

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Tobin House

other names/site number 1969 California Street

**2. Location**

street & number 1969 California Street  not for publication

city or town San Francisco  vicinity

state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code 94109

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the  
National Register  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the  
National Register

removed from the National  
Register

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            |                 | buildings  |
|              |                 | sites      |
|              |                 | structures |
| 0            |                 | objects    |
| 1            |                 | Total      |

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals: Tudor Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete  
roof slate  
walls stucco  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other METAL: copper, lead; GLASS; WOOD; OTHER:  
cement plaster

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government – planning department, assessor
- University – Environmental Design Archives, UCB
- Other

Name of repository:

San Francisco Public Library; California Historical Society;  
San Francisco Architectural Heritage

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art \_\_\_\_\_

Communications \_\_\_\_\_

Community Planning and Development \_\_\_\_\_

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Period of Significance

1915 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Significant Dates

1915 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Architect/Builder

Polk, Willis \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

### Acreage of Property

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

|   | Zone | Easting | Northing |   | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|------|---------|----------|---|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | —    | —       | —        | 3 | —    | —       | —        |
| 2 | —    | —       | —        | 4 | —    | —       | —        |

See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Karen McNeill, Ph.D., Historian

organization Carey & Co., Inc. date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 460 Bush Street telephone (415) 773-0773

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94108

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name Anthony & Celeste Meier

street & number 1969 California Street telephone (415) 351-1400

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94109

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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#### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

1969 California Street is a master architect-designed, three-story plus basement single family residence in the Tudor Gothic Revival style. It faces north on a wide residential street at the southern edge of the Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco. The building features a sharply slanted slate shingle roof with heavy copper coping and flashing as well as five partially exposed chimneys topped by clustered copper chimney pots. Gothic details on the façade lend the house additional character. These include a full-length angled bay, arched casement windows, scroll moldings, apron tracery, and a panel with a lion's head that hangs above the arched entryway. This building's most unusual feature is a two-story Gothic pointed half arch at the western end of the façade. Just in front of the house, by its easternmost edge, stands a decorative concrete lamppost base. While the building has undergone some alterations since it was built in 1915, it retains a high level of integrity.

This residential building is rectangular in plan, with the primary façade facing north. It stands closely adjacent to a brick house at the west, while the east elevation is entirely exposed. The building is wood frame and stucco-clad.

The slate-clad roof features two steeply-pitched, parallel side gables separated by a long cross gable. A heavy copper coping outlines the roof edge. Five stucco-clad chimneys project above the roof – one at each end of the side gables and one near the northern end of the cross gable. Clusters of three tall copper chimney pots top each chimney. The parapet connecting the two side gables along the eastern elevation also serves as a railing for a third-story balcony.

A full height bay window, standing slightly off-center toward the east, dominates the primary façade. Also prominent are the door openings at the west. These include, at the façade's western edge, a 20-foot tall pointed half arch leading to a pass-through to the rear, and a second pointed archway, approximately twelve feet tall, opening onto the recessed entry. A pointed-top service door, at the base of the façade near the eastern edge, is two-panel, with a decorative iron grille over a glazed upper panel. A square hood molding tops the main entry doorway, with a cast lion's head set into a molded panel above.

Windows dominate all sides of the bay, at both the first and second floors. They also adorn the second floor of the facade, to the west of the bay. These windows are all wood arched-top casements; 14-lite at the first floor and 12 at the second. The bay features four casements at the front panel, and one at each of the slanted sides. The western second story window is three-casements wide. Gothic-style scroll moldings surround the window panels and the door openings. At the bay, cast Gothic tracery tops the window bands.

Notable features of the west elevation, which is partially covered by the half-arch pass through, include three decorative leaded glass, fixed windows – two arched and one rectangular.

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Bay windows dominate the south elevation. While at the first floor the bay extends most of the building width, at the second, it narrows to form a small balcony at the west side. Copper belt courses outline the tops of the bays, running above the windows. At the first floor, the south face of the bay features a row of five arched single-hung windows replete with lamb's tongues and glazed with diamond-patterned leaded glass. Similar windows light the slanted side panels. Elsewhere on the elevation, including the four at the upper bay, windows are square-topped, clear-glazed, and non-original. A door with a textured glass panel leads to the small second story balcony. The third story has wood fixed windows and a glass paneled double door, which opens onto a balcony extending almost the width of the building. A metal handrail sits atop the copper coping of the balcony wall. To the east of the first-story bay is the single-story addition, featuring French doors with vertical side lights. A copper rainwater leader runs from the third-story balcony to the ground level.

The exposed eastern elevation is simply-detailed. Windows are one-over-one wood sash with replacement wood sliders in the side gables. Stairs lead to a door near the front (north) edge.

A single-story, one-room deep wing extends from the southern end to the eastern edge of the property line. It features a flat, asphalt-covered roof and a parapet with copper coping and flashing. Permits document that this portion of the house has been heavily modified with new framing, stucco cladding, a parapet, and coping. A once uninterrupted portion of the wall now features French doors that open onto the second-story balcony, at the roof of this single-story addition.

A concrete lamppost base with a recessed panel and a leaf pendant stands on the sidewalk in front of and just to the east the house. A more elaborate cornice, triangular arch, and probably brass or copper candlestick lamppost have been removed.

#### ALTERATIONS

Exterior alterations to 1969 California Street have been minimal, mostly in-kind replacement of deteriorating or missing historic materials. The slate roof and copper chimney pots, coping, flashing, and gutters are all in-kind replacement of the original materials; the new chimney pots date to 2002, while the roof, coping, flashing, and gutters date to 2004. Similarly, first-story leaded windows of the south elevation are in-kind replacements dating to approximately 2006, as is the northernmost leaded glass window at the first story of the west elevation. Replacement windows on the west and rear elevations of the third story date to 2004 and replacement windows on the east side of the house date to 2005.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, discussion of all alterations derives from building permits from the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection.

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The lion's head above the archway to the front entry originally hung on a simple cartouche, which disappeared under unknown circumstances some time between 1968 and 2002. The new frame dates to 2007.<sup>2</sup>

The single-story wing that projects east from the east elevation has undergone extensive alterations. No historic photos are available, but legal documents describe it as a former detached shed. Owners applied for a permit to add a parapet in 1997, which led to major exterior alterations to the original structure, rendering the exterior similar in materials and detail to the main house and, essentially, transforming the shed into a permanent single-room deep and single-story tall addition. An opening that is not visible from the street was also cut into a previously solid wall; a pair of French doors was installed, creating an entrance onto the rooftop of the addition.<sup>3</sup>

According to building permits, a cement patio measuring approximately 200 square feet was built "by the side door" in 1952. This probably refers to the driveway and concrete steps leading to the side entrance located on the east elevation. Other alterations to the property include a new fence around the perimeter of the rear garden (1996); new front gates at the entrance and driveway (n.d.); and windscreens with clear glazing at the third-story balconies (2003).

slate-clad roof  
heavy copper coping

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<sup>2</sup> Photographs from Junior League of San Francisco, *Here Today: San Francisco's Architectural Heritage* (San Francisco, 1968), 37 and James Beach Alexander and James Lee Heig, *San Francisco: Building the Dream City* (San Francisco, 2002), 299; conversation between Karen McNeill and Anthony Meier, May 1, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Transcript of Proceedings, Carol S. Brooks and Mary Joy Thomas, Appellants, Department of Building and Inspection, Respondent, re: William Holloway, 1969 California Street, December 10, 1997.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Tobin House, located at 1969 California Street, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion C, as the work of a master architect. Willis Polk, one of the San Francisco Bay Area's most influential architects of the period, designed the house for Constance de Young and Joseph O. Tobin, descendants of two of San Francisco's most prominent families. It is representative of Polk's penchant for medieval English architecture and restrained use of decoration as panaceas for what he deemed the architectural chaos of San Francisco's late nineteenth-century streetscape. The house also influenced the architectural development of the block during the 1940s and is unique in San Francisco – let alone Polk's oeuvre – for a Gothic-style half arch that leads to a side yard to the west of the house.

BACKGROUND

In July 1911, Michael H. de Young (1849-1925), co-founder of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, purchased lots fifteen and sixteen of San Francisco block number 649. They are located on the south side of California Street, between Gough and Octavia Streets, directly adjacent to the former site of his own estate on lots seventeen through twenty. Technically located in the Western Addition of San Francisco, these lots stand on the popular boundary line of the Western Addition and Pacific Heights neighborhoods. In August 1911, de Young transferred the deed to the lots to his daughters Helen M. Cameron, wife of George E. Cameron, and Constance M. Tobin, wife of Joseph O. Tobin, an executive at Hibernia Bank and member of one of San Francisco's oldest and wealthiest families. Michael de Young also offered to build homes on these lots for his daughters and their young families, but for years nothing happened. Both the Tobin and Cameron families chose instead to live along the peninsula, in affluent towns south of San Francisco.

Tragedy struck the de Young family in 1913, which eventually prompted the development of 1969 California Street. Katherine de Young, the matriarch of the family, fell ill with cancer that year, the same year that her only son, thirty-two year old Charley, died suddenly of typhoid fever. Emotionally heart broken and physically stricken with cancer of the spine and kidneys, Katherine de Young died in 1917. According to one of the four surviving daughters, Helen de Young Cameron, the four girls "made it a point never to leave Father alone" during their mother's illness or after her death.<sup>1</sup> It was during this period, in 1914, that Constance and Joseph O. Tobin decided to take up M. H. de Young's offer to build a house on lot sixteen, directly adjacent to the de Young mansion. One of the most influential architects in the San Francisco Bay Area, Willis Polk, designed the new house, a three-story and basement frame structure in the Tudor Gothic Revival style clad with cement plaster over metal lath. Originally, Polk conceived of the house as a twin and designed a full Gothic arch, half of which adorns the western end of the façade of the Tobin house. A bridge connected the Tobin and de Young properties.

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<sup>1</sup> Helen de Young Cameron, *Nineteen Nineteen: The Story of the de Young House at 1919 California Street, San Francisco*, reprinted edition (San Francisco, 1990), 34-35.

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Constance and Joseph O. Tobin lived with their family in the house from 1915 to 1927. Shortly after M. H. de Young died, the Tobins relocated to the peninsula, where both Constance and Joseph had sisters who were living on estates in the affluent suburbs of San Mateo, Hillsborough, and Burlingame. It is not clear how the house was used or by whom, but the Tobins did not sell 1969 California Street at this time. M. H. de Young's four daughters maintained the old Victorian next door for family gatherings until the late 1930s, by which time the mansion was in dire need of expensive repairs and servants were difficult to find. They decided to sell the mansion in 1940. When one potential buyer proposed to turn it into a boarding house, however, the de Young daughters decided to hand over the mansion to a developer's wrecking ball. Helen de Young Cameron sold her lot to the west of the Tobin house at this time too, thus ensuring that Willis Polk's design was never going to be completed. The remaining half arch thus serves as permanent reminder of M. H. de Young's intentions to have two of his daughters live next to the old family estate. Constance de Young Tobin also purchased a portion of M. H. de Young's property from the developers in 1940: the space that is now the driveway and upon which the single-story addition now stands. No documents are currently available to determine what this space looked like, how it was used before the Tobins purchased it, or how they intended to use it. The parcel also included one decorative concrete lamppost base that had marked off the de Young property. These elements of block 649, now part of lot 16, are the last surviving remnants of M. H. de Young's residential estate.

CONTEXT C: ARCHITECTURE

Master architect Willis Jefferson Polk (1867-1924) designed the Tobin House. Trained through apprenticeships, Polk rose to become arguably the most influential architect in the San Francisco Bay Area during the first quarter of the twentieth century. He helped revolutionize domestic architecture with his contribution to the Bay Region Style, and he played a pivotal role in the architectural aesthetic and urban planning program for the City of San Francisco following the earthquake and fires of 1906. The Tobin House can be understood as an example of Willis Polk's critique against the ostentation of nineteenth-century Victorian San Francisco. It is also one of the most distinctive urban residences that Polk designed throughout his career.

Willis Polk was born in 1867 in Jackson, Illinois, to William Webb Polk, an itinerant carpenter who eventually established a prosperous business in St. Louis, Missouri. The younger Polk began his architectural training in a local contractor's office when he was just eight years old, then graduated to work in his father's office as a teenager. In 1887 Polk joined the prominent Boston firm of Van Brunt & Howe as an employee in their new office in Kansas City, Missouri. Under their tutelage, he began to understand architecture as an art rather than a trade and was introduced to academic eclecticism. Within years, the budding architect moved on to New York City, where he audited courses taught by William Robert Ware at Columbia University and worked in the office of A. Page Brown. Though he did not work with them, Polk also came to know preeminent architects McKim, Mead & White as well as many of the young protégées working in their office. The most influential idea that Polk took away from his

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association with this famous firm was that an architect should aspire to create beautiful buildings. When A. Page Brown relocated to San Francisco, Polk followed and took his aspirations for beauty with him.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1890s the young Willis Polk established himself as a vocal critic of reigning Bay Area architectural styles and developed a following for innovative domestic designs that Lewis Mumford dubbed the Bay Region Style. For smaller commissions, Polk drew upon northern European – mostly English – precedents to create an informal, rusticated urban aesthetic. The often unpainted shingle houses blended into the landscape. Classical architecture guided Polk's larger commissions, though these were few in number before 1900. In both cases, Polk earned a reputation for academic expression of historic forms and restrained use of ornament, which allowed him to achieve architectural interest through the structural elements. His architecture departed radically from the predominant Queen Anne Style, which was characterized by irregular and complex plans and elevations, as well as profuse use of applied ornament and paint. Innovations like these have long placed Polk in the pantheon of the San Francisco Bay Area's most influential architects of the turn of the century, along with Coxhead and Coxhead, Bernard Maybeck, and A. C. Schweinfurth.<sup>3</sup>

After a European tour and a brief sojourn in Chicago between 1900 and 1903, where he worked for preeminent American architect, Daniel Burnham, Willis Polk returned to San Francisco and became a leader in the City Beautiful movement. He worked for about ten years as the West Coast representative of Burnham's firm, during which time he oversaw the design and construction of such landmarks as the thirteen-story Merchants Exchange Building (1903), which was the tallest building in San Francisco at the time of its construction and served as *the* center of commerce on the Pacific Coast for years. Polk also oversaw the reconstruction and enlargement of the Mills Building, one of Burnham's most important buildings in San Francisco. Polk, still working for Burnham, also designed the First National Bank (1908), a neo-classical commercial building at the corner of Post and Montgomery Street that was the first building in the world to encapsulate steel columns with hollow granite shafts. The granite columns measured twenty-feet high and weighed many tons.<sup>4</sup> The City of San Francisco also commissioned Daniel Burnham to devise a city plan, now famous for its series of Parisian-style roundabouts and radial streets as well as the extension of Golden Gate Park's panhandle to Van Ness Avenue, and Polk served as Burnham's local advocate of the plan. Though little of Burnham's plan was executed per se, its influence, as advocated by Polk for nearly twenty years, can be seen in the landscape. San Francisco boasts one of the country's most significant example of Beaux-Arts planning in the design of its Civic Center, complete with Civic Auditorium, City Hall, library, Opera House and Veterans Building. By the

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that nearly all of Willis Polk's archival record has been destroyed. Although the architect or his descendants donated all of his records to the University of California, Berkeley, they languished in the campanile for years, only to be remembered and retrieved after water damage had almost completely destroyed them. Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley, 1983), 51-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-220107-141; Richard Longstreth, ed., *A Matter of Taste: Willis Polk's Writings on Architecture in the Wave* (San Francisco, 1979); "Passing of Willis Polk, Architect and Master Builder," *Architect and Engineer* (September 1924), 108-109; Arthur Brown, Jr., "Willis Polk," in *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> "Huge Granite Shafts are Fitted Over Steel," *San Francisco Call*, January 27, 1908, p. 4.

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1900 Willis Polk had established himself as a society man and society architect; by the 1910s he was arguably San Francisco's most important and influential voice in local architecture and urban planning.<sup>5</sup>

Willis Polk's reputation as a master architect and irascible public figure grew over the next decade. He immersed himself in highly publicized controversies with Mayor James Rolph, including one over a bond measure for a municipal opera house and another over building codes. For a time, Polk also chaired the architectural planning committee for the Panama Pacific International Exposition, to be held in San Francisco in 1915 both to commemorate the opening of the Panama Canal and to celebrate San Francisco's rebirth after the 1906 disaster (ultimately, Polk's arrogance and generally unpleasant personality led to his dismissal from this committee). Following the exposition, Polk called upon his friend, Michael de Young, to play the hero in what Polk framed as an Homeric epic: to save "the rare, almost never occurring, seldom recurring, God given, touch of genius," Bernard Maybeck's masterpiece, the Palace of Fine Arts.<sup>6</sup>

Two of Polk's most significant commercial buildings date to the 1910s as well. They include the Hobart Building, which at twenty stories was the tallest building to date in San Francisco. The footprint of the building site dictated the structure's asymmetric form, while the curved sides of the tower and Baroque detailing still lend it a distinctive presence along San Francisco's Market Street. Another of Polk's commercial masterpieces dates to this period too: in 1916 the University of California Regents hired Polk to design the Hallidie building, named after UC Regent and inventor of the cable car, Andrew Hallidie. This building's glass curtain façade anticipated by decades the primary method of construction for high-rise buildings and skyscrapers in the United States and elsewhere. According to Randolph Delahanty, it stands as "the single most important building in San Francisco."<sup>7</sup>

Though increasingly engaged in city planning or large public and commercial projects, Willis Polk and his associates continued to design residential architecture. In contrast to the rustic city house/Bay Region Tradition that he helped pioneer during the 1890s, Polk's domestic designs of the 1910s fell into three general types: French Baroque, like the Charles Templeton Crocker mansion in the affluent town of Hillsborough (completed in 1917); Georgian Baroque, exemplified by Filoli (1915-1917), the estate in Woodside of mining magnate and president of the Spring Valley Water Company, William Bowers Bourn II; and city houses characterized by severe formal façades and elaborately sculptured interior courtyards, which were often Spanish in inspiration. These houses were generally located in affluent communities outside of San Francisco or in San Francisco's Presidio Heights, Pacific Heights, Sea Cliff,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Longstreth, "The Bay Region Styles: 1890-1930," November 1973, pp. 2-3, in Willis Polk biographical file, San Francisco Architectural Heritage; "Willis Polk," in *San Francisco: Its Builders Past and Present*, Vol. 2 (San Francisco, 1913), 275-276.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Estavan, ed., *The History of the Opera in San Francisco*, Part II, Vol. 8 (San Francisco, 1939), 75; "Polk Buries Hatchet," *Oakland Tribune*, May 28, 1914, p. 23; Willis Polk Scrapbooks, California Historical Society, San Francisco; David Parry, "Polk, Willis Jefferson," *Encyclopedia of San Francisco*, <http://www.sfhistoryencyclopedia.com/articles/p/polkWillis.html>, accessed October 29, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Randolph Delehanty, *San Francisco: The Ultimate Guide* (San Francisco, 1989), 74).

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Nob Hill, and Russian Hill neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup> While Polk drew heavily from historicist styles for all of buildings, he judged none of them to be “slavish imitations – all of them typifying the magic touch according to my conception as a creative Artist.”<sup>9</sup>

Original plans for 1969 California Street no longer exist or are unavailable to the public, but on July 2, 1914, Willis Polk submitted a building permit for a three-story and basement residence at 1969 California Street for Joseph O. Tobin. The proposed structure occupied the entire width of the lot, more than half the depth of the lot, and stood forty-feet high atop a concrete foundation. It had a slate roof and stucco cladding. Polk filed a second permit five months later that called for a slightly narrower, but several feet deeper building. The revised design also called for a lower ceiling at the basement level, allowing for higher ceilings on the first and second stories.<sup>10</sup> According to Constance Tobin’s sister, Phyllis Tucker, Polk’s design for the Tobin house included a mirrored twin to the west, with a Gothic archway over a shared driveway.<sup>11</sup>

While the Tobin house features characteristics of Polk’s domestic urban architecture of the 1910s, several details make it distinctive in his oeuvre. All of the houses from this period had stucco cladding; decorative details were limited almost exclusively to the windows; and steeply slanted roofs were common. Unlike the other houses, however, the Tobin house featured unpainted stucco – at least on the façade – and, instead of white, the window sashes were painted to match the stucco. The Tobin house is also the only Polk-designed house to feature copper flashing, gutters, and chimney pots, the only house with corbelled arches and bands of tracery, and the only Tudor Gothic house that Polk designed during the 1910s. Finally, the Tobin house has two character-defining features that no other residence in San Francisco or Polk’s oeuvre can claim: a Gothic half arch, and a lamppost base that stands as the last remnant of Michael H. de Young’s once large residential estate.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Barry Kerrick, “Willis Jefferson Polk, San Francisco Architect,” (M.A. thesis, Mills College, 1965), 78; Willis Polk Scrapbooks, California Historical Society, San Francisco; David Parry, “Polk, Willis Jefferson,” *Encyclopedia of San Francisco*, <http://www.sfhistoryencyclopedia.com/articles/p/polkWillis.html>, accessed October 29, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Willis Polk to Pauline Jacobson, December 20, 1921, copy of letter in Willis Polk biographical file, SF Architectural Heritage.

<sup>10</sup> Building permit no. 57083, July 28, 1914, and no. 60360, January 20, 1915, San Francisco Department of Building and Inspections.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Nion [Phyllis de Young] Tucker to Mrs. von Briesen, June 29, 1966, in file for 1969 California Street, *Here Today*, Junior League of San Francisco, San Francisco History Center, SFPL.

<sup>12</sup> The other single-family homes in San Francisco that Polk designed between 1910 and 1920 include the following: 3255 Pacific Avenue (1910); 2820 Pacific Avenue (1912); 2960 Broadway (1913); 3277 Pacific Avenue (1913); and 9, 25, and 45 Scenic Way (speculative homes commissioned by Mrs. John Proctor in 1914); 726 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Polk also designed at least two groups of townhouses, including 1, 3, 5, and 7 Russian Hill Terrace (1915-1916) and 831-849 Mason Street (also speculative homes commissioned by Mrs. John Proctor between 1917 and 1918). Several other houses may date to this period, but the extant list of commissions completed by Willis Polk and Co. offers no addresses or dates of construction. Kerrick, “Willis Jefferson Polk,” 57; Vernacular Language North (VLN), “Willis Polk: 1890-1932,” [http://www.verlang.com/sfbay0004ref\\_wp.html](http://www.verlang.com/sfbay0004ref_wp.html), accessed June 17, 2008.

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Notably, the Tobin House was the only Polk-designed residence other than Filoli that local papers mentioned specifically in 1915. This is particularly remarkable since Willis Polk hired a newspaper reporter to produce stories about his activities and keep them in a scrapbook; one can only offer conjecture given the absence of a significant archival collection, but in light of Polk's penchant for public self-promotion, 1969 California Street appears to have been Polk's favorite urban home design of that year.<sup>13</sup>

Though historicist in style, Polk used the Tobin house to introduce a modern aesthetic to this block of California Street. Only two other houses stood on this south side of the block: the mansions of M. H. de Young and M. J. Brandenstein, of MJB Coffee fame. Writers have described the de Young mansion as "one of the most spectacular mansions ever built on California Street" and was one of just thirty-eight homes in the state that was featured in *Artistic Homes of California*, but it probably fell into the category of architectural nightmares that Willis Polk disdained. It featured horizontal wood cladding, ornately decorated window surrounds, multiple bays with embellished projecting cornices, a portico capped by a similarly embellished balcony, and an extensive wrought-iron widow's walk. In all likelihood, Brandenstein's mansion was similarly ornate. The north side of the street, meanwhile, hosted Victorian row houses and the Atherton house, with its complex plan and turreted towers. In short, this block of California Street featured houses that were typical of the late nineteenth-century Western Addition, a neighborhood Willis Polk once described as "that architectural nightmare conceived in a reign of terror and produced by the artistic anarchists who are continually seeking to do something great, without previous experience or preparation for their work." Polk dedicated his career to remedying what he perceived as "epidemic of architectural bad taste."<sup>14</sup> Thus, in the Tobin house, Polk achieved beauty largely through form and materials rather than applied decoration. With its minimally decorated façade and modern cladding, the Tobin house looked stark next to its neighbors.

Polk applied the most modern technologies to the Tobin house as well. The *San Francisco Examiner* noted that the Tobin residence featured white enamel walls in the bedrooms, tiled bathrooms, central heating, a vacuum cleaning system, and hot water supply.<sup>15</sup> These elements made it a model of home technology and sanitary living, two important issues in domestic architecture of the Progressive Era.<sup>16</sup>

The setting of the Tobin House changed dramatically during the 1940s, but the architectural significance of the house grew proportionately. After the four surviving de Young daughters had their

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<sup>13</sup> Willis Polk Scrapbooks, California Historical Society.

<sup>14</sup> Willis Polk, "The Western Addition," *The Wave*, January 28, 1893, in Richard Longstreth, ed., *A Matter of Taste*, 35, 295-299; Frederick Hamilton, "The Work of Willis Polk & Company," *Architect and Engineer*, 24 (April 1911), 34-35.

<sup>15</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 31, 1915.

<sup>16</sup> See Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago, 1980); and Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

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father's mansion demolished in 1940, the Tobin House stood out as an anomaly on this part of California Street. It was not only as the only Gothic Revival structure, but also as the only single-family residence. The latter still holds true, but 1969 California Street guided the architecture that grew up around it during the next decade. All of the buildings that stand on the former site of the de Young mansion as well as the building to the immediate west of the Tobin House fuse modern architecture with Gothic revival elements. Most notably, all but one building has stucco cladding and they all have steeply-pitched side gable roofs, arched entryways, and two-story slanted bay windows on the street elevation. Though simplified for these mid-century buildings, these architectural details all reference the character-defining traits of 1969 California Street. (See Section AD, page 9)

Willis Polk remained an important figure in Bay Area architecture during the nine years between the construction of 1969 California Street and his death, though mostly in rhetorical rather than material terms. His primary concern remained the design and construction of a new civic center, and he was part of the original architectural team chosen in 1922 to design the San Francisco Veterans Memorial, which includes the Veterans Building, Opera House, and Memorial Garden. Polk's designs for this project were never built and had little bearing on the Beaux-Arts structures that stand on Van Ness Avenue today. Among his most important projects during the last years of Polk's life were the sensitively restored Mission Dolores (1918) and San Francisco's Beach Chalet (1921).

Gualtiero Bartalini (1898-1994) bought 1969 California Street from Constance Tobin in 1943. He was a colorful figure – a flamboyant man, trained opera singer and artist whose spoof on opera was published posthumously. For forty-five years Bartalini operated the house as a residential hotel catering mostly to people in the performing arts.<sup>17</sup> As interesting as this period in the building's history may be, Gualtiero Bartalini was a minor character in the opera scene and local history. His acquisition of the house marks the end of its period of significance.

#### CONCLUSION

Willis Polk was recognized during his lifetime as a preeminent architect, and he continues to be recognized as one of the most influential figures in the development of San Francisco's architectural landscape between his arrival in the region in 1889 and his death in 1924. He designed 1969 California Street at the height of his career, in 1914 and 1915, when he was fighting with city hall and serving on the planning commission for the Panama Pacific International Exhibition. It was Polk's only urban house to be documented in the local papers during those years, attesting to its significance within his body of work, and stands as the only Gothic Tudor home that Polk designed during the last decade of his life. The accidental half arch makes 1969 California Street unique in Polk's work. More importantly, the

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<sup>17</sup> Gualtiero Bartalini, *The Opera According to Bartalini: A Book of Doggerel Libretti and Comic Illustrati* (Petaluma, Cal., 1994); Oral history with Gualtiero Bartalini, in California Street, 1969, *Here Today* files of Junior League of San Francisco, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library; Acting secretary of Willis Polk & Co. to T. J. Jones, University of California, June 27, 1945, Willis Polk biographical file, SF Architectural Heritage.

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house is an excellent example of Polk's taste for historicism and the execution of one of the primary tenets of his architectural philosophy: achieving architectural beauty through form and restrained use of decoration. The house also influenced the architectural development of this block of California Street during the 1940s, which remains evident in the buildings to the east and west of it. 1969 California Street thus appears eligible for the National Register under Criterion C.

### INTEGRITY

Like all houses, 1969 California Street has undergone some alterations. Gualtieri Bartalini reportedly opened the interior with arches, painted the walls with bright colors, and furnished the house in a Renaissance style. He also constructed a new set of stairs from the third floor to the second-floor bathroom; installed handrails on the balustrades of the second and third-floor balconies; installed a fire prevention sprinkler system; and intended to remodel the interior to create permanent apartments, but never completed this project.<sup>18</sup>

1969 California Street has had six owners since 1988, when Gualtiero Bartalini sold the property. The first owner filed several permit applications to alter the interior radically by upgrading the bathrooms, knocking down some interior walls, and partitioning the space permanently into apartments. None of these plans came to fruition. Two subsequent owners filed permits to replace the slate roof, but both permits expired before the work was done. Instead, the house fell into a state of disrepair. For years it remained largely uninhabited, except as a haven for homeless transients. By 1996, the south wall of the house had so deteriorated that sections of it had to be replaced, as did several windows. Other alterations in 1997 include remodeling the kitchen, adding French doors along the east elevation, and adding a parapet to the shed on the east side of the house. This last project involved practically demolishing said shed and rebuilding it to create a new dining room. The parapet served as a balustrade for a balcony onto which the French doors open. Since 1999, a new fence has been constructed in the backyard; the third floor attic has been remodeled into two bedrooms, a playroom, and a washroom; the roof and copper coping, flashing, and chimney pots have been replicated and replaced; windows on the east side of the house have been replaced, as have eighteen other windows that are not visible from the street; and a new frame surrounds the lion's head that hangs above the entrance arch.<sup>19</sup> None of these alterations have adversely affected the historical integrity of the house, as they replicate the original work, cannot be seen from the street, or are minor in scale and/or are of secondary importance to the building. As such, 1969 California Street retains a high level of integrity in all categories of the National Register's Criteria for Evaluation: location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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<sup>18</sup> Oral history with Gualtiero Bartalini; building permits, City of San Francisco; city directories, 1943-1989.

<sup>19</sup> Transcript of Proceedings, Carol S. Brooks and Mary Joy Thomas, Appellants, Department of Building and Inspection, Respondent, re: William Holloway, 1969 California Street, December 10, 1997; San Francisco Department of Building Inspection Online Permit and Complaint Tracking, 1969 California Street, <http://services.sfgov.org/dbipts/>, accessed October 23, 2007.

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### GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

1969 California Street stands on the south side of California Street, 103 ½ feet east of Octavia Street. The rectangular lot measures 47'6" east to west, and 137'6" north to south for a total area of 6,531 square feet.

#### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

These boundaries have been determined for the nominated property because they correspond to the Assessor's parcel on which 1969 California Street stands. This parcel is known as Lot 16 in Assessor's Block 649.