

Alert Alley Early Residential Historic District

Identified Eligible for Listing in the California Register of Historical Resources



Prepared by the San Francisco Planning Department
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D R A F T

This historic district summary has been compiled as part of an Historic Context Statement development and neighborhood Survey sponsored by the Mission Dolores Neighborhood Association. Contextual information focused on the social, architectural, and development history of the neighborhood can be found in the *Mission Dolores Historic Context Statement*.



Alert Alley Historic District

The Alert Alley Historic District is a one-block long stretch of properties located within Assessor Block 3557 in the Mission Dolores neighborhood of San Francisco. The Mission Dolores neighborhood is located within the City's larger Mission District and is generally bounded by Valencia Street to the east, Sanchez Street and Church Street on the west, 20th Street on the south, and Market Street and the Central Freeway on the north. Assessor Block 3557 is bisected by Alert Alley, a midblock street running east-west, and Landers Street, a midblock street running north-south. Dolores Street, a wide boulevard that bisects the neighborhood, forms the district's eastern boundary.

18 Contributing Properties

4 Non-Contributing Properties

Boundary: The boundaries of the district encompass properties on the south side of 15th Street between Landers Street and Dolores Street and properties on the east side of Landers Street between 15th Street and

Alert Alley. The district boundary largely excludes parcels on the west side of Landers Street between 15th Street and 16th Street except for a grouping of pre-1900 properties located midblock. The southern boundary of the district includes properties on the north side of 16th Street between Landers and Dolores streets, as well as five parcels located at the southwest corner of Dolores & 16th streets. The Tanforan Cottages at 214 and 220 Dolores Street are located within Assessor Block 3557 but were not included in the district due to their previous designation as San Francisco Landmark #67 and #68.

Period of Significance: The Period of Significance is 1890-1910, the years of construction for properties within the district.

Historical Resource Status Code - District: 3CD, Eligible for California Register of Historical Resources as a contributor to a California Register Historic District through survey evaluation.

District Eligibility: Criterion 1 (Events)- District is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Criterion 3 (Architecture)-District embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.

District Contributors: 18 contributing properties (81%) and 4 non-contributing properties (19%)

Contributing Properties

1919-1923 15th Street
1925-1929 15th Street
1931-1933 15th Street
1935-1947 15th Street
1949 15th Street
3310-3312 16th Street
3322 16th Street
3330 16th Street
3336 16th Street
3344-3348 16th Street
260-264 Dolores Street
266-268 Dolores Street
278-282 Dolores Street
156 Landers Street
162 Landers Street
166-168 Landers Street

Non-Contributing Properties

3314-3320 16th Street
3340-3342 16th Street
200 Dolores Street
101 Landers Street
172-174 Landers Street

Historical Resource Status Code-Individual: 5S3, 290 Dolores Street, individual property appears to be eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation.

Individual Eligibility:



Congregation Sha'ar Zahav at 290 Dolores Street. (Photo credit: Shayne Watson, 2016.)

Criterion 1: Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Criterion 2: Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history

290 Dolores Street

Congregation Sha'ar Zahav at 290 Dolores Street was identified in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco* for its associations with the Jewish LGBTQ community. Reportedly the first LGBTQ Jewish congregation to be formed in San Francisco in 1977, the congregation occupied several temporary spaces before settling permanently at 290 Dolores Street in 1998.¹ The property is associated with the "Building LGBT Communities 1960s-1990s" theme

identified in the context statement and likely has other significant associations within the Jewish and LGBTQ community.

The subject property was constructed in 1917 in the Craftsman style and functioned as a funeral home until at least 1996.² The property was surveyed as part of the Inner Mission North Survey in 2002 and evaluated for its associations with early infill development occurring in the neighborhood between 1914-1930.³ The Department recommends further review of 290 Dolores Street for potential landmark designation for its association with the Jewish and LGBTQ communities in San Francisco. The subject property may also be eligible under Criterion 3 (Architecture) as an intact example of a large-scale commercial building designed in the Craftsman style, but further analysis is needed.

¹ Donna J. Graves and Shane E. Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, 2016, 254.

² Ibid.

³ San Francisco Planning, "290 Dolores Street", *Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record, State of California*, 2002.

Summary of Significance

The Alert Alley Early Residential Historic District is significant as a representative collection of residential buildings associated with the “Early Neighborhood Development (1864-1906)” and “1906 Earthquake and Reconstruction (1906-1915)” themes within the Mission Dolores neighborhood, defined in the *Mission Dolores Neighborhood Context Statement*.⁴ Most of the eligible properties within the district were constructed between 1890-1910, and physically illustrate the transition of development that occurred after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. The district is centered around Alert Alley, an east-west midblock street that was known as Albert Alley until 1909.⁵

The district is located in close proximity to the Tanforan Cottages, San Francisco Landmarks #67 and #68, located at 214 and 220 Dolores Street, respectively. The two cottages date from the 1850s and represent the earliest phase of residential development within the Mission Dolores neighborhood. The neighborhood was originally platted into large city blocks in the 1850s and lay within a vital transportation corridor. *El Camino Real*, also known as the Old San Jose Road and/or the old Mission Road, ran along the western side of the valley near what is now partly covered by Dolores Street and was commemorated as California Historical Landmark No. 784. The road connected the southern peninsula to the Mission and Presidio and formed the northeast boundary of Noe’s Rancho San Miguel during the Mexican period. It continued to be an important transportation route throughout the late nineteenth century. By the 1860s, farmers established a number of large commercial garden plots and nurseries along this corridor and sold their goods to the residents in the urban core.⁶ Street grading had also begun in the district by the 1860s, and the city’s first streetcar line extended along Valencia Street to 25th Street in 1863, which the San Francisco-San Jose railroad line bought later that year.⁷

By the 1870s, much of the larger Mission District west of Mission Street was well populated with residential buildings, while comparatively much of the land west of Dolores Street remained not as densely developed.⁸ During this decade the population of the 11th Ward, which encompassed the neighborhood, rose from 3,000 in 1860 to 23,000 in 1870.⁹ Photographs and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps dating from the 1880s reveal the pattern of residential neighborhood development was largely established by this time and continued to grow into the twentieth century. The neighborhood continued to remain largely residential with a concentration of single-family residences. Prior to the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, dwellings outnumbered flats and other forms of multi-unit housing.

⁴ Katherine Petrin, *Mission Dolores Historic Context Statement*, 2020, 29.

⁵ “List of Changes: Streets, Avenues, and Alleys,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, California), November 16, 1909: 5.

⁶ Judith Taylor and Harry Morton Butterfield, *Tangible Memories: Californians and Their Gardens, 1800-1950* (Philadelphia, 2003).

⁷ Godfrey, *Neighborhoods in Transition*, 144.

⁸ Map of the City of San Francisco, 1874.

⁹ The 11th Ward was a political division within the city governing City/County elections and representation. It encompassed most of the Mission District. San Francisco Planning Department, “Inner Mission North 1853-1943 Context Statement, 2005,” 21.

The earliest Sanborn Map of the subject block was published in 1899 and indicates the block was mostly undeveloped apart from the Tanforan Cottages, and a series of small dwellings mostly concentrated on the west side of Landers Street including an Italian boarding house with bocce ball court and wine cellar.¹⁰ By 1914, the entire block with the exception of two vacant lots, was mostly built out with flats and other multi-family residential buildings. This increase in development is indicative of how dramatically both population influx and reconstruction related to the 1906 Earthquake and Fire impacted the neighborhood.

Buildings related to the “Early Residential Development (1864-1906)” are largely focused along Landers Street with the outer edges of the district defined by properties related to “1906 Earthquake and Reconstruction (1906-1915)”. In 2008, a Preliminary Mitigated Negative Declaration (PMND) was completed for the property at 200 Dolores Street, as part of a new construction project involving the rehabilitation of the subject property. 200 Dolores Street was constructed between 1903 and 1904 as the former parsonage for the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Ebenezer Church. The church was also constructed in 1904 by Swedish architect August Nordin but was destroyed in a fire in 1993.¹¹ As part of the evaluation process for the PMND, a brief survey of the blocks surrounding 200 Dolores Street was conducted that determined the presence of a potential historic district on both Dolores and 15th Streets containing “a concentration of two- and three-story residential buildings constructed between 1903 and 1911.”¹² 260-264 and 266-268 Dolores Street predate the 1906 Earthquake and Fire and are associated with the Dolores Street Fire Line, which served as a firebreak preserving properties west of Dolores from destruction.

Character-Defining Features

Buildings within the Alert Alley Early Residential District share common features that contribute to the overall architectural significance of the District. The District is comprised of buildings of a variety of architectural styles including vernacular, Italianate, Classical Revival, and Queen Anne. Though the district contains buildings dating from different period of development, buildings within each period relate to each other and present a sense of cohesive design, craftsmanship and materials. Character-defining features of the Alert Alley Early Residential District:



156 Landers Street



162 Landers Street

Single-Family Early Residential

Properties dating from the “Early Neighborhood Development 1864-1906” period are unified by their small-scale form, massing, and materiality that are representative of the early residential and agricultural development of the Mission Dolores neighborhood. Character-defining features of the properties within the district dating from this period include:

- Small, one-story over- integrated garage or two-story massing (two story over garage?)
- Horizontal wood siding
- Flat front with front facing gable roof or Italianate style parapet roof form
- Original wood double-hung windows with ogee lugs Architectural ornament including brackets, applied columns, and other façade ornamentation indicative of the Italianate style
- Front setback/ location on lot in reference to street
- Central or offset primary entrance stair



1919-1923 (left) and 1931-1933 15th Street (center)

Multi-Family Reconstruction Residential

Properties dating from the “1906 Earthquake and Reconstruction 1906-1915” period are unified by their larger scale, form, and massing to meet the growing population of the Mission Dolores neighborhood. Character-defining features of the properties within the district dating from this period include:

- Two or three-story over-integrated garage or three-story massing
- Horizontal painted wood siding
- Front-facing gable roof or projecting cornice
- Original wood double-hung windows with ogee lugs
- Single or paired projecting bay(s) at front facade
- Front setback/location on lot in reference to street
- Offset entrance with original stair configuration

Integrity

Contributing buildings within the Alert Alley Early Residential Historic District have maintained a high-level of integrity overall. While some buildings may exhibit less integrity, they may be included in the District if original form is primarily intact, and most original features have been retained. Compatible minor alterations or additions do not impair the building's ability to convey its significance. Please see the *Mission Dolores Historic Context Statement* for more information on assessing integrity. A lower threshold for integrity was applied to these properties and other small vernacular cottages dating from the early development period of the Mission Dolores neighborhood due to their rarity and relationship to the early development of the neighborhood.

District contributors possess their original building form and most original features including wood siding, expressive millwork, applied ornamentation, and roof forms. Most houses have retained their original windows, but some have seen replacements within existing openings. Non-contributing properties were assigned this status due to significant changes to original features or forms such as removal and replacement of original cladding, incompatible insertion of garages, and removal of all or most architectural ornamentation.

Property Inventory

See attached survey spreadsheet

Bibliography

1874 Map of the City of San Francisco.

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