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Proposed Changes to Article 10 Will Strengthen Protections for Landmarks

It is ironic that San Francisco, one of the most handsome cities in America has one of the weakest landmarks ordinances of any community of its stature. Our 20-year old ordinance, forward looking when adopted in 1967, and virtually unchanged since, has long needed revisions to supplement the largely advisory and "friendly persuasion" approach.

More than two years of discussion and negotiation between preservation organizations, the Western Regional Office of the National Trust, members of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB) and the Planning Department have lead to a proposed new Article 10 of the Planning Code. If adopted by the Board of Supervisors, the new landmarks ordinance will virtually prohibit demolition of landmarks and "contributory" buildings in historic districts—except where the property retains no substantive value of reasonable use, or where imminent safety hazards exist.

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This extraordinary stained glass dome illuminating the interior of the historic Ellinwood home in Pacific Heights could be legally protected under new Landmarks Ordinance.

The new Article 10 will change the role of the LPAB from an advisory group making recommendations to the Planning Commission. Instead, the LPAB will be the body charged with implementation and administration of the landmarks ordinance. Specifically the renamed "Landmarks Board" will be able to refer their determinations on landmarks and historic district designations directly to the Board of Supervisors for action as well as make legally binding decisions to issue Certificates of Appropriateness (C of A's) which

authorize construction, alteration or demolition. Under the new ordinance, the Planning Commission would no longer exercise veto authority over the Board's actions. Instead, the Commission will comment on the planning implications, if any, of proposed designations. The new Article 10 also codifies criteria for the issuance of C of A's based on the (National) Secretary of Interior's Standards which will bring San Francisco criteria in line with these widely accepted guidelines.

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Libraries Reflect the City's Values

Two years before San Francisco opened its first free public library, B.E. Lloyd, in the book *Lights and Shades in San Francisco* (1876), boasted of the city's fine libraries. Barely a generation removed from the Gold Rush, San Francisco had three major collections open to the public on a subscription basis: the Mercantile, the Odd Fellows, and the Mechanics' Institute. These institutions reflected the avid interest in culture that characterized San Francisco's population as early as the 1850s.

This year, the city's libraries have increasingly been in the public eye. City budget woes resulted in the closure of the financial district branch and reduced hours in other libraries. Meanwhile, the November ballot contained both city and statewide bond measures designed to finance new facilities. This fall, the California Office of Historic Preservation announced a statewide survey to identify Carnegie library buildings for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

In San Francisco, ballot proposition A will raise \$109.5 million to finance the construction of a new main library and upgrade branches. According to Head Librarian Kenneth

Dowlin, the money would take the Main Library from a beautiful, but dysfunctional building designed for 19th century librarianship into a structure built for the information age of the 21st century. He hopes the new main library will be a symbol of San Francisco's cultural vitality and prosperity.

Throughout history, libraries have aimed to promote learning and treasure the knowledge of a civilization. Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (7th century B.C.) established the first library, a collection of 1200 clay tablets, to preserve works of literature. Municipal libraries were among the amenities

of civic life in the Roman Empire. During the early Middle Ages, libraries were mostly confined to monasteries.

The invention of the printing press in the 15th century revolutionized book production—and ultimately libraries, as well. As the supply of books expanded, private libraries became more common in the 16th century, and royal libraries took form—the beginnings of today's great national libraries in Europe. The

educated populace, the movement to found free public libraries—first in Boston, in 1852, and in Chicago and New York soon after—was part of a more general effort to expand the scope of public education in the later 19th century. High schools, land-grant colleges, and great universities on the German model proliferated.

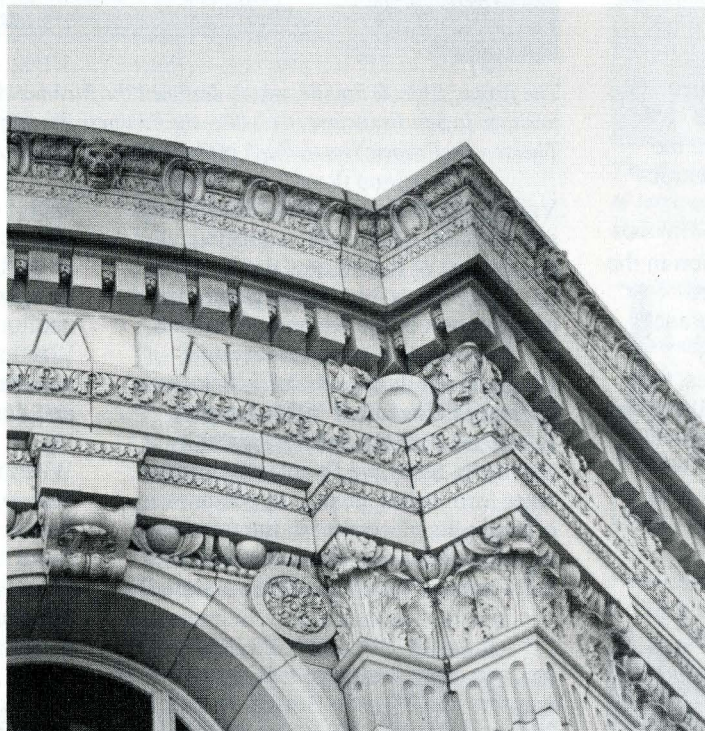
San Francisco's first free public library was founded in 1878, when the city appropriated \$24,000 for the purpose. *The Municipal Reports of 1878-79* noted that the sum was scarcely adequate to launch so important a venture as a new library, and organizers approached the Mechanics' Institute to find out if they could acquire its library as the core for the public library. When the Mechanics' Institute rejected the proposal, \$15,000 was set aside to purchase books, and the balance of the appropriation went toward setting up the library in rented space in Pacific Hall, on Bush between Grant and Kearny. The library opened June 7, 1879 with a collection of some 6,000 volumes.

The Main Library remained on Bush Street until 1889, when it relocated to a wing of City Hall. The Earthquake

and Fire of 1906 destroyed City Hall and with it the library's 142,000 volumes.

The recovery of the library system was directed from a temporary building at Hayes and Franklin Streets. In 1908, the president of the library's board of trustees, emphasizing the importance of building a permanent main library, wrote, "In all progressive cities, libraries have come to be recognized as an absolutely essential part of the educational system of the community."

Industrialist Andrew Carnegie believed so strongly that free public libraries are the most democratic instrument of



This detail photo shows the rich ornamentation employed by Coxhead on the Golden Gate Valley branch. Photographs for this article were provided by Kevin Levine.

enlarged quantity of books and the variety of subject matter gave birth to a "science" of arranging books in a library, and the first alphabetical catalogues made their appearance in the 17th century.

During the Renaissance learning became the highest of civilized values, but efforts to expand public education remained largely theoretical. Municipal libraries did not reappear in Europe until the 18th century when they served a growing urban middle class.

In the United States, where the workings of democracy presupposed an

public education that he pledged \$45 million at the turn of the century to the construction of libraries throughout the nation. According to a recent *Fortune* magazine article, in constant dollars the Scottish-born steel magnates philanthropy, most of it benefiting libraries, exceeds the generosity of all other American industrialists before or since.

In 1901, Carnegie offered San Francisco \$750,000 for a new main and branch libraries. But public opposition developed against accepting "tainted" money from the union-busting Carnegie, and nothing was done until 1912, when the Board of Supervisors put the question to the voters. That November, a large majority of the electorate voted to accept the Carnegie grant, and the city began making plans for construction.

Expansion of the city's population in the neighborhoods brought increased pressure to replace inadequate branch facilities, most of them in rented quarters. For the branch libraries, the Carnegie grant was a boon. Half the allotment, \$375,000, financed construction of seven branch libraries between 1914 and 1921: Richmond, Mission, Noc Valley, Sunset, Golden Gate



G. Albert Lansburgh, architect of the Presidio Branch, preferred the style of the Italian Renaissance, which idealized learning, "as being admirably suited to the characteristics of a library."



The firm of Bliss & Faville, which designed the Richmond Branch shown here, left a rich heritage in San Francisco, including the Southern Pacific and Matson Buildings, the Geary Theater, St. Francis Hotel, Bank of California, and the State Building at Civic Center.

Valley, North Beach (now Chinatown), and Presidio. After voters ratified acceptance of the money, the Board of the Supervisors immediately authorized construction of the Richmond Branch, on 9th Avenue between Geary and Clement. Built at a cost of \$48,910 & opened in November 1914, the grey sandstone structure was designed by architects Bliss and Faville. Its somewhat formidable, austere appearance is offset by its placement in the middle of a park and the use of polychrome terra cotta ornamentation (recently restored).

On January 2, 1916, after more than 25 years in a succession of temporary quarters, the Mission Branch opened at 24th and Bartlett. That year's report by the city librarian noted its design was "in harmony with the historic associations of the Mission. . . ." The architect, G. Albert Lansburgh, described it cryptically as "an interesting example of an individual type of Spanish architecture." The building is faced in matt glazed terra cotta with polychrome ornamentation. The roof is red tile.

Lansburgh designed four of the seven Carnegie-endowed branches. Panama-born and San Francisco-schooled, Lansburgh entered the University of California in 1894. Bernard Maybeck, encouraged him to attend the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris from which he graduated in 1906 with highest honors. He returned to San Francisco scarcely a month after the Earthquake. At the

height of his career, Lansburgh had offices in New York and Los Angeles, as well as San Francisco, and became famous as a designer of theaters and auditoriums. His works include the Warfield and the Golden Gate theaters and the interiors of the Opera House and the Veterans' Building.

When Lansburgh's Sunset Branch at 18th and Irving opened in March 1918, the *Chronicle* admired the building, faced entirely in light terra cotta, "for its graceful lines and classic beauty." The three arches of the porch recall the classicism of early Italian Renaissance design, such as Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital in Florence.

With the opening of the North Beach (now Chinatown) Branch in February 1921, Lansburgh captured the feel of a North Italian *palazzo comunale*, or city hall. The building's graceful twin staircases lead in opposite directions across the face of the building from a common ground-level landing then turn and rise to meet again at a balcony landing at the second-story main entrance. The balustrade is of terra cotta, as is the detailing of the portal, double windows and frieze, all adding interest to the chaste brick façade.

The Presidio Branch, dedicated in April 1921, enjoys a generous site similar to the Richmond Branch's, mid-block on Sacramento Street, clear through the block to Clay, between Baker and Lyon.

Lansburgh set the building on a slight elevation, 80 feet from the street. Gradually rising stairways approach the arched entry, which is framed by a pair of Tuscan columns with Ionic capitals. The effect of the siting and landscaping, done under John McLaren's direction, is to give this classic Renaissance-inspired building a stately appearance.

Two other well-known architects had a hand in the Carnegie branches. John Reid, Jr., particularly remembered for his schools, designed the Noe Valley library, opened to the public in September 1916. Reid unleashed a barrage of Beaux-Arts detailing: a variety of fretwork and wave motifs, dentils, egg and dart, and polychrome swags. The *Chronicle* said the building provided a separate space for children and noted the recent introduction of "Story Hour" in the city libraries, "to cultivate a taste for reading and learning."

Ernest Coxhead, best known for his association with the early Bay Area Tradition shingle-style house, designed the Golden Gate Valley Branch at Green and Octavia. Dedicated in 1918, the terra cotta-clad building is in the form of a Roman basilica—a rectangular building with an apse at one end. High arched windows are set off by fluted pilasters. Rich detailing is Baroque in spirit.

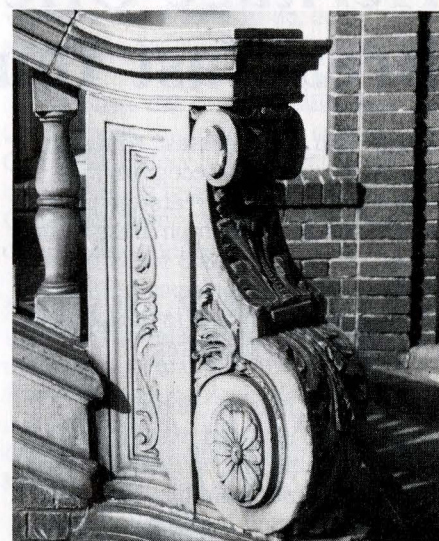
The Carnegie grant also gave impetus to construction of the long-overdue Main Library. In 1914, the Library Commis-

sion invited six architects, including George Kelham, Albert Lansburgh, Albert Pissis, and the Reid Brothers, to submit plans in a design competition. Reviewing the contest, San Francisco architect B.J.S. Cahill (*Architect and Engineer*, May 1914) applauded the winning design by George Kelham as "a clean-cut plan, perfectly balanced and admirably arranged."

In praising the "high standard of work" submitted by all the contestants, Cahill observed that the unsuccessful entrants "stood by the verdict with gameness and even generosity." But, Edgar A. Mathews, one of the losers, charged that Kelham's design copied the Detroit Public Library in order to flatter the vanity—and win the votes—of two of the three judges: Cass Gilbert, who designed the Detroit library, and Paul Cret, who had voted for Gilbert's design in the Detroit competition. *Architect and Engineer* dismissed Mathew's contentions, saying they "are considered ridiculous by most members of the profession."

The Main Library was dedicated February 15, 1917, and Arthur Brown, Jr., of Bakewell & Brown, architects of City Hall, stated that the Renaissance-inspired building harmonized with the general Civic Center scheme. According to Brown, the structure expresses "beautiful and noble architectural forms. . . in the simple and direct manner which characterizes all the best work in architecture." Kelham seized

the "opportunities for monumental effects" with "great feeling and skill" without overwhelming the viewer.



The floriated scroll and sensuous balusters of terra cotta mark the distinctive double staircase of the Chinatown Branch.

For more than two decades, the City has been considering what to do about overcrowding in the Main Library. Four studies since 1964 have all reached the same conclusion: it is not feasible to remodel and expand the existing building. This fact sparked Proposition A.

Although, the design for the new Main Library is purely conceptual at this stage (the site will be Marshall Square, just south of the present facility), some aspects of the design are certain, and they foretell something of what a new Main Library may add to San Francisco. The conceptual proposal lays out a design framework which should make the building harmonize with the rest of Civic Center. Exterior materials will have to be compatible with the prevailing Beaux Arts tradition, and the general height and bulk of the building will also have to be in keeping with the rest of the buildings at Civic Center.

When finished, the new main library will make Civic Center whole, completing an architectural vision articulated more than 75 years ago. Combined with the conversion of the old library into the Asian Art Museum, the area would become the cultural heart of San Francisco. Then, the library, true to its ancient traditions, may well embody the highest hopes of the city's residents.



This Lansburgh-designed branch was completed in 1921, to meet the long-standing needs of the Asian and Italian communities of Chinatown-North Beach.