

(Landmarks)

DESIGNATING EL CAPITAN THEATER AND HOTEL AS LANDMARK NO. 214
PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San
Francisco:

Section 1. The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that El
Capitan Theater and Hotel located at 2353 Mission Street, Lot 24 in
Assessor's Block 3595, has a special character and special
historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value, and
that its designation as Landmark No. 214 will further the purposes
of, and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the
City Planning Code.

(a) Designation: Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City
Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal
Code, El Capitan Theater and Hotel is hereby designated as Landmark
No. 214. This designation having been fully approved by Resolution
No. 13888 of the City Planning Commission, which Resolution is
on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors under File No.
90-95-2 and is incorporated herein and made a part of hereof as
though fully set forth.

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SUPERVISORS BIERNAN, MCGHEE, TENG, LEAL

(b) Required Data:

- (1) The description of the location and boundaries of the
Landmark site is El Capitan Theater and Hotel located
at 2353 Mission Street, being a portion of Lot 24
within Assessor's Block 3595.
- (2) The designation of El Capitan Theater and Hotel shall
consist of the footprint (envelope) of the Landmark
building only. The dimensions of the subject property
are approximately 165 feet in length, 95 feet in width
and 35 feet in height. Any future subdivision of the
subject property and its resultant new construction
shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness as
defined in Planning Code Section 1006 unless said new
construction alters the landmark building itself.
- (3) The characteristics of the Landmark which justify its
designation are described and shown in the photographs
and other materials on file in the Planning Department
Docket No. 95.289L and the Landmarks Preservation
Advisory Board's, hereafter (Landmarks Board), Final
Case Report contained in Docket No. 95.289L.

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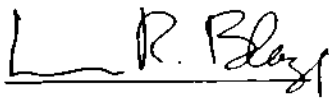
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(4) The particular features that should be preserved are those shown in the photographs on file in Planning Department Docket No. 95.289L and described in the Landmarks Board's Final Case Report, in Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 4, "Design" and in Section D, "Integrity," Subsection No. 13. "Alterations," said photographs and Case Report are incorporated in this designating ordinance as though fully set forth.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
LOUISE H. RENNE
CITY ATTORNEY

RECOMMENDED:
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

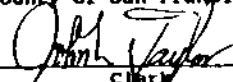

By 
Deputy City Attorney

By 
Lu Blazej
Director of Planning

Board of Supervisors, San Francisco

Passed for Second Reading	§	Finally Passed
January 16, 1996	§	January 22, 1996
	§	
	§	
Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano	§	Ayes: Supervisors Alioto Amiano
Bierman Haieh Kennedy Leal Migden	§	Bierman Haieh Kaufman Kennedy
Shelley Teng	§	Leal Migden Shelley
	§	
Absent: Supervisor Kaufman	§	Absent: Supervisor Teng

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco


Clerk

Mayor

File No.
90-95-2

FEB 2 1996
Date Approved

File No. 95.289L
El Capitan Theater and Hotel
2353 Mission Street
Lot 24 in Assessor's Block 3595

SAN FRANCISCO
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 13988

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate El Capitan Theater and Hotel located at 2353 Mission Street, being a portion of Lot 24 in Assessor's Block 3595 as Landmark No. 214 pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code; and

WHEREAS, The Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (hereafter, Landmarks Board) prepared a Case Report on the subject property, considered public testimony on the Final Case Report and recommended an intent to initiate the El Capitan Theater and Hotel located at 2353 Mission Street at its Regular Meeting of May 17, 1995; and

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given held a Public Hearing on September 21, 1995 and continued the item to their Regular Meetings of September 28, 1995 and October 19, 1995, to consider the Final Case Report and the proposed designation of said Landmarks Board; and

WHEREAS, This City Planning Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has a special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value and that the proposed designation would be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes and standards of the said Article 10;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, That this City Planning Commission does hereby recommend APPROVAL of the designation of the El Capitan Theater and Hotel located at 2353 Mission Street, being a portion of Lot 24 within Assessor's Block 3595;

Second, That the City Planning Commission, after considering public testimony, determined that the designation of El Capitan Theater and Hotel shall consist of the footprint (envelope) of the Landmark building only. The dimensions of said building are approximately 165 feet in length, 95 feet in width, and 35 feet in height. Any future subdivision of the subject property and its resultant new construction shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness as defined in Planning Code Section 1006 unless said new construction alters the Landmark building itself.

Third, That the special character and special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value of the Landmark is set forth in the photographs and other materials on file in Planning Docket 95.289L which is incorporated herein and made a part thereof as though fully set forth;

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

File No. 95.289L
El Capitan Theater and Hotel
2353 Mission Street
Lot 24 in Assessor's Block 3595
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Fourth, That the particular features that should be preserved are those shown in the photographs on file in Planning Department Docket No. 95.289L and described in the Landmarks Board's Case Report, in Section A, entitled "Architecture," Subsection No. 5, "Design" and in Section D "Integrity," Subsection No. 13 "Alterations," said photographs and Case Report are incorporated in this designating ordinance as though fully set forth.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City Planning Commission hereby directs its Secretary to transmit the proposal for designation, with a copy of this Resolution to the Board of Supervisors for appropriate action.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the City Planning Commission on October 19, 1995.

Linda Avery
Commission Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Boomer, Fung, Levine, Lowenberg, Prowler and Unobskey

NOES: None

ABSENT: Commissioner Martin

DATE: October 19, 1995

VFM:mj:CPC2353M.Res



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

1660 MISSION STREET, 5TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

TEL. (415) 558-6345 • FAX. (415) 558-6426



FINAL CASE REPORT**DATE:** May 17, 1995**HISTORIC BUILDING NAME:** El Capitan Theater and Hotel**OWNER:** Del Camp Investments**ADDRESS:** 2353 Mission Street**BLOCK & LOT:** 3595/24**POPULAR BUILDING NAME:** El Capitan Hotel**ZONING:** NC-3, 50-X**ORIGINAL USE:** Movie House, Hotel and Retail Stores**ARCHITECT:** William H. Crim**CURRENT USE:** Residential Hotel and Parking Lot**CONSTRUCTION DATE:** 1928**STYLE:** Spanish Colonial Revival**LANDMARK NO:** 214**NUMBER OF STORIES:** 3**EXTERIOR MATERIALS:** Reinforced concrete, stucco and terra cotta

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: The Mission District, site of the earliest Spanish speaking settlement within the City has traditionally been centered along Mission Street, the District's "Main Street" where almost every conceivable type of good or service is available for area residents. The earthquake of 1906 amplified the effect that the Mission District culture had on the inhabitants of the city. The subsequent fires destroyed many of the Downtown nickelodeons and opened the way for construction in the Mission of buildings to house the City's cultural resources. The largest of the theaters built in the area was the El Capitan Theater and Hotel developed in 1928 by William H. Crim. Both are indicative of the culture which once thrived in the surrounding area. The El Capitan Theater was the largest theater in San Francisco during the 1920s seating almost 3,000 people. Such a large structure provided downtown businessmen and their families the opportunity to leave the taller steel and concrete structures of the hectic downtown in order to enter into a different world, one which fancied an elaborately designed Spanish Colonial Revival structure, Native American singers, and technologically advanced stage devices. The extravagant productions inside the theater, which often included numerous actors and large orchestral selections, indicated the opulence so prevalent during the early 1920s. In addition, the sheer size of the building signifies that theater occupied a significant place within the lifestyles of those who resided in San Francisco. Today, only the theater facade remains. But with a glimpse of the ruins one realizes the extent to which this structure contributed to the thriving Mission District from the 1930s to the 1950s.

EVALUATION CRITERIA**A. ARCHITECTURE****1. STYLE:**

Significance As An Example Of A Particular Architectural Style Or Convention

Spanish Colonial Revival. The popularity of this style begins with the Panama-California exposition held in San Diego in 1915 and it quickly replaced the Mission style. Like the Mission style, it is also characterized by smooth stucco walls and red tile roofs but is differentiated from the Mission style by the use of elaborate molded ornament around doors and windows, polychrome tile at entries and wrought iron grilles and balconies. The ornament is derived from Mexican sources which had interpreted the original Spanish sources. It was popular for commercial buildings, institutions, apartments and houses. El Capitan contains especially rich churrigueresque ornament of terra cotta around third floor windows, an elaborate and highly decorated central tower above the marquee and a richly detailed high parapet and finials which span the roofline. (VG)

2. CONSTRUCTION TYPE**USE CATEGORY:**

Significance As An Example Of A Particular Occupancy Type Or Use, Method Of Construction Or Material

Reinforced Concrete and Steel (G)

3. DATE BUILT:

Significance As An Example Of A Particular Period In San Francisco History

1928 (VG)

4. ARCHITECT:

Designed Or Built By An Architect Or Builder Who Has Made A Significant Contribution To The Community, State Or Nation

William H. Crim was born in San Francisco on May 20, 1879 and took his early education in the city public schools. He received his mechanical training at the California School of Mechanical Arts. Subsequent to that education Crim worked for eight years in a variety of San Francisco architectural offices including those of Percy and Hamilton, Henry H. Meyers and Willis Polk.

Crim then decided to travel in Europe in order to study the architectural masterpieces of many countries. Upon his return to San Francisco Crim formed a partnership with Earl B. Scott, an established San Francisco architect of the time. While with Scott, Lansburgh designed large structures such as the Mission Savings Bank Building. However, in 1911 Crim formed his own independent firm. The buildings which he created in this office were renowned for their absolute protection against fire. Mostly designed for the San Francisco area, Crim created buildings for the California and Hawaiian Sugar Refining Company, the Tobacco Company of California, the Pacific Coast Envelope Company, the Pacific Folding Paper Box Works and the mattress factory for John Huey and Company. In addition, Crim designed residences for T.C. Van Ness Jr., W.C. Oesting and Harry R. Williar. Other structures created by Crim include the hotel building for Mr. I.I. DeHail, the Crim Estate Building, the mausoleum for C.P. Gibbons in Holy Cross Cemetery, the Second Church of Christ Scientist, the Park Presidio School and El Capitan Theater.

Crim even won recognition for his work by taking second prize in a design competition for the Bohemian Club in the City. In his early years, Crim had a tendency to design Colonial buildings. However, in his later years he tended to follow the Mission or Spanish order as evidenced in the design of El Capitan Theater. The possibility remains, however, that the Spanish influence derived not

only from Crim himself but from the influence of the consulting architect, Gustave Albert Lansburgh. (E)

5. DESIGN:

Quality Of Composition, Detailing And Ornament Measured In Part In Originality, Urban Design, Craftsmanship Or Uniqueness

The El Capitan Theater was once San Francisco's largest and most spacious Theater in the Mission District. In fact, the San Francisco Chronicle heralded it as "the most spacious district theater west of Chicago."¹ The architecture is typical of the Spanish Colonial Revival with the Moorish influence strongly suggested. The facade contains abundant ornate low-relief carvings which highlight the many arches, columns, window surrounds and cornices.² The reinforced concrete walls are finished in a tan stucco. Some of the second story windows in the structure are arched. Elaborate finials decorate the roofline of the building and create an adequate touch for the extravagant facade. (E)

6. INTERIOR:

Interior Arrangement, Finish, Craftsmanship, And/OR Use Detail Is/Are Particularly Attractive Or Unique

The interior of the building was destroyed in order to be used as a parking lot. The remaining hotel structure houses residents in a clean, well preserved environment in comparison to other hotels of that type according to a building inspection during April 1992. (G)

B. HISTORIC CONTEXT

7. PERSONS:

Associated With The Life Or Activities Of A Person, Group Or Institution That Has Made A Significant Contribution To The Community, State Or Nation

The Ackerman, Harris and Oppenheim theater empire developed and built the theater within 16 months. This was the same firm that opened the Warfield Theater in San Francisco and operated several amusement houses in the Bay Area. John J. Cluxton was the directing general manager of El Capitan Theater. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, Cluxton was "the best known theater man on the West Coast."³ In fact, he severed his 22 year connection with the famous Alexander Pantages organization in order to manage the El Capitan. (G)

8. EVENTS:

Associated With Events That Have Made A Significant Contribution To The Community, State Or Nation

Originally, the El Capitan presented extravagant stage shows. The opening show presented "We Americans," and was the first showing outside of New York. This production included Patsy Ruth Miller, George Lewis, Flora Bramley, John Boles, Josephine Dunn and Eddie Phillips while George Sidney played the lead. The initial stage presentation involved 25 artists, 16 showgirls, 5 acts of vaudeville, several orchestral selections and an organ concert on a large new Wurlitzer. The projection room contained the newest devices such as spotlights. Each Saturday a new production was put on with various presentations which cost 35 cents from noon until midnight. Other stage presentations included Bert Savoy of Savoy and Drennan, Frank Grummit and Mary Lewis of the Metropolitan Opera Co., Johnny Morris and Sunny in a comedy skit entitled "Miss Chi-Kum-Kie," Rich Trio, Na-Wa-Da-Ha (a native American singer), and The Dixie Steppers McDonald and McConn. (G)

9. PATTERNS:

Associated With Or Illustrative Of Broad Patterns Of City's Cultural, Social, Political Or Economic History Or Development

The Mission District encompasses one of the largest areas in San Francisco and has two distinct sections. Historically a mixture of industrial and residential structures characterized the eastern portion of the area. In contrast the Inner or Western Mission, which is the area pertinent to this landmark nomination, developed in a more urban, commercial and residential manner as a streetcar suburb of the Downtown area. The origins of the entire District, however, trace back to the founding of a Mission in 1776 by Father Francisco Palou on the banks of the Laguna de Manatíal. Originally this Mission was named the "Saint Francis of Assisi" for the founder of the Franciscan order and was the sixth Mission established in California by the Franciscans.

Around 1850 an independent financier named Charles L. Wilson built a plank toll road which extended 2 1/4 miles along the current Mission Street from 4th to 16th Street. This road provided a faster land-based route to and from the mercantile settlement on Yerba Buena Cove. By 1867 there were horse-drawn car lines through the Mission and a steam railroad line operated along Harrison Street. These modes of transportation further encouraged development and recreation in the Mission. Such establishments as roadhouses and elaborate amusement parks, first at the Willows (between 12th and 13th Streets), and later at Woodward Garden (at Northwest 14th and Mission Streets) met the demand for entertainment. Between 1870 and 1900 the area made itself home to Californio, Irish and German families who built middle class housing over the hills in the southwest portion of the area. It remained a safe place to raise children due to its moderate flow of commercial activity and adequate cultural resources. Then came the earthquake of 1906.

The earthquake and subsequent fires destroyed most of the City of San Francisco. The Inner Mission escaped relatively unscathed and two-thirds of its mixed-development remained intact. However many downtown nickelodeons were destroyed and in the entire City of San Francisco only one playhouse remained in operation. As a result of the utter destruction several movie houses were built along Mission Street in order to replace the nickelodeons. These Mission District theaters were of such grandeur that according to the San Francisco Chronicle at the time the theaters constituted one of the greatest cinema rows in all of San Francisco, with five movie houses in just four blocks and over twenty theaters in the entire Mission District. These theaters supported the culturally diverse strips of commerce which catered to the multicultural working class residents and as a result remained a center for cultural activities through the 1930s and well into World War II.

But as television consumed theater as a major cultural resource, the Mission theaters closed. El Capitan Theater was the hardest hit and was the first to close in 1957. Dwindling crowds did not equate with the giant film temple which held almost 3000 people. By 1965, the El Capitan Theater became a parking lot with only the facade and has become a residential hotel.. Shortly thereafter the Grand Theater, located at the other end of the strip, closed down as well. Over the years, both the Victoria Theater and the York Theater struggled to keep their doors open but only the Victoria Theater has succeeded. The closing of these once thriving theaters constitutes a disintegration of several major historical and cultural resources in the City. From the early times of the City; the Mission District was a place in which culture and entertainment thrived. Today, the El Capitan Theater--among others--remains testament to the thriving entertainment district which once was. (VG)

C. PHYSICAL CONTEXT

10. CONTINUITY:

Contributes To The Continuity Or Character Of The Street Neighborhood Or Area

The El Capitan Theater facade and the three story hotel building maintain a stately grandeur amongst other two to three story residential or commercial buildings that line Mission Street. (G)

11. SETTING:

Setting And/Or Landscape Contributes To The Continuity Or Character Of The Street, Neighborhood Or Area

The El Capitan building extends almost half the length of the block in one of the most significant commercial areas in the Mission District. The San Francisco Chronicle heralded the building as "a point of interest for the whole City . . . and not merely a theater in the Mission." (G)

12. VISUAL**SIGNIFICANCE:**

Significant As A Visual Landmark
To The Neighborhood, City,
Region or Nation As A Whole

Certainly the sheer size of the structure, in addition to the elaborate detail work, makes this one of the most noteworthy buildings along Mission Street.

INTEGRITY**13. ALTERATIONS:**

The Degree To Which The
Property Has Retained Original
Materials From Which Its
Significance Is Derived Or Which
Characterize Its Period

Despite the fact that the interior of the theater no longer remains, the facade of the theater is remarkably intact but in need of restoration. Nearly all of the ornamentation survives; however, the massive El Capitan marquee has been removed and some of the terra cotta finials are missing or have been replaced with substitute materials. A fire in 1993 destroyed over half of the hotel's eighty five rooms which have now been rehabilitated and placed back into service. (G)

E: THREATS TO SITE: NONE () PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT (X) ZONING () VANDALISM ()
PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT () OTHER ()

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS:

- () NATIONAL
() STATE
(X) LOCAL

CALIFORNIA STATE REGISTER: No
HERE TODAY:

HERITAGE SURVEYS:

DCP 1976 SURVEY: Rated "1"

UMB SURVEY: Yes

OTHER:

ENDNOTES:

BIBLIOGRAPHY: See Attachment A

EDITED BY LANDMARKS BOARD STAFF

BASED UPON MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY:

NAME: Sam Scott, Intern under supervision of
Vincent Marsh, Staff

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DATE SUBMITTED: May 17, 1995

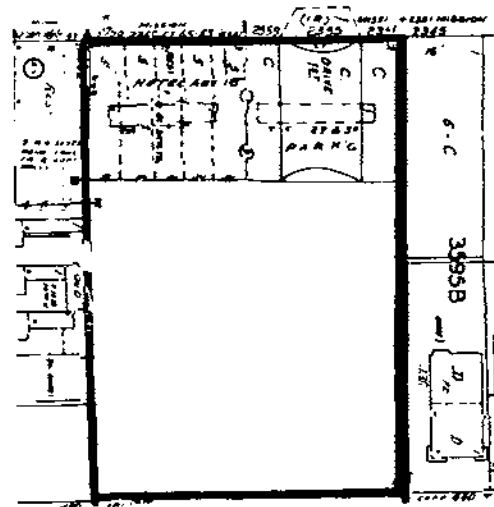
ENDNOTES:

1. San Francisco Chronicle, 5 March 1927, p. 11.

2. John J.G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms 1600-1945 (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1981), p.9.

3. San Francisco Chronicle, 5 March 1927, p. 11.

4. San Francisco Chronicle, 25 May 1928, p. 14.



ATTACHMENT A

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