

LM 69.5

159.70

**NOTICE OF FINAL PASSAGE
FILE NO. 90-70-12 ORD. NO. 159-70
DESIGNATING THE COLUMBUS
TOWER (SENTINEL BUILDING) AS A
LANDMARK PURSUANT TO ARTICLE
10 OF THE CITY PLANNING CODE.**

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was read for the second time and finally passed by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco at its meeting of MAY 11, 1970.

ROBERT J. DOLAN, Clerk
Approved: MAY 14, 1970
JOSEPH L. ALIOTO, Mayor
MAY 21, 1970—11

FILE NO. 90-70-12 ORD. NO. 159-70
DESIGNATING THE COLUMBUS
TOWER (SENTINEL BUILDING) AS A
LANDMARK 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 the Columbus Tower (Sentinel Building) has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a landmark will be in furtherance of and in conformance with the purposes of Article 10 of the City Planning Code and the standards set forth therein.

(a) Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, the Columbus Tower (Sentinel Building) is hereby designated as a landmark, this designation having been duly approved by resolution of the City Planning Commission.

(b) Location and boundaries. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the City Planning Code, Chapter II, Part II of the San Francisco Municipal Code, a landmark site is hereby designated for the said Landmark, located and bounded as follows:

Beginning at the point of intersection of the easterly line of Kearny Street with the southwesterly line of Columbus Avenue; thence along said line of Kearny Street 54.166 feet southerly; thence at a right angle easterly 45.188 feet to the said line of Columbus Avenue; thence along said line of Columbus Avenue northwesterly 70.615 feet to the point of beginning; being lot 13 in Assessor's Block 176.

(c) Justification. The special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are as follows:

Built for Abraham Ruef, one-time political "Boss" of San Francisco, the Sentinel Building was under construction at the time of the 1906 Earthquake and survived without material damage. An example of the "flatiron" style, the building is transitional, separating Jackson Square, North Beach and Telegraph Hill from Chinatown and the Financial District. After a long period of decline, the building was handsomely renovated under the direction of Henrik Bull and was subsequently re-named Columbus Tower.

(d) Features. The said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning in Docket No. LM69.5; the summary description being as follows:

Seven story steel-frame building, surmounted by a cupola and attic. Dominant element of the building is the tier of bay windows at the core corner, rising unbroken to the cupola at the top, in towerlike manner. The two street facades each have three tiers of bays, alternately round and square. Horizontal bands of ceramic tile mark the separation between stories and bays. The ground story has been faced with blue and gold tiles in Byzantine mosaic. Fenestration varies, with most windows being rectangular while those at the top story above round bays are arched. Exterior walls are of brick. There is a prominent projecting cornice at the roof line of the seventh story with a low attic above.

I hereby certify that the foregoing ordinance was passed for second reading by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco at its meeting of May 4 1970.

ROBERT J. DOLAN, Clerk
May 9 1970

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 6500

WHEREAS, A proposal to designate the Columbus Tower (Sentinel Building) as a Landmark pursuant to the provisions of Article 10 of the City Planning Code was initiated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on December 3, 1969, and said Advisory Board, after due consideration, recommended approval of this proposal;

WHEREAS, The City Planning Commission, after due notice given, held a public hearing on March 12, 1970, to consider the proposed designation and the report of said Advisory Board; and

WHEREAS, The Commission believes that the proposed Landmark has a special character and special historical 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;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, First, that the proposal to designate the Columbus Tower (Sentinel Building) as a Landmark pursuant to Article 10 of the City Planning Code is hereby APPROVED, the location and boundaries of the Landmark site being as follows:

Beginning at the point of intersection of the easterly line of Kearny Street with the south-westerly line of Columbus Avenue; thence along said line of Kearny Street 54.166 feet southerly; thence at a right angle easterly 45.188 feet to the said line of Columbus Avenue; thence along said line of Columbus Avenue northwesterly 70.615 feet to the point of beginning; being lot 13 in Assessor's Block 176.

Second, That the special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value of the said Landmark justifying its designation are as follows:

Built for Abraham Ruef, one-time political "Boss" of San Francisco, the Sentinel Building was under construction at the time of the 1906 Earthquake and survived without material damage. An example of the "flatiron" style, the building is transitional, separating Jackson Square, North Beach and Telegraph Hill from Chinatown and the Financial District. After a long period of decline, the building was handsomely renovated under the direction of Henrik Bull and was subsequently re-named Columbus Tower.

Third, That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular exterior features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning in Docket No. LM69.5; the summary description being as follows:

Seven story steel-frame building, surmounted by a cupola and attic. Dominant element of the building is the tier of bay windows at the gore corner, rising unbroken to the cupola at the top, in towerlike manner. The two street facades each have three tiers of bays, alternately round and square. Horizontal bands of ceramic tile mark the separation between stories and bays. The ground story has been faced with blue and gold tiles in Byzantine mosaic. Fenestration varies, with most windows being rectangular while those at the top story above round bays are arched. Exterior walls are of brick. There is a prominent projecting cornice at the roof line of the seventh story with a low attic above.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the 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 at its regular meeting of March 12, 1970.

Lynn E. Pio
Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Fleishhacker, Kearney, Newman, Porter.

NOES: None

ABSENT: Commissioners Carr, Mellon, Ritchie

PASSED: March 12, 1970

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
Final Case Report for Hearing of
December 3, 1969

COLUMBUS TOWER
(Sentinel Building)

OWNER: Kingston Trio Corporation

LOCATION AND
BOUNDARY OF SITE: 916-920 Kearny Street, southeast corner of Columbus and
Kearny. The lot is triangular, 70.615 feet on Columbus
Street; 54.166 feet on Kearny Street; and 45.188 feet
across the base of the lot, being Lot 13 in Assessor's
Block 176.

HISTORY: Constructed at the gore corner of Kearny Street and Columbus
Avenue, and one of the City's early skyscrapers, Columbus
Tower, originally known as the Sentinel Building, marks
the transition between downtown on the south and Jackson
Square, Chinatown and the Italian Quarter.

Designed by architects Herman Kahlberg and Sol Field,
who were also responsible for the Concordia-Argonaut Club
as well as others, the building was under construction
at the time of the 1906 Earthquake and was completed in
1907. That it was as advanced structurally as any of its
time is evidenced by the fact that it was not materially
damaged by the Fire and Earthquake. No expense was spared
by those responsible for its building, the most prominent
of whom was Abraham Ruef, lawyer and well-known "Boss"
of San Francisco before and after the Earthquake and during
the regime of Mayor Eugene Schmitz. Ruef had intended to
have his office in the building, advantageously situated
several blocks from the old City Hall. The graft prosecutions
of 1907 interrupted his plan and it was not until his re-
lease from San Quentin in 1915 that he established his head-
quarters here.

In addition to being an office building, the structure
housed Caesar's Grill, a popular restaurant. The small
(1200 square feet) ground story provided access via a
spiral staircase to the subterranean restaurant (3,000
square feet) which extended under the sidewalks of the
adjacent streets. When Prohibition forced its closing
in 1918, the space was taken over by Neptune's Grotto, a
restaurant-speakeasy.

After Ruef died in February, 1936, and during the Great
Depression of 1929, the building declined
and changed in character. Artists and writers replaced
professional men and commercial enterprises, and the
building became an adjunct of the Bohemian and writers'
colony then centered in Jackson Square and on Telegraph
Hill. Many of these people lived in the building in
addition to having their studios here.

In the 1940's and 1950's, the drab appearance of the
building became more apparent and the copper of the dome
became increasingly blackened with age. In 1958, the
building was purchased by Robert Moor, who, with his
architect Henrik Bull, was instrumental in renovating it.

HISTORY:
(continued)

Complete rehabilitation of the building was undertaken. The story beneath the attic was refurbished with new windows, all others remaining unchanged, because the original hardwood window frames were undamaged. The cupola, which is a steel frame covered with lead over copper, was painted blue and gold, and the color of the building was changed from a dark battleship gray to a light colored paint. The ground story was radically remodelled with ceiling-high round arched openings replacing all doors and windows at grade; terra cotta blocks also replaced brick walls at this level, so that the colorful ceramic tile friezes again appeared as a striking element. The building, again a prominent part of the skyline, was renamed Columbus Tower.

The ground story, which had seen many prominent eating places, saw a succession of short-lived enterprises until Zim's Restaurant located there.

The building stands today, as envisioned by the builder, a landmark entrance or gateway to the financial district and downtown, for one who enters by way of Columbus Avenue. Bought by the Kingston Trio in the 1960's, a new wave of tenants succeeded the artists, writers and bohemians; now recording studios, talent scouts, booking agencies, architects and industrial designers dominate the list of occupants.

ARCHITECTURE:

This building is a steel-frame, seven story and attic structure, surmounted by a cupola or small dome. With a very prominent projecting cornice, it gives the appearance of a tower with wings on either side. A building of the "Flatiron" style, modelled after the famed original constructed in New York City, it is one of the last of the style to be constructed in San Francisco.

The dominant element in the structure is the projecting tier of bay windows, forming some two thirds of a circle, rising the full height of the building, almost 100 feet, at the angle formed by the two streets, Columbus and Kearny. Surmounted by the cupola, this appears to be a tower, and gives rise to the name. The exterior walls of the building area faced with brick, and the stories are marked by horizontal bands of ornamental ceramic tiles, with designs that seem to be gothic in motif. The ground story, once also brick, is now faced with terra cotta tiles, rather strongly contrasting with the upper stories. The ground story is pierced with round-arched openings: some are doorways, some are windows, and one is a niche with plantings.

The seventh story is surmounted by a wide and projecting cornice; above this is a low attic story which, at the corner of the two streets, forms a drum supporting the cupola. The cupola, of steel covered with lead and copper, is itself surmounted by two small bell shaped ornaments, above which is a slender finial.

The two street facades each have three tiers of bay windows,

ARCHITECTURE:
(continued)

rising only to the sixth floor, unlike the central tier at the corner. Those on the Columbus Avenue facade are round, save that nearest the corner, which is square. Those on the Kearny Street side are square, save that in the middle which is round. Fenestration is varied, with all windows being rectangular (projecting dormers in the attic are small and oblong) except that those above the round bays are wide and round-arched.

Ornamentation is rather simple and stylized. The bay windows have horizontal bands of ceramic tiles between the windows of successive floors: those at upper stories simulate gothic tracery while those at lower levels are keys and shields. A very prominent fire-escape surrounds the tier of square bays on the Columbus Avenue facade.

The rear wall of the building, opposite the gore corner, is quite flat, without any ornament or openings, and provides the flat surface justifying the name "flatiron".

ZONING AND
SURROUNDING LAND
USE:

Zoning is C-2, part of the Community Commercial District; Jackson Square decorators with hotel and garages to the east, Chinatown to the south and west and the general commercial district to the north.