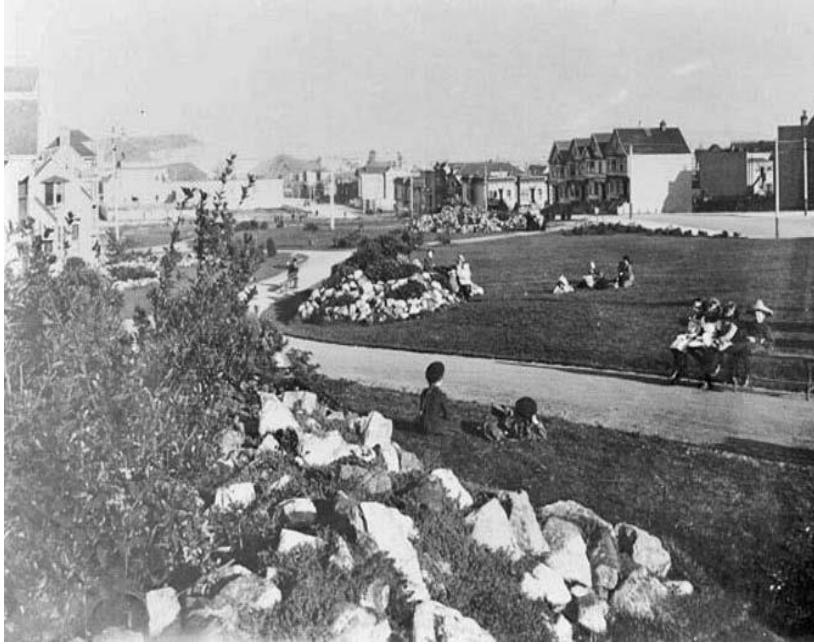
Similar to other contemporary immigrant and ethnic groups, Scandinavian community life centered on work and religious and social/cultural organizations. Although Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes shared related languages and were mostly Lutheran, each group initially tended to worship, socialize, and marry within their own individual

group. Scandinavian churches tended to be separated both by language and theology, with the Danes more likely to be tolerant of alcohol than the more temperate Swedes and Norwegians. Scandia Hall, which was the home of the Swedish community until it was destroyed in 1906, was located on City Hall Avenue in the Civic Center. Closer to home, there were roughly a half-dozen Swedish congregations in the Upper Market area. The center of Swedish religious and cultural activity was Ebenezer Lutheran Church at Fifteenth and Dolores streets. Although this church survived the 1906 Earthquake, it succumbed to a fire in 1993; however the parish hall survives at 208 Dolores Street. The Danish community was centered near the intersection of Church and Market streets. The first Danish church, Ansgar Danish Lutheran Church, was completed on April 6, 1906. It survived the earthquake two weeks later and served as a relief center. The church still stands at 152 Church Street; its name was changed to St. Francis Lutheran Church in the 1960s when the Danish and Finnish Lutherans melded their parishes into one church.

1906 Earthquake and Fire

2173 15th Street escaped the 1906 Earthquake and Fire largely unscathed. Like most of the adjoining Western Addition, Duboce Triangle was not heavily damaged by the 1906 Earthquake and escaped the fires that ravaged so much of the city. Aside from the usual cracked foundations and toppled chimneys, the neighborhood remained largely intact. Like nearby Hayes Valley, Duboce Triangle hosted earthquake refugees who streamed into Duboce Park. By July 1906, the San Francisco Relief Corporation assumed control of the Duboce Park camp, renaming it "Relief Camp No. 19." Confined to a relatively small area, Camp No. 19 was one of the smaller camps, with 300 residents. Unlike many refugee camps, Camp No. 19 was always a tent camp and never acquired the wooden "refugee shacks" that were constructed in other parks. Surviving for almost a year, Camp No. 19 was closed on February 8, 1907.¹²¹

Duboce Park and the Lower Haight neighborhoods were gradually repaired, although similar to nearby Hayes Valley, Duboce Triangle was transformed from a middle-class neighborhood of single-family homes before the quake into a more densely populated area of multi-family apartments and flats. Based on information from the 1913-15 Sanborn map, it appears that many single-family residences that appeared on the 1899 Sanborn map were torn down and replaced with larger flats and apartment buildings.



Duboce Park, circa 1904, immediately prior to the 1906 disaster. Source: San Francisco Public Library, History Center

Depression to World War II

In the 1920s – 1940s, the occupants of 2173 15th Street were primarily working class. Early owners of 2173 15th Street were mostly married couples and included a public school teacher (Walter G. and Leta Swanson, 1924); a carpenter (Simon P. Sellman, 1935); a US Army soldier (Joe and Mary Yeargin, 1947); a saleswoman and piano teacher (Dolores and John H. Rider, 1950); and grocery store owners (Adolph and Ellen Ghidella, 1958).

Many of the same factors that characterized the Western Addition and Hayes Valley during the Depression and the Second World War were also present in Duboce Triangle. Largely built out by 1950, the Sanborn maps published that year show little evidence of much new construction, aside from the occasional residential infill project or filling station along Market Street. Some temporary post-quake frame structures remained, although most had long since been replaced with more permanent structures. Other new construction occurred on the sites of livery stables, coal yards, and large freestanding single-family residences.

At the beginning of the Depression, Scandinavian institutions continued to thrive in the larger Market/Octavia neighborhood, particularly those serving the still-growing Finnish immigrant community. In 1928, Finnish immigrants Matti and Sandra Finnila built a one-story brick commercial building on a vacant lot in the 2500 block of Market, just east of Noe Street, to house a Finnish style sauna. The building, which also housed several storefronts and a residence for the Finnila family, stood until 1986 when it was torn down and replaced by the concrete Market/Noe Center.¹³⁸ In 1935, the Finnish Lutheran Evangelical Church opened in a new building at 50 Belcher Street (extant).

Although no detailed studies of the demographics of Duboce Triangle have been completed, anecdotal accounts record the gradual emigration of long-term Scandinavian residents (in particular, Swedes) to outlying suburbs of San Francisco and to the East Bay. This outbound migration had begun as a trickle during the 1910s but increased steadily, especially after World War II. As the pioneer Scandinavian immigrants departed from the neighborhood, some of the churches began to fold. The Scandinavians were largely replaced by white war workers from all over the United States. Many rented from recently departed Scandinavian landlords. Some older Scandinavian people

remained in the area, but the neighborhood was reportedly deteriorating due to overcrowding and lack of adequate maintenance.¹³⁹

During the 1940s, Duboce Triangle was chosen as the site for the San Francisco Farmers' Market. Built on a large undeveloped parcel, a few blocks from 2173 15th Street, where the Safeway now stands, the farmers' market was the first of its kind in the nation. Nearby, the U.S. Treasury constructed the new San Francisco Mint on top of Reservoir Hill, formerly the location of a municipal reservoir. Designed by Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, the U.S. Mint was a major New Deal-financed public works project for San Francisco. The Moderne style Mint took on the functions of the Old Mint building, located at Fifth and Mission streets.

Postwar Era

Duboce Triangle shared some themes in common with the nearby Western Addition. Both were characterized by a high rate of absentee property ownership, with many of the neighborhood's older Victorians having been carved into small units to house war workers during the 1940s. The absentee owners often chose inexpensive remodeling projects, resulting in the stripping of redwood siding and trim and the application of stucco, formstone, or metal siding. Some long-time Scandinavian-American property owners remained, as evidenced by the continuing presence of institutions like St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, the Swedish-American Hall, Café du Nord, the Scandinavian Seamen's Institute, the Finnish Sauna and Bathhouse, and a handful of other Scandinavian businesses, including a delicatessen, on Market Street.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, based on a series of indicators, Duboce Triangle was considered to be a "distressed" neighborhood by the San Francisco Planning Department. Overcrowding increased in the years following slum clearance efforts in the Western Addition, as many African-Americans relocated to Duboce Triangle and the Lower Haight. Long-term residents, many wary of the changes around them, began to sell out. Investment in the neighborhood all but stopped. The only new building constructed in the neighborhood during the immediate postwar period was the San Francisco Fire Department Engine Co. No. 27 station, built in 1950. For a time, the Redevelopment Agency considered demolishing most of Duboce Triangle as well, but a core group of neighbors began lobbying the City to take advantage of a federally funded program called Federally Assisted Code Enforcement (FACE) to help the City crack down on code violators and absentee landlords. Although this took place after 1961, it suggests that rehabilitation was on the upswing closer to Market Street at an earlier date.¹⁵⁷

ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION

This section of the report is an analysis and summary of the applicable criteria for designation, integrity, period of significance, significance statement, character-defining features, and additional Article 10 requirements.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Check all criteria applicable to the significance of the property that are documented in the report. The criteria checked is (are) the basic justification for *why* the resource is important.

☒ Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

☐ Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Statement of Significance

Characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation:

2173 15th Street is historically significant because of its status as one of the Duboce Triangle neighborhood's earliest residential buildings. Constructed c. 1875, it is one of the few extant buildings from that era. It provides a tangible link to the pioneer era of San Francisco and represents the earliest settlement patterns of the neighborhood.

The subject building is also significant as an excellent example of the rare Greek Revival / National Style architectural design. It displays key characteristics of the style including a steeply pitched forward-facing gabled roof, rustic wood cladding, double-hung wood-sash windows, and a rare entry porch.

Period of Significance

The Period of Significance of the subject building dates to its year of construction, circa 1875.

INTEGRITY

The seven aspects of integrity are location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association in relation to the period of significance established above. Cumulatively, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its association with the earliest residential development of the Duboce Triangle neighborhood and with the Greek Revival / National Style.

2173 15th Street retains integrity of location, association, design and setting as a single-family dwelling in the largely residential area of Duboce Triangle. The property has somewhat diminished integrity of materials and workmanship through the application of a brick veneer to the first level. Despite these alterations, however, the building still retains integrity of feeling as an example of an early San Francisco single-family dwelling designed in a pre-Victorian style. Likewise, no significant structural changes have been made to the building.

The building still features exemplary elements of the Greek Revival style, such as a front-gabled roof emphasized with a prominent rake molding, at least one instance of a decorative window surround and hood, and a full-width porch with an entablature supported by square columns with plinths and capitals.

ARTICLE 10 REQUIREMENTS SECTION 1004 (b)

Boundaries of the Landmark Site

Encompassing all of and limited to Lot 022 in Assessor's Block 3560 on the south side of 15th Street, between Noe and Sanchez Streets.

Character-Defining Features

Whenever a building, site, object, or landscape is under consideration for Article 10 Landmark designation, the Historic Preservation Commission is required to identify character-defining features of the property. This is done to enable owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

The character-defining *exterior* features of the building are identified as:

- Massing and setback
- All exterior elevations and rooflines with the following exceptions:
 - Non-historic brick veneer
 - Non-historic stairway and metal railing
- Porch and columns
- Wood cladding
- Double-hung wood sash windows

The character-defining *interior* features of the building are identified as: None

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Historic Name:	N/A
Address:	2173 15th Street
Block and Lot:	3650 022
Owner:	Diana Fuller
Original Use:	Single Family House
Current Use:	Single Family House
Zoning:	RH-2

Selected Bibliography

Page & Turnbull. Market and Octavia Area Plan Historic Context Statement, Prepared for the San Francisco Planning Department, December 7, 2007.

Page & Turnbull. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523-AB forms for 2173 15th Street, evaluated by Rebecca Fogel and Caitlin Harvey. Prepared for the San Francisco Planning Department, March 2007.

San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. Building Permits #153599, #200456, #221382, #609771, #653771, and #760773.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1893, 1913.

San Francisco Assessor's Records, various years.

San Francisco City Directories, various years.

San Francisco Planning Department. *Preservation Bulletin, No. 18, Residential and Commercial architectural periods and styles in San Francisco.*

San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Water Department Records (earliest application dated 7/9/1918).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

San Francisco City and County

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