

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

**1. Name of Property**

**DRAFT**

Historic name: Hobart Building

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

**2. Location**

Street & number: 582-592 Market Street

City or town: San Francisco State: California County: San Francisco

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_ statewide      \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A      \_\_\_ B      \_\_\_ C      \_\_\_ D

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 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



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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:

French Renaissance

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:

Skyscraper  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: terra cotta, brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Hobart Building in San Francisco's Financial District was constructed in 1914 by prolific San Francisco architect Willis Polk to replace an earlier building damaged by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fires. The building was designed in the French Renaissance Revival style with a three-part vertical division of base, shaft, and capital. It displays the mounted tower form of skyscraper design with an iconic lozenge-shaped tower that rises from the center of the building. The building features a concrete encased steel frame with reinforced concrete floors, walls, and roof, and terra cotta clad brick exterior walls. Located on Market Street near Montgomery Street, opposite the intersection with 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, the building stands twenty-one stories tall with a primary (southeast) façade along Market Street that features terra cotta detailing. The original glass storefronts that spanned the first two floors of the west portion of the primary façade have been replaced with a decorated granite and glass façade. The large main entrance to the office lobby remains intact at the east end of the façade. It includes an entrance vestibule and large classically detailed entrance portal with volutes and the building's name carved into the door enframement. The building retains its historic integrity and has undergone very few exterior alterations, apart from the replacement of the original storefront systems.

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## Narrative Description

### *Overview and Setting*

The Hobart Building is located mid-block on the north side of Market Street just east of Montgomery Street in the Financial District of San Francisco. The irregularly shaped parcel measures 92 feet on its primary (southeast) Market Street façade and 123 feet along the eastern side of the property. Because Market Street cuts diagonally through the city, the front of the parcel is on a diagonal.

The building is located in a high-rise district, with a collection of lower masonry buildings to the east and numerous modern high-rises constructed since the 1960s in the broader vicinity. To the west, at the corner of Montgomery and Market Streets, a small plaza has a stairway and escalator leading to the underground Montgomery Street Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and San Francisco Municipal Railway (MUNI) station. The east façade of the Hobart Building at 582-592 Market Street abuts the neighboring Finance Building at 576-580 Market Street and the west façade abuts a glass-skinned banking hall at 2-8 Montgomery Street, constructed in 1967.<sup>1</sup>

### **Exterior**

Constructed in 1914, the Hobart Building is a steel frame commercial office building with a concrete-encased steel frame; reinforced concrete floors, walls, and roof; and terra cotta-clad brick exterior walls. It sits on a foundation of heavy footings.<sup>2</sup> The building is divided into two sections: a wide twelve-story section over a basement, and the building's signature central tower that rises an additional nine floors. The façade design is composed of a three-part vertical division employing French Renaissance Revival style detailing. In the words of architectural historian Michael Corbett from his 1979 book *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage*:

Located on a mid-block site, [the Hobart Building] manages to relate both to the diagonal of Market Street in the positioning of its tower and to the north of Market grid in the shape of its base. Its glass commercial base was designed to play the mundane role that should be retained by any street level space in a commercial area. Its rusticated shaft gives the building an urban character that links it in an anonymous but pleasing texture to its neighbors [...].<sup>3</sup>

The most prominent material on the building is its buff terra cotta cladding, which creates rich detailing in the stringcourses and rustication of the bulk of the building and culminates in an ornately decorated tower.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Finance Building see Michael R. Corbett et al., *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage* (San Francisco: Modern Living Books, 1979), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Eckland Consultants Inc. *Seismic Damageability Report*. July 2, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 81.

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*Primary (Southeast) Façade*

The building's three-part composition features a three-story base (including the double-height first floor), a nine-story shaft, and a nine-story tower located at the southeast corner of the building. The building is eight bays wide, three composing the west wing and five composing the east. It was designed to be viewed both from along the thoroughfare of Market Street as well as looking north from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The base features an ornate granite entryway at the east corner of the building. The entrance surround is decorated with naturalistic elements. The double-height opening is trimmed in a series of classical molding profiles including rope molding and acanthus leaves. Above the entry opening, the building name is incised into a concave panel with carved foliate ornament at either side. The entablature above the entry is supported by two scrolled brackets decorated with stylized acanthus leaf and dart moldings and additional large acanthus leaves at the base and crown of each bracket. The entablature features rows of bead-and-reel, egg-and-dart, dentil, and lamb's tongue moldings topped by a blank frieze and acanthus leaf cymatium. A single double-hung aluminum window is set into the granite wall above.

An exterior vestibule is located immediately within the entry opening, featuring a rose marble floor with black marble trim and black marble inlay spelling out the building's name. Three pairs of plate glass doors with opulent bronze surrounds are decorated with gutta and rosettes and are separated by pilasters with lamb's tongue decorated panels and stepped capitals. A large glass transom separated into five sections matches the arrangement of entrance openings and pilasters below.

A foliated bronze panel separates the entrance doors and transom and reprises the moldings of the entrance entablature with rope, lamb's tongue, egg-and-dart, bead-and-reel, and acanthus moldings. The ceiling of the vestibule features a richly detailed coffered plaster ceiling. The west wall is partially clad in non-original, gray-veined rose marble tiles that filled in an original window opening to the adjacent commercial space. The remainder of the vestibule walls are clad in light gray honed granite.

To the west is a granite-clad storefront for Citibank, redesigned in the 1990s. The bank façade features five double-height window bays with a horizontal stainless-steel signboard cutting through the center. The window bays of the ground floor bank feature plate glass with signage set behind. A backlit Citibank sign is attached to the granite cladding at the west end of the storefront. A backlit awning with company signage projects from the second bay from the east.

The central bays are divided by dark gabbro cladding, surrounded by granite cladding with geometric interlocking circles and repeating rectangles set into the top panels of the granite storefront beneath the second-floor windows, which consist of paired aluminum frame windows. This pattern was a modern interpretation of the motif of the historic frieze of the Finance Building, located immediately to the east of the Hobart Building and designed by Willis Polk in 1923 to match the design of the Hobart Building.

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The third floor of the Hobart Building completes the base of the skyscraper and retains its historic finishes and details. This floor is clad in terra cotta with a decorative lower beltcourse with repeating lozenges and patera. Molded wall panels with molded capitals are set between the eight window bays, and an upper beltcourse of dentils and Greek fretwork tops the base of the building.

The shaft of the building is clad in terra cotta and features a rusticated pattern throughout. Wood frame and steel frame windows are double hung. The western three bays are capped with a terra cotta cornice at the flat roofline at the twelfth floor. Floors 13 through 20 compose the height of the building's tower. The south façade of the tower consists of five bays. The lower four stories repeat the visual language of the building shaft, and ornamentation becomes more elaborate along the top four floors of the tower and the twenty-first-floor penthouse. The seventeenth floor sits over a modest cornice, and wall panels between windows contain convex patera within molded frames. This floor is topped with a cornice with a heavy dentil molding.

Windows at the eighteenth and nineteenth floors are vertically paired with recessed spandrel panels within round arches that feature a double guilloche pattern along the underside of the arch. Terra cotta pilasters decorated with tiered urns in the French Renaissance Revival style separate the windows. These panels consist of four urns with a variety of ornament including shells, garlands, ribbons, and acanthus, and are topped with a winged ornament. Above the pilaster capitals is another cornice supporting the twentieth floor with ten narrow, recessed window bays along its primary (southeast) façade divided by projecting brackets textured with rows of florets and with blank shields just below their capitals. The windows are double hung with wood frames.

A tall ornate Baroque parapet surrounds the roof deck that wraps around the circumference of the tower at the twenty-first floor. The parapet features giant order block modillions decorated with lozenges and guttae beneath an elaborate frieze set between two cornices. The penthouse unit at the twenty-first floor is set back from the parapet and features textured terra cotta cladding along the upper portion, a cement plaster coating along the base of the wall, and rusticated terra cotta corners. Three double-hung wood frame windows are centered in the top floor with a smaller window set to the east side. An ornamental frieze tops the twenty-first floor with a terra cotta anthemion antefix at each corner. Above, a hipped roof crowns the tower. The roof is clad in a polychrome terra cotta tile in shades of green, red, and black, giving it a jewel tone character. The roof is crowned with a round chimney flue with terra cotta cresting and finials at either side.

### *West Façade*

The west façade was once flush with the wall of the old Wells Fargo Building at the corner of Market and Montgomery Streets. Following the demolition of the neighboring building in the early 1960s, the west wall was surfaced with plaster to prevent water infiltration and support the bricks that clad the reinforced concrete. The wall is left void of fenestration and ornamentation, save for a painted sign at the top of the wall, nearest to Market Street that reads "HOBART BUILDING." The west section of the wide lower section terminates at a flat roof above the twelfth floor, which projects from the tower at an angle.

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Above, the rounded western face of the lozenge-shaped tower rises an additional nine floors. The terra cotta details continue from the southern facade, with Floors 13 through 16 featuring cladding that relates to the building shaft, the seventeenth floor with windows set between two prominent cornices, the eighteenth and nineteenth floors with decorative pilasters and vertically grouped windows within rounded arches, and a row of narrow windows set within decorative brackets with blank shields at the twentieth floor. The twenty-first floor is set behind the elaborately ornamented parapet. The rounded façade accentuates the sumptuous detailing, expressing its depth. On the west façade, the fenestration differs at the thirteenth through fifteenth floors, employing steel framed three-over-three double-hung windows with wire glass for fire safety requirements.

#### *North (Rear) Façade*

The lower twelve floors of the north façade are clad in brick with a cement plaster coating—like the east and west façades—and organized into five window bays, each with a three-over-three double-hung steel frame window. At these floors, the building also features a small wing on the east side of the north facade. Where this wing jogs north, a west-facing portion features three-over-three steel sash double-hung windows flanked by two-over-two steel sash double-hung windows. The rear wing wraps to the west, featuring two south-facing bays of three-over-three steel sash windows at every floor and one west-facing bay of three-over-three steel sash windows.

Despite being the secondary façade, the north facade of the tower is as ornate as the south facade. From the time the building was first completed until the construction of 44 Montgomery Street—which blocks sightlines of this façade from the north and west—this facade was visible from throughout the city. Floors 13 through 16 of the tower feature three-over-three double-hung steel frame windows while Floors 17 through 21 feature one-over-one wood frame windows.

#### *East Façade*

The east façade abuts the neighboring Finance Building at 576 Market Street at the lower seven floors. Above, a blank wall extends to the twelfth floor with two columns of three-over-three double-hung steel frame windows toward the south end of the façade and one column of windows of the same type to the north. At the roofline, “HOBART BUILDING” is painted on the façade. The roofline of the twelfth floor is flat and extends from the tower base at an angle, following the lot line. Above, the tower repeats the design of the west façade.

#### **Interior**

The base of the building was constructed to take advantage of the irregular lot, creating a rough “C” shape that allows an optimal floor plan for a double-loaded office corridor and an ample light court along the rear of the building.

#### *Lobby*

The Hobart Building lobby retains a majority of its original materials and is in excellent condition. Like the adjacent vestibule, the floors and walls are clad in rose marble with a black

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marble trim on the flooring. The interior is lit by a non-historic chandelier suspended in the center of the lobby, which features an upside-down pyramid form with glass crystals hanging from each tier. The rear (north) wall has three elevator shafts, each with bronze doors and an entablature like that of the front entrance. Between the eastern and center elevator shafts, a mail chute with bronze and glass detailing descends from the ceiling.

The east wall features a non-original security desk, constructed of wood and marble. A building directory on a touch screen is mounted to the wall to the left of the security desk and is located within a framed marble wall panel crowned by a white marble-faced clock with bronze details within a rose marble surround. Marble pilasters are located between the elevator shafts and at either side of the lobby directory. The ceiling features a recessed soffit panel surrounded by rich ornamentation. Canister lights are set into the central panel.

### *Corridors, Suites, and Stairs*

The building continues to be used as an office building, with suites on double-loaded corridors. A typical corridor of offices features marble wainscoting that terminates above the door frames, as well as crown molding. Doors are made of wood with a glass panel in the upper portion, typically filled with textured glass for privacy. Above most doors is an operable transom with matching glass. Some transoms have been replaced and feature vertical jalousie windows with textured glass or operable transoms with clear glass. Additional fixed transoms are located adjacent to the operable transoms for most office suites to allow for additional light. Fluorescent lighting runs along the ceilings. The elevator doors are unornamented at the upper floors. Wall corners are typically rounded, giving many spaces a streamlined aesthetic.

Inside the office suites, windows are either double hung one-over-one wood sash or three-over-three steel sash. All are operable and offer views of the surrounding downtown neighborhood. Flooring consists of carpet along the corridors and a mix of carpet or vinyl flooring in office suites. Stairwells run at the west end of the corridors and at the center of the building just east of the elevator shafts. Stairs are clad in gray marble with a steel picket balustrade with wood handrail.

### **Character Defining Features**

The character defining features of the Hobart Building include:

#### Construction:

- Steel structural frame
- Reinforced concrete floor plates

#### Exterior:

- Form, shape, height, and massing, most notably the lozenge-shaped tower that addresses both Market and Second Streets
- Flat roof above the twelfth floor and hipped tower roof above the twenty-first floor
- Wall cladding of rusticated, buff colored terra cotta

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- Fenestration pattern with one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows and three-over-three double-hung steel sash windows
- Granite entrance with molded surround and entablature, featuring acanthus leaf motif, brackets, and dentil molding
- Marble exterior vestibule with bronze doors and coffered ceiling on Market Street
- Terra cotta wall panels and terra cotta windowsills and headers at the third through eighth floors
- Terra cotta ornament at the third through twenty-first floors, including decorative beltcourses in varying patterns, egg-and-dart and key moldings, and spandrel bas relief ornament including urns
- Wood flagpole at southeast corner of the roof
- Cement plaster exterior wall cladding at north and west façades

Interior:

- Lobby ornamentation:
  - Ceiling with ornate molding and metal leaf
  - Marble-clad walls and floor
  - Clock set into wall of lobby
  - Bronze elevator doors and decorative surround
  - Mail chute
  - Glass chandelier
- Corridors on upper floors
  - Marble wainscoting
  - Crown molding
  - Partially glazed wood doors
  - Operable transoms over most corridor doors
  - Gray marble stairs with steel picket balustrade and wood handrail

**Alterations**

Alterations to the Hobart Building have been minimal with the exception of the redesign of the two-story commercial space at the west of the primary façade and the demolition of the adjacent building to the west in 1964 that exposed the utilitarian west façade of the building, which was not intended to be visible.

A frequent visitor to the building in the 1960s noted the hidden aspect of the thirteenth floor. At that time, the thirteenth floor could only be accessed by a special key in the elevator. The floor buttons went from Floor 12 to Floor 14. The central staircase bypassed the thirteenth floor with no direct access, although one could climb over the railing. It was also possible to pry open the elevator doors between the Floor 12 and Floor 14 stops to access the Floor 13 foyer.

The original floorplans do not show a difference between the thirteenth and other floors. At the time of nomination, one elevator does end at the twelfth floor and has its elevator room on the thirteenth floor. The other two elevators serve all floors. The middle of the three elevators provides access to the basement.

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The redesign of the two-story commercial space at the western side of the primary (southeast) façade first occurred in 1976 with a remodel in white marble completed for the Financial Savings and Loan.<sup>4</sup> The existing commercial façade appears to date to a 1995 building permit that replaced an existing glass storefront along four column bays.<sup>5</sup> The original design of the building featured pink Tennessee marble cladding along the ground- and second-story commercial façades.<sup>6</sup>

Interior alterations include the replacement of flooring materials; the replacement of some corridor transom windows; and some updating of interior features such as installing modern lighting, bathroom fixtures, and wiring.<sup>7</sup>

The western portion of the second floor—located behind the commercial storefront alteration—does not retain any historic materials on the interior due to remodeling of the first two floors by a commercial tenant. This is the only area of the office building that has been extensively altered with the addition of drop ceilings, new doors and corridor windows, and modern finishes.

An early alteration to the building, prior to 1927, was the removal of the flagpole from the very top of the building. Photographs taken in 1914 and 1915 show the flagpole atop the round chimney flue that crowns the penthouse roof. Prior to photographs taken in 1949, a flagpole was added behind the parapet along Market Street at the east end of the twenty-first floor, and a replacement flagpole installed in 2018 is extant at that location.

### **Integrity**

The Hobart Building retains all aspects of integrity to convey its significance as a 1914 office building designed by prominent San Francisco architect, Willis Polk, in the French Renaissance Revival style.

### *Location*

The Hobart Building has not been moved since its construction and retains integrity of location.

### *Design*

The defining design characteristics and features of the Hobart Building exterior—including its three-part vertical façade arrangement, terra cotta cladding with classical design elements, signature tower, and its vertically oriented primary façade—remain intact and communicate the building's 1914 design as an important early San Francisco skyscraper. Alterations have been limited along the exterior to the redesign of the two-story commercial unit along Market Street.

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<sup>4</sup> Building Permit 465549, (October 1976), Available at the City and County of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. Permit describes the installation of a 67' by 22' façade of marble veneered arches, aluminum frame windows, and glass doors.

<sup>5</sup> Building Permit 9308197, (September 1995), Available at the City and County of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection.

<sup>6</sup> "Each Detail of Great Structure is to be Modern," undated article clipping [circa 1914] in Willis Polk Scrapbook collection at the California Historical Society.

<sup>7</sup> Building Permit 200804048841, June 2008, on file at San Francisco Department of Building Inspection.

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At the interior, alterations are limited to the replacement of flooring materials, the replacement of some transom windows along the upper corridors, and the redesign of the ground- and second-floor tenant space. The building retains the vast majority of its design elements that illustrate its original French Renaissance Revival style, and the additional retention of the building's historic circulation corridors communicates the building's role as an early twentieth century office building. The building, therefore, retains integrity of design.

### *Setting*

The Hobart Building is located in San Francisco's Financial District. Although some of the surrounding buildings have been replaced with higher density office buildings and taller skyscrapers compared to what was present in 1914, the Hobart Building continues to be surrounded by a downtown business district, allowing it to retain its setting. Additionally, the presence of several extant early twentieth century office and commercial buildings in the immediate area continue to illustrate Market Street's historic character. Therefore, the Hobart Building retains its integrity of setting.

### *Materials*

The Hobart Building retains the majority of its original materials, including its terra cotta façade and decoration, terra cotta roof tiles, nearly all of its original windows, and its bronze and glass lobby entrance. At the interior, the building also retains the vast majority of its original office doors and original corridor transom windows, its marble wall cladding in corridors and the office lobby, and many of its bronze details along stairs and the office lobby. Although some features, such as terra cotta tiles, have been replaced due to deterioration, these have been replaced in-kind by the original manufacturer, Gladding McBean, and replicate the building's historic design and materials. Alterations along the exterior have been limited to the redesign of the two-story commercial unit along Market Street, while the remainder of the façade remains intact. Therefore, the building retains its integrity of materials.

### *Workmanship*

The features of the building that most clearly demonstrate its workmanship include the articulation and decoration of the façade, the design and workmanship of the building's terra cotta, the plaster ceiling of both the entrance vestibule and lobby, the marble paneling of the interior, and the bronze and metal features of the stairways, elevators, and lobby. These features all exhibit the skill and workmanship of the craftsmen in creating the French Renaissance Revival style commercial skyscraper in the early twentieth century. Thus, the building retains integrity of workmanship.

### *Feeling*

The overall feeling of the building remains that of a downtown office building of the early twentieth century at a time when the city was still being reconstructed following the devastation of the 1906 earthquake and fires. Thus, the building retains integrity of feeling.

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*Association*

The Hobart Building is readily recognizable as an office building and early downtown skyscraper constructed in the 1910s, a common feature of financial and commercial districts in major cities in the United States. It continues to reflect many of the defining characteristics of the French Renaissance Revival style that was popular for public and commercial buildings of the period. Thus, the building retains integrity of association.

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## 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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1914

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1914

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Polk, Willis Jefferson

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Hobart Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the state level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of an early twentieth century commercial skyscraper building that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the French Renaissance Revival style, designed by master architect Willis Polk at the height of his career. The Hobart Building was constructed in 1914 during San Francisco's reconstruction period following the 1906 earthquake and fires and leading up to the opening of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, intended to showcase San Francisco's resilience to the nation and the world. Designed by prominent San Francisco architect and popular personality Willis Polk, the rapid construction of the Hobart Building was widely covered in media both for its architectural design and for the drama of its construction. The twenty-one-story building was an early San Francisco skyscraper and its French Renaissance Revival design with its unusual lozenge-shaped tower remains an icon of the Downtown San Francisco skyline despite the construction of skyscrapers since the post-World War II period. The building is an excellent example of the French Renaissance Revival style as employed in early twentieth century commercial skyscraper design. The period of significance of the Hobart Building is 1914, the year of construction.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Criterion C: Architecture**

#### *Architecture of the Hobart Building*

The Hobart Building was identified as eligible for the National Register through survey evaluation in 1978.<sup>8</sup> In 1983, a project at the Hobart Building involved a federal agency and triggered consultation according to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.<sup>9</sup> Through this procedure, the Hobart Building was determined eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion C. The determination of eligibility stated that the building "is one of the finest historic commercial structures in San Francisco."<sup>10</sup>

As a steel-frame skyscraper constructed in 1914, the building is an excellent example of its type, period, and method of construction. It also possesses high artistic values. The building remains an excellent example of the work of master architect Willis Polk and demonstrates his interest in academic classicism, the City Beautiful movement, and the developments of skyscraper design in the early twentieth century. Though the office of Willis Polk designed thirty-seven buildings

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<sup>8</sup> California State Office of Historic Preservation, Built Environment Resource Directory (BERD), San Francisco County, updated March 2020.

<sup>9</sup> *Determination of Eligibility: Notification for the National Register of Historic Places*. March 18, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

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during the post-earthquake reconstruction period between 1906 and 1914, the Hobart Building is one of the most well-recognized of his designs due to its distinctive tower.

*Willis Polk, Architect*

The son of a carpenter, Willis Jefferson Polk (1867-1924) was born in Jacksonville, Illinois on October 17, 1867. At the age of 13, Polk was apprenticed to an architect, and two years later he submitted his first design in an architectural competition, winning first prize and the opportunity to design a schoolhouse in Hope, Arkansas. Regional newspapers called Polk a “boy genius” and praised his design abilities. As a result of Willis Polk’s abilities, he and his father Willis Webb Polk started an architecture and contracting firm in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>11</sup> The firm, known as W. W. Polk & Sons, consisted of Willis Webb Polk and his two sons Daniel and Willis Jefferson. At the age of twenty, Willis Jefferson Polk left the family business to pursue a more complete architectural education and went to work for the prominent firm of Van Brunt & Howe, which had recently opened an office in Kansas City.<sup>12</sup>

Described as impatient, tenacious, and ambitious, Polk only worked at Van Brunt & Howe for six months.<sup>13</sup> He then moved around the country, working at several architectural firms before ending up at the office of A. Page Brown in New York City. Brown had established his firm after many years of working at the New York City office of McKim, Mead & White. He introduced Polk to the Beaux-Arts Classicism and the academic style of McKim, Mead & White. Brown’s office remained closely affiliated with McKim, Mead & White, which was in the same building at 57 Broadway. As described by architectural historian Richard Longstreth:

The time spent at 57 Broadway consummated Polk’s training. To a greater extent than the intellectual perspectives afforded by Van Brunt and Ware, Polk was affected by McKim, Mead & White’s commitment to beauty as the architect’s ultimate aim. Polk worked on intuition, and he appears to have learned more by example than by theoretical analysis. By studying McKim, Mead & White’s work, he realized a crucial synthesis between theory and practice. From Charles McKim, he learned the clear, logical ordering of form and space; and from Stanford White, the spirited manipulation of historical references and decorative details.<sup>14</sup>

When A. Page Brown moved his office to San Francisco in 1889 to take advantage of the area’s explosive growth and its need for trained architects, Polk moved west with him. Polk did not remain at Brown’s office for long and briefly joined forces with Fritz Maurice Gamble in the firm of Polk & Gamble. The partnership dissolved within a year and Polk then temporarily

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 51.

<sup>12</sup> The first Van Brunt & Howe office was located in Boston. “Brief Biographies of American Architects Who Died Between 1897 and 1947.” Society of Architectural Historians. Transcribed from the American Art Annual by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Director, Maine Historic Preservation Commission. Accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.sah.org/docs/misc-resources/brief-biographies-of-american-architects-who-died-between-1897-and-1947.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Longstreth, 53-56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

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reestablished the family business with his father and brother (under the name Polk & Polk). The family partnership included Daniel as the chief draftsman, Willis Jefferson as the designer and salesman, and Willis Webb as the chief financial officer and general contractor.<sup>15</sup> As Polk & Polk, Willis Jefferson Polk designed 1013 Vallejo Street (1892, extant) on Russian Hill in the First Bay Tradition style. The house at 1013 Vallejo Street was a duplex and the second residential unit became the Polk family home. This type of rustic city home, which fused a local western interest in the rustic and natural with a strong academic understanding of early English and Norman architecture, became a frequent design idiom for Polk, who undertook a number of rustic First Bay Tradition residential projects in urban and suburban locations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The family business lasted for only a few years and closed due to bankruptcy in 1897.<sup>16</sup>

Polk was only just recovering from bankruptcy in 1899 when he was given a chance to replace the recently deceased F. F. Hamilton as primary designer in the respected San Francisco firm of Percy & Hamilton. Working closely with surviving principal George Washington Percy, Polk began overseeing all design work. He was not made a full partner and was also subject to revisions that fit Percy's more conservative sensibilities.<sup>17</sup> The firm's most important work was the Kohl Building at the corner of California and Montgomery Streets (1901, 400 Montgomery Street, extant). Following Percy's death late in 1900, Polk engineered an introduction to famous Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, and in a subsequent letter to Burnham, Polk suggested that the two men start a partnership. Although flattered, Burnham turned Polk's offer down. Soon after, Polk inquired whether he could work for Burnham at his Chicago office and was accepted. In September 1901, Polk and his young wife, Christina Barreda Moore, moved to Chicago, remaining there for almost two years.<sup>18</sup>

Willis Polk found a mentor and friend in Daniel Burnham. Until this time, Polk's work had been extremely individual in nature, and reflected the First Bay Tradition influences seen in the work of his Bay Area contemporaries, Ernest Coxhead, A. C. Schweinfurth, and Bernard Maybeck. In Burnham's office, Polk learned to appreciate Burnham's suave and urbane Beaux-Arts-influenced formulas for large commercial buildings, and this influence remained visible in his later commercial works, like the Hobart Building. In 1903, Polk returned to San Francisco and formed a short-lived partnership with George Alexander Wright. Polk retained a close friendship with Burnham and was influential in obtaining support for Burnham's proposed radial plan (the "Burnham Plan") for San Francisco, which was being readied for publication just prior to the San Francisco earthquake and fires on April 18, 1906.

With downtown San Francisco lying largely in ruins, Polk seized the opportunity to take part in the reconstruction by reviving his plans to open a branch office of D. H. Burnham & Co. in San Francisco. Although the Burnham Plan for San Francisco was largely scrapped in the haste to rebuild, Polk was quite successful in bringing in other work. Between 1906 and 1910, Willis

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<sup>15</sup> Longstreth, 90-91.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 107-110, 117.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>18</sup> Longstreth, 299.

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Polk secured contracts for several major buildings, including the construction of the Pacific Union Club, the Chronicle Building, the Merchants' Exchange Building, and St. Mary's Hospital. He also designed the Crocker/First National Bank Building, located at the intersection of Market, Post, and Montgomery Streets (1908, later addressed as One Montgomery, partially extant), just east of the Hobart Building.<sup>19</sup> Polk was responsible for overseeing all design work in the San Francisco office, and following the dissolution of the partnership in 1910, many buildings formerly attributed to D. H. Burnham & Co. were reattributed to Polk.

Despite an initial level of success, Polk lacked business acumen and the San Francisco office of D. H. Burnham & Co. began to suffer from cost overruns and mismanagement. Additionally, Polk managed to alienate many potential clients through his irascibility and flamboyant lifestyle. In 1910, Burnham severed the business relationship with Polk, and the two men remained friends until Burnham's death two years later.<sup>20</sup>

Polk formed his own practice, called Willis Polk & Co. Along with several of his contemporaries, including Ernest Coxhead, A. C. Schweinfurth, John Galen Howard, Arthur Brown, Jr. and Bernard Maybeck, Polk contributed immeasurably to the increasingly professional nature of architecture in San Francisco. Polk's abilities were widely recognized, and despite his difficult temperament, he continued to find work. The year of the Hobart Building's completion, 1914, was a tremendously successful year for Polk's growing company, grossing an estimated \$10 million in sizeable commissions, primarily in San Francisco. On his own, he did not bring in as many commissions for large downtown office buildings as he had with Burnham. One significant exception was the Hallidie Building on Post Street (1917), the first glass curtain walled building in the West.

By the time of his death in 1924, Willis Polk's practice had declined significantly. His public behavior, exacerbated by chronic drinking, brought Polk increasing ostracism. Nevertheless, Polk's design abilities had not deserted him. Some of his last projects include the Spring Valley Water Company (1922, 425 Mason Street, extant), the Duncan McDuffie Residence in Berkeley (not completed until 1925, 22 Roble Road, extant), and the canopy for the Post Street entrance of his 1908 Crocker/First National Bank Building (completed 1924, extant).

Willis Polk's legacy in the San Francisco Bay Area is reflected in the sheer number of buildings he completed—including locally designated landmarks like the Hobart Building and Hallidie Building—and for his role in the professionalization of the architectural field in San Francisco and for his gregarious and dramatic character that made him a popular local personality.

### *History of the Hobart Building*

The Hobart Building of 1914 replaced the original 1886 Hobart Building, damaged by the 1906 earthquake and fires. The Pacific Postal Telegraph Building, as it was more commonly called for its ground-floor tenant, was erected in 1886 as a five-story polychrome Victorian Gothic style

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Burnham died in the Heidelberg accident in June 1912.

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office building designed by Edward R. Swain.<sup>21</sup> Businesses that occupied the original building played significant roles in the history of San Francisco and of California as a whole. These included the City of Paris Dry Goods wholesalers, Central and Southern Pacific Railroad Companies, and many companies in which Walter S. Hobart was invested, such as the Lumberman's Trust Co., W.D. Head Drilling Co., Big Canyon Gold Milling and Mining Co., Consolidated Eureka Gold Mining, and numerous attorneys.<sup>22</sup> Hobart was a mining and milling speculator extensively involved in mining activities in Nevada and California.<sup>23</sup> Hobart additionally became involved in San Francisco real estate and, at the time of his death in 1892, the Hobart Estate Company controlled \$3 million in real estate in California and New York. The Hobart Estate Company was left to his three adult children, Alice, Walter Jr., and Ella.

The 1906 earthquake and fires severely damaged the Pacific Postal Telegraph Building. The initial impact of the earthquake caused the floors to partially cave in, and Pacific Postal Telegraph Company operators remained and sent the first news of the disaster to New York by 5:30am.<sup>24</sup> In February 1907, the building was assessed for damage to determine if it could be restored or if it should be rebuilt. While the structural walls had not been badly damaged, the interior woodwork was entirely destroyed.<sup>25</sup> After Pacific Postal Telegraph moved out, the building was left vacant.<sup>26</sup> The old-fashioned Victorian Gothic style building was demolished by 1913, and the Hobart Estate Company cleared the lot for a newly designed Hobart Building.<sup>27</sup> The Hobart Estate Company managed the Hobart Building until 1922.

### *Construction of the Hobart Building*

In March 1913, it was announced that a twelve-story, million-dollar building would be constructed by architect Willis Polk on the site of the original Hobart Building. According to an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the site was then one of the largest holdings in downtown San Francisco, and the proposed building promised to be a noble addition to the rapidly reconstructed face of Market Street. Many large projects were underway at the time and slated for completion before the 1915 Panama–Pacific International Exposition, aiming to showcase San Francisco's resilience and ingenuity. A 1913 *San Francisco Call* article that described the proposed construction of the Hobart Building, the nearby Call Building, and other Market Street sites read:

These improvements within two years' time will enable Market Street to present a solidly built up appearance from Sansome to Fifth Street [...]. By the time the world's fair year is ushered in it is safe to predict that Market Street from

<sup>21</sup> Landmark Preservation Advisory Board. *Landmark # 162 Final Case Report*.

<sup>22</sup> 1899 Crocker Langley City Directory.

<sup>23</sup> "Walter S. Hobart: Death of a Millionaire Speculator." *San Francisco Chronicle*. (June 3, 1892). Hobart's obituary stated that "In fact, there is scarcely a corporation of any importance in that state [Nevada] in which he did not own shares." He also owned significant shares in the Plymouth Consolidated, Springfield, Utica, Angels, and Eureka mines of California.

<sup>24</sup> "Telegraphic Congestion Now Nearly Overcome." *Los Angeles Herald*. 25 April 1906.

<sup>25</sup> "Real Estate and Building News." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 23 February 1907.

<sup>26</sup> "Big Building for Hobart Estate Property," *San Francisco Chronicle*. 22 March 1913.

<sup>27</sup> "Get Contract on Hobart Building." *San Francisco Call*. 7 February 1907.

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Sansome to Van Ness, a distance of over a mile, will show continuous lines of lofty structures on each side, with scarcely a trace anywhere of the havoc wrought by the great fire of 1906.

San Francisco's famous street, thus restored cannot fail to impress all visitors with the wonderful recuperative power of this city and the energy of her citizens.<sup>28</sup>

Polk's original design included a clock tower crowning the central bay. The City Planning Commission insisted that this crowning feature be removed due to safety concerns. Final plans were approved in June 1913. A full final set of drawings on linen was produced in September 1913 and a book of floor plans was printed in December 1913.

The construction of the building drew a great deal of attention, much of it sparked by architect Willis Polk's dramatic flair. In April 1914, a controversy around the fireproofing of floor beams and soffits in either concrete or metal lath and plaster garnered significant public attention when Polk publicly defied an inspector by standing atop a steel girder that was whisked away to the tenth floor where he claimed to await arrest for violating the building ordinance.<sup>29</sup> The controversy culminated in early May 1914 when Polk hung a large painted sign on the unfinished Hobart Building that directly questioned the integrity of Mayor Rolph. The controversy was quickly quieted through the intervention of the Hobart Estate Company,<sup>30</sup> not wishing to aggravate either the Mayor or the Board of Supervisors, whom Polk was personally insulting in his defiance of the ordinance that they had approved.<sup>31</sup>

The Hobart Building opened in late 1914 and once again housed many of the Hobart Estate's associated companies, such as lumber and mining companies. The building had been completed ahead of schedule and as related in *Splendid Survivors*, the building was constructed under budget and received much skepticism for its short construction period, as critics saw the quick construction as haphazard and rushed.<sup>32</sup>

In 1915, Willis Polk conceived of a second identical tower, never built, to be constructed as an addition to the north of the Hobart Building. Polk was involved in the 1923 construction of the adjacent Finance Building at 576-580 Market Street, which largely extends the decorative

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<sup>28</sup> "Skyscrapers Soon to Loom Up in Market Street," *San Francisco Call*, (May 24, 1913), 10.

<sup>29</sup> "Polk Defies City from High Perch," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (April 29, 1914).

<sup>30</sup> "Polk Hurling Word Army, 420 of 'em at Mayor," *San Francisco Examiner*, (May 1, 1914).; "Mayor Defied by Willis Polk," *San Francisco Examiner*, (May 1, 1914).

<sup>31</sup> "Message of Peace from Willis Polk: Architect who defied public officials ends dispute by filing revised plans." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (May 5, 1914). Polk had intended to leave the soffits exposed to save over \$6,000 in construction costs, igniting the so-called "Fireproofing Scandal" of 1914. The discussion quickly recentered around the use of cement or metal lath and plaster for fireproofing, and was more about public optics and strong personalities than on the actual method of fireproofing employed. The soffits were ultimately covered in metal lath and plaster.

<sup>32</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 81.; See also "Willis Polk is Too Swift, Says Lawyer," *San Francisco Examiner*, (July 19, 1914), and "Girder Falls 300 Feet and Pins Hat Rim: Young Woman Has Unusually Narrow Escape from Death," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (July 16, 1914).

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scheme of the Hobart Building's lower floors to the east, and the additional design of the Chancery Building further east of the Hobart and Finance Buildings at 562-566 Market Street, also in 1923.<sup>33</sup> The Hobart Building remained the tallest building on the block through World War II and its signature tower was a character-defining addition to the San Francisco skyline.

### *Design of the Hobart Building*

The Hobart Building was designed with the three-part classical façade composition that was becoming the standard for skyscraper construction and design at the turn of the twentieth century. The building features a strong division into base, shaft, and capital, with clear differentiation through the application of ornament and the reflection of the building's program. While three-part façade composition for skyscrapers was formally outlined in Chicago architect Louis Sullivan's 1896 essay "The Tall Building Artistically Considered," this approach to façade design was already well established by the mid-1890s in New York, Chicago, and other cities with skyscraper construction.<sup>34</sup>

Classical detailing and the Renaissance Revival style in particular was also becoming the norm for commercial façade design due to the huge success of the World's Columbia Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. The World's Columbia Exposition popularized Classicism across the United States through its use of Beaux-Arts planning principles and neoclassical architectural forms in crafting the overall aesthetic and organization of the fair. The resulting unity in design, materials, and organization was seen as a clean and orderly microcosm of an ideal city, with grand buildings and ample open space. The fair's Court of Honor was popularly referred to as the "White City," for its clean, orderly, cohesive, and monotone design, and provided a tangible example to the rest of the country of what the chaotic American city could become through the application of visual order and unity of design. This led to the City Beautiful movement which sought to beautify American cities through classical architecture and Beaux-Arts planning principles.<sup>35</sup>

The influence of Beaux-Arts planning and design began to manifest itself in the architecture of San Francisco nearly immediately. According to *Splendid Survivors*, "During the rest of the 1890s, although little building actually occurred in downtown San Francisco, the City of Paris, the Ferry Building, the Emporium, and the Call Building all... promoted the image of the City Beautiful."<sup>36</sup> Willis Polk had been trained in Beaux-Arts planning and design and was highly invested in the beautification efforts in San Francisco. His choice to employ French Renaissance Revival and Baroque Revival design elements in the Hobart Building demonstrates his clear connection to the pervasive and popular design idioms of the time.<sup>37</sup> While his earlier residential

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<sup>33</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Bradford Landau and Carl W. Condit, *The Rise of the New York Skyscraper: 1865-1913*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1996), 185.

<sup>35</sup> Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 319-322.

<sup>36</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> The various types of classicism in use during this period are often grouped under the Beaux-Arts style name in modern scholarship although they have roots in Renaissance, Baroque, and Greek styles, among others. See Landau, 184-185 for additional information.

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work was more inventive, and free from the restraints of classicism, Polk's commercial design was largely classically derived.

At the Hobart Building, Polk used the French Renaissance Revival style and some Baroque Revival forms that are unified through his overall approach to the building's organization and symmetry. The elements of the design that are particularly Renaissance Revival in style are the organization of the large classically detailed entrance portal and the building's expansive rusticated shaft. The more decorative articulation of the transitional third and seventeenth floors with strong beltcourses was a typical Renaissance Revival style approach to skyscraper design.<sup>38</sup>

The profusion of decorative detailing—which Polk layered on in excessive amounts, utilizing many decorative moldings and patterns—is more Baroque Revival in its architectural feeling. The Baroque style was originally a reaction to the Renaissance style, and while it used the same forms and decoration, the Baroque was more decorated, more dramatic, more theatrical, and more ornamental than the restrained Renaissance style. The Baroque style, popular in the seventeenth century and commonly associated with the French architecture of the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), encompassed all the arts including sculpture, painting, theater, dance, and interior design. The Baroque Revival in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries grew out of the teachings of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, France, where several American architects went to study, beginning with Richard Morris Hunt in 1845 and Henry Hobson Richardson in 1860. It was through this international education of a select number of American architects that American designers became familiar with French historical styles and contemporary French revivals of classical styles. The first Americans to study abroad frequently established their studios along the French atelier model, taking young draftsmen and architects to teach and train. Through the atelier model of education and training, French design and theories gained prominence and defined many of the developments in domestic American architecture in the following decades.

At the Hobart Building, Polk decorated the crowning elements of the tower with a profusion of detail strongly Baroque in feeling. His use of a number of classical details verges on the humorous through the sheer density of his decorative elements, such as the use of tightly packed block modillions with lozenges and guttae that line the tower's parapet over the twentieth floor. Block modillions are typically generously spaced with intervening decoration, such as patterned soffits. Polk increases the drama of the Hobart Building's tower through the profusion of its decorative features. These decorative features, while exuberant and plentiful, do not overtake the tower itself. It remains a sophisticated crowning feature with fine proportions that demonstrates Polk's skill as a designer and his deep understanding of academic classicism.

The building's unique lozenge-shaped tower was not the original design for the building, which Polk initially designed as culminating in a clocktower. The clocktower design was more clearly evocative of design precedents of the period like that of McKim Mead & White's tower for Madison Square Garden (1889-1890, demolished), or the Manhattan Municipal Building in New

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 319.

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York City (constructed from 1909-1914, extant), which features a tower with a series of stacked and colonnaded round temple forms topped with a statue embodying “Civic Fame.”<sup>39</sup> The Hobart Building—unlike the Municipal Building—was not freestanding and required the air and light of a mounted-tower form in order to ensure that the erection of new buildings around it would not eliminate the usefulness or the long-term economic return of the building. With the rejection of the tall clocktower top by city officials, Polk chose to remove what was several floors of pure architectural detail and instead capped the building more subtly with its setback office penthouse at the twenty-first floor, finely decorated with terra cotta friezes, decorative tile roofing, and the presence of classical antefixes, finials, and screens.<sup>40</sup>

As discussed by Corbett in *Splendid Survivors*:

[...] the tower gives [the Hobart Building] a particular romantic quality that distinguishes it from anything else in San Francisco, or from any other American skyscraper. The tower is the building’s finest feature in its distinctive oval-with-flat-sides shape, dense terra cotta ornamental detail, corbeled cornice, and two-leveled tiled hipped roof. Its expression of the soaring quality of the tower is certainly less literal than that of New York’s Woolworth Building (1913), which was considered the last word on the subject at the time, but it is just as successful in another way. The tower long stood out on the skyline of the city and, although now dwarfed in height, is still a conspicuous landmark in its neighborhood and from Second Street, the location from which it was designed to be viewed.<sup>41</sup>

### *California Skyscrapers of the 1910s*

The Hobart Building is significant at the state level as an early California skyscraper with a unique tower design. While skyscraper construction was most common in cities like Chicago and New York where the increasing cost of land placed additional pressure on the need to densify, the skyscraper became a symbol of the modern city, and cities across the nation began to build vertically. The tall office building, called the “skyscraper” by the 1890s, was further made accessible by the development of steel frame technology, such as the one used for the Hobart Building.<sup>42</sup>

In California, early cities with the density and development to warrant the construction of skyscrapers in the late nineteenth century were largely limited to San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Of these cities, San Francisco was the first to begin to build skyscrapers starting with the Old Chronicle Building (1890, extant), which originally stood at 218 feet, with ten stories and a clock tower. The building was designed by Chicago architects Burnham & Root, who had designed many skyscrapers of the Chicago school.<sup>43</sup> The height of

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<sup>39</sup> Landau, 370.

<sup>40</sup> “Finally Adopted Plan of Hobart Building Eliminates the Tower.” San Francisco Chronicle. June 28, 1913.

<sup>41</sup> Corbett, *Splendid Survivors*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Landau, 168.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph J. Korom Jr., *Skyscraper Facades of the Gilded Age: Fifty-one Extravagant Designs*. (McFarland Incorporated, Publishers, 2013), 131-132.

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the Old Chronicle Building was soon surpassed by the Reid Brothers' Call Building, which was completed in 1898 (extant, extensively altered in 1938). The Call Building, at 315 feet tall, remained the tallest building in San Francisco until the 1920s.<sup>44</sup> Very few skyscrapers were constructed between the 1906 earthquake and 1920, with the 19-story Humboldt Bank Building in 1908 (785 Market Street, extant) and the 21-story Hobart Building in 1914 among the few. When the Hobart Building was completed in 1914, it was the second tallest building in San Francisco at 285-feet tall.

Skyscraper construction became more common in the early 1920s, with the construction of the Matson Building (1923, extant), the Standard Oil Building (1922, extant), the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building (1925, extant), and the Russ Building (1927, extant). The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 largely halted construction of the tall office building until after the Second World War. The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building and the Russ Building, which both stand at 435-feet tall, remained the tallest buildings in San Francisco until the 1960s.

Other California cities were slow to erect their own skyscrapers. Oakland, which was still hoping to become the urban hub of the San Francisco Bay Area during the early twentieth century, erected the 11-story Union Savings Bank–Easton Building in 1903 (extant), which was the first steel-frame skyscraper in that city.<sup>45</sup> In 1914, Oakland completed its new City Hall (extant, designed by the New York-firm of Palmer & Hornbostel), which consists of a wide three-story base, a ten-story tower, and a clock tower that reaches 320 feet.<sup>46</sup> The Oakland City Hall remained the tallest building in that city until 1960. The Gothic Revival style Cathedral Building, (1914, extant) was completed the same year as Oakland City Hall and the Hobart Building.<sup>47</sup>

While Los Angeles saw the construction of the 13-story Braly Block (later the Continental Building, extant) in 1903, skyscraper construction was legislated with height restrictions of 150 feet (approximately 13 stories) beginning in 1904. An exception was made for the construction of Los Angeles City Hall in 1928, and the height restriction remained in place until 1958.<sup>48</sup> A number of rectilinearly massed office buildings were erected to the height limit. Without a need to go higher than 150 feet, the articulation of tower massings was unnecessary.

The Fruit Building was built in Sacramento in 1914 (later the Exchange Hotel, extant). San Diego's first skyscraper, the U.S. Grant Hotel (11-stories, extant), was erected in 1910. San Jose's first skyscraper was the Bank of Italy Building (extant), not completed until 1926.

Of the California cities mentioned, most were constructing mid-rise office buildings in the early decades of the twentieth century and were only minimally engaged with building skyscrapers as

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Oakland City Hall, Oakland, Alameda County, California, 83001170.

<sup>46</sup> David Gebhard et al. *The Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1985), 294-295.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> SurveyLA, *Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: Architecture and Engineering, Theme: Beaux Arts Classicism, Neoclassical, and Italian Renaissance Revival Architecture, 1895-1940*, (City of Los Angeles, July 2018), 15.

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they either did not have the necessary development pressure or had local height restrictions. For this reason, most mid-rise office buildings were designed to maximize their useable area, employing a rectilinear volume that filled their parcel. With larger parcels, the use of central light courts or E- and H-shaped plans for upper stories provided circulation of light and air to all units.

As a national building type, the skyscraper form was being refined and its form experimented with. The mounted tower form was becoming popular, particularly in New York City, as it could permanently guarantee light and air to the upper stories.<sup>49</sup> Early mounted tower form skyscrapers in New York City—including the Singer Tower (1908, demolished), the Metropolitan Life Building (1909, extant), and the Woolworth Building (1913, extant)—were publicized widely in architectural periodicals. The Hobart Building is one of the few early skyscrapers in California to use the mounted tower form. Another example of the mounted tower form used in early California skyscrapers is Oakland's Tribune Tower, constructed in the 1920s (extant) as an addition to a 1906 six-story office block.

A comparison between the Hobart Building's form with that of Oakland City Hall and the Cathedral Building (both National Register listed properties), all completed in 1914, illustrates the use of several types of skyscraper design. Oakland City Hall, with its wide three-story base and central shaft, is a free-standing building that was modeled after the example of McKim, Mead & White's Manhattan Municipal Building in New York City (1909-1914, extant). Unlike the Hobart Building, which was designed to complement the cohesive existing street wall of Market Street, Oakland City Hall was meant to be viewed as a freestanding building of civic prominence.<sup>50</sup> The Cathedral Building, in contrast, is sited along a nearly triangular parcel that gives it a prominent corner location and dramatic profile. Its trapezoidal-shaped plan rises along the property line with a setback at the seventh floor. Decorated in a Gothic Revival style, the building was designed just as the Woolworth Building was completed, which popularized the Gothic Revival style for commercial buildings and skyscrapers.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the Woolworth Building, however, the Cathedral Building is articulated as a single tower, likely due to its lot size and moderate height of fourteen stories. Together, these three buildings—the Hobart Building, Oakland City Hall, and the Cathedral Building—illustrate the national trends in skyscraper construction as utilized in California.

The Hobart Building is significant at the state level as a unique skyscraper design that adapted the mounted tower form, seldom used in early California skyscraper design, to the growing urban skyline of San Francisco. Polk embraced the property's mid-block siting by respecting the established street wall of Market Street, while setting the building apart from its neighbors and other early skyscrapers through the articulation of the building's upper stories in a unique tower form.

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<sup>49</sup> Landau, 321.

<sup>50</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Oakland City Hall, Oakland, Alameda County, California, 83001170.

<sup>51</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Cathedral Building, Oakland, Alameda County, California, 79000467.

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*Conclusion*

The Hobart Building is an excellent example of a 1914 commercial skyscraper that employed the design language of the period and skillfully combined the Renaissance Revival style with the more ornate Baroque Revival style. Through his understanding of contemporary design principles and a strong academic understanding of classicism, Willis Polk crafted a sophisticated office building with a unique lozenge-shaped tower that remains an icon of the San Francisco skyline and is a rare example of this form in California. While Willis Polk's career declined precipitously over the next decade, the Hobart Building was constructed at the height of his career and its tale of rapid construction and clashing personalities is intimately tied to the legacy of one of San Francisco's master architects. The Hobart Building remains highly intact on its exterior and within its interior lobby space and circulation corridors, such that it continues to convey its significance under Criterion C.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: City and County of San Francisco Assessor-Recorder; City and County of San Francisco Department of Building Inspection; Hobart Building (original drawings); California Historical Society; San Francisco Public Library, History Room; Niantic Holdings, Hobart Building History Room

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.472157 Longitude: -122.240600

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary with the City and County of San Francisco Assessor-Recorder, parcel number 0291-006.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary of the parcel on which the building has been located since its construction in 1914.

---

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Barrett Reiter, Architectural Historian/Cultural Resources Planner

organization: Page & Turnbull, Inc.

street & number: 170 Maiden Lane, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor

city or town: San Francisco state: CA zip code: 94108

e-mail: [reiter@page-turnbull.com](mailto:reiter@page-turnbull.com)

telephone: (415) 593-3223

date: January 2021; Revised April 2021, May 2021

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer,

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photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Hobart Building  
City or Vicinity: San Francisco  
County: San Francisco  
State: California  
Photographer: Barrett Reiter, Page & Turnbull  
Date Photographed: December 9, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 20 Primary (southeast) façade, looking north from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.
- 2 of 20 Primary (southeast) façade, looking north from further south along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.
- 3 of 20 Oblique view of primary façade and east façade (over adjacent building) from Market Street, looking northwest.
- 4 of 20 Oblique view of primary façade and west façade (over adjacent building along Montgomery Street), looking northeast from center island on Market Street.
- 5 of 20 West façade of Hobart Building (over adjacent building along Montgomery Street), looking east from One Post Plaza.
- 6 of 20 North and west façades of the Hobart Building's tower, looking southeast.
- 7 of 20 Detail of north and west undecorated facades of the Hobart Building as visible from Montgomery Street. Looking southeast.
- 8 of 20 Lower floors of primary façade along Market Street, looking north from intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Market streets.
- 9 of 20 Detail of main office entrance of Hobart Building, looking slightly northwest.
- 10 of 20 Oblique view of south façade of penthouse at twenty-first floor, looking east.
- 11 of 20 Detail of terra cotta decoration along roofline of penthouse at twenty-first floor.
- 12 of 20 Entrance vestibule to main office lobby along Market Street, looking slightly northeast.

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- 13 of 20 Detail of ceiling and transoms within entrance vestibule. Looking up and northeast.
- 14 of 20 Interior of office lobby, looking south.
- 15 of 20 Interior of office lobby, showing elevators. Looking north.
- 16 of 20 Office corridor at the eleventh floor. Looking west.
- 17 of 20 Typical office unit, shown here at the eleventh floor. Looking north.
- 18 of 20 Office corridor at the twelfth floor. Looking east.
- 19 of 20 Stairwell at the twentieth floor provides access to the twenty-first-floor penthouse. Looking east.
- 20 of 20 Typical office unit within the curved section of the Hobart Building's tower, shown here at the twentieth floor. Looking west.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

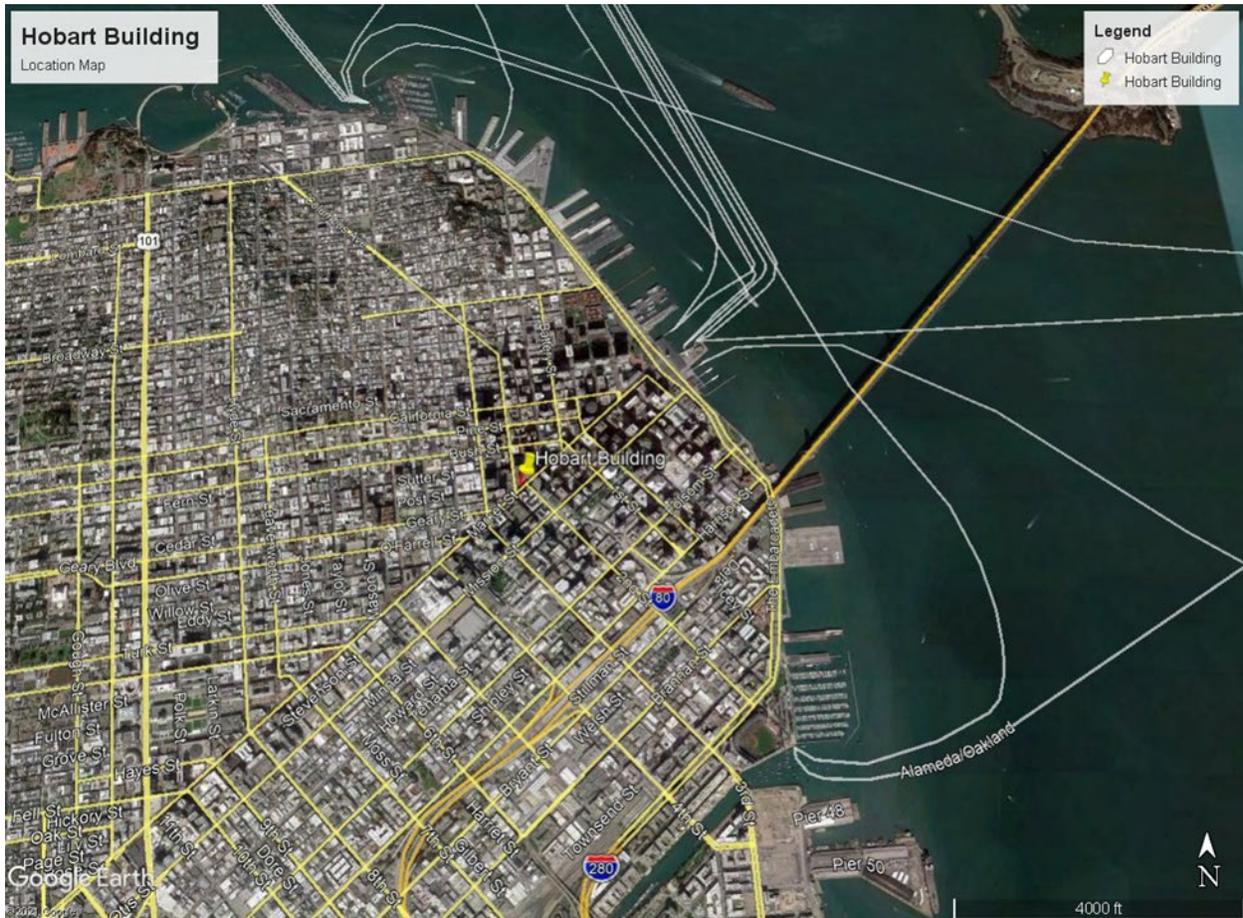
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### Location Map

Latitude: 37.472157      Longitude: -122.240600

Source: Google Earth, 2021, edited by Page & Turnbull, 2021

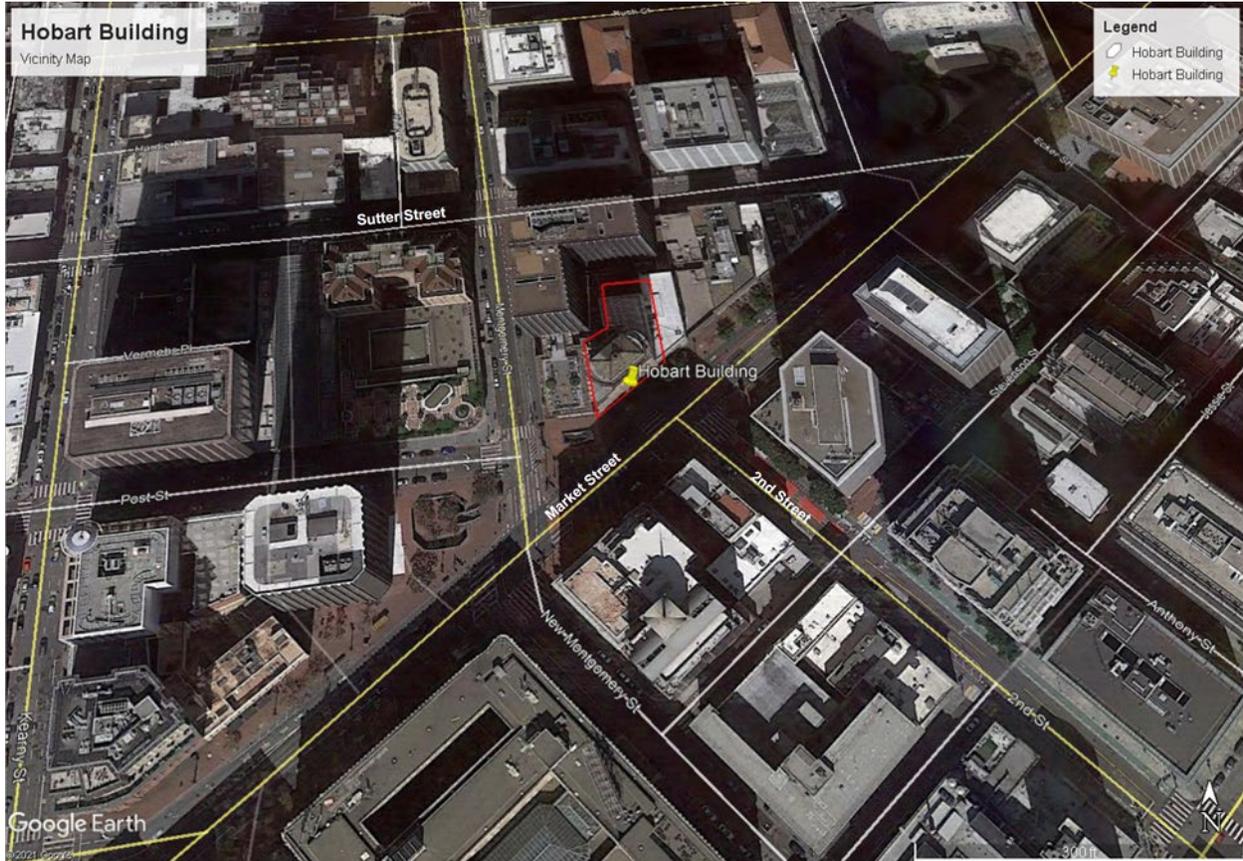


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### Vicinity Map

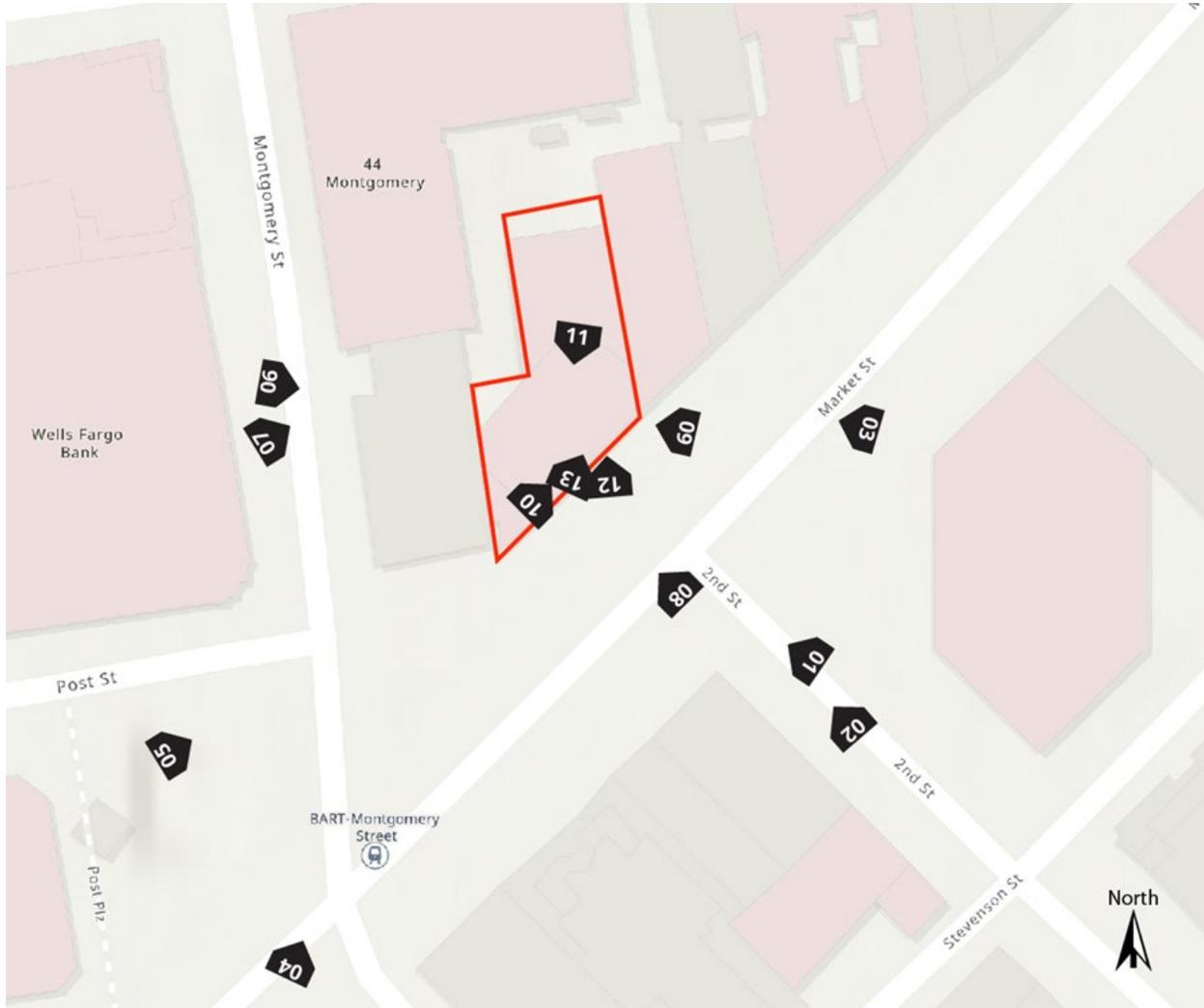
Source: Google Earth, 2021, edited by Page & Turnbull, 2021



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**Sketch Map/Photo Key 1 of 5 (Exterior)**



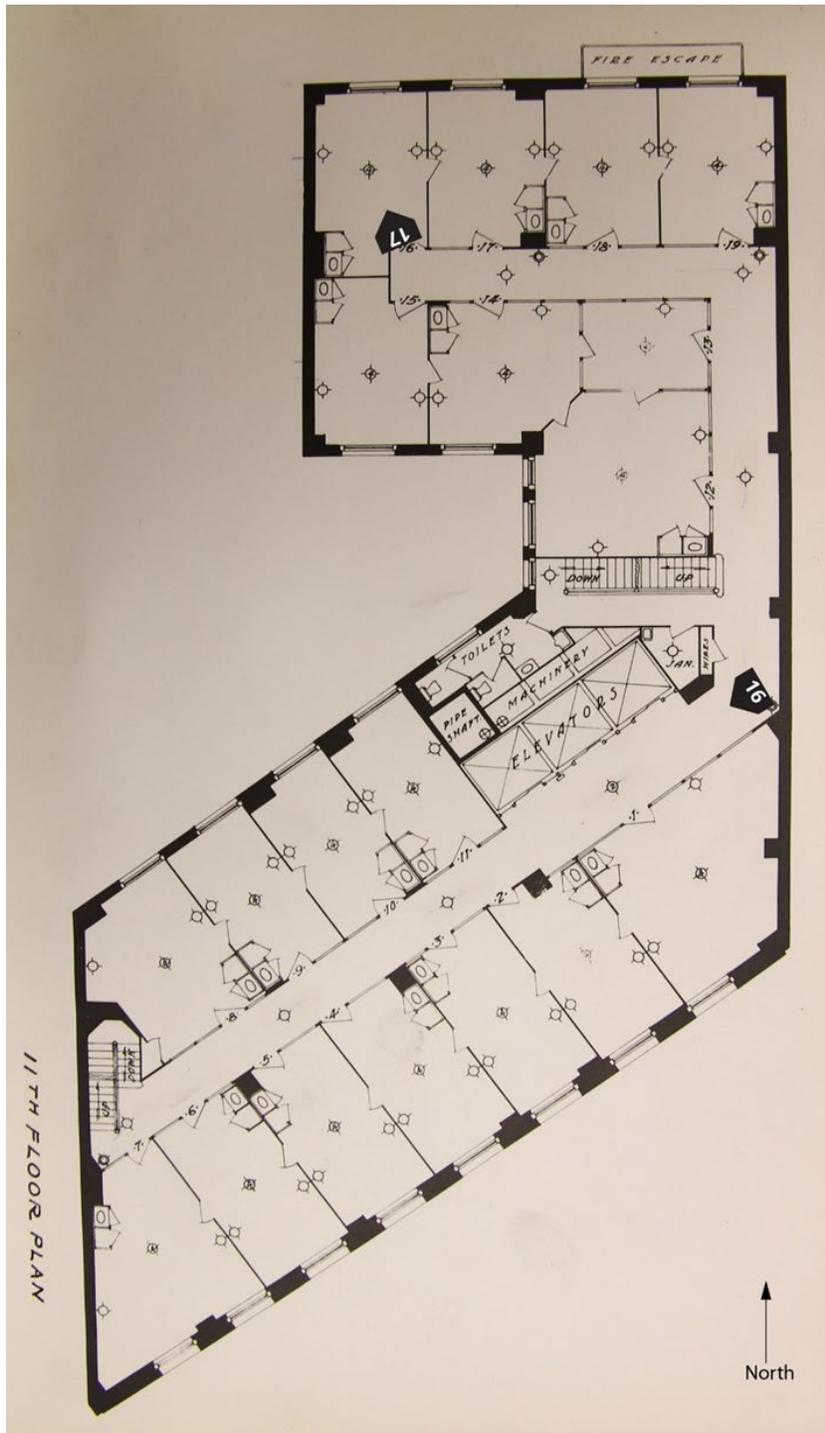


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### Sketch Map/Photo Key 3 of 5 (Interior, Eleventh Floor)

Base map is the original 1913 plan drawing by Willis Polk & Co.

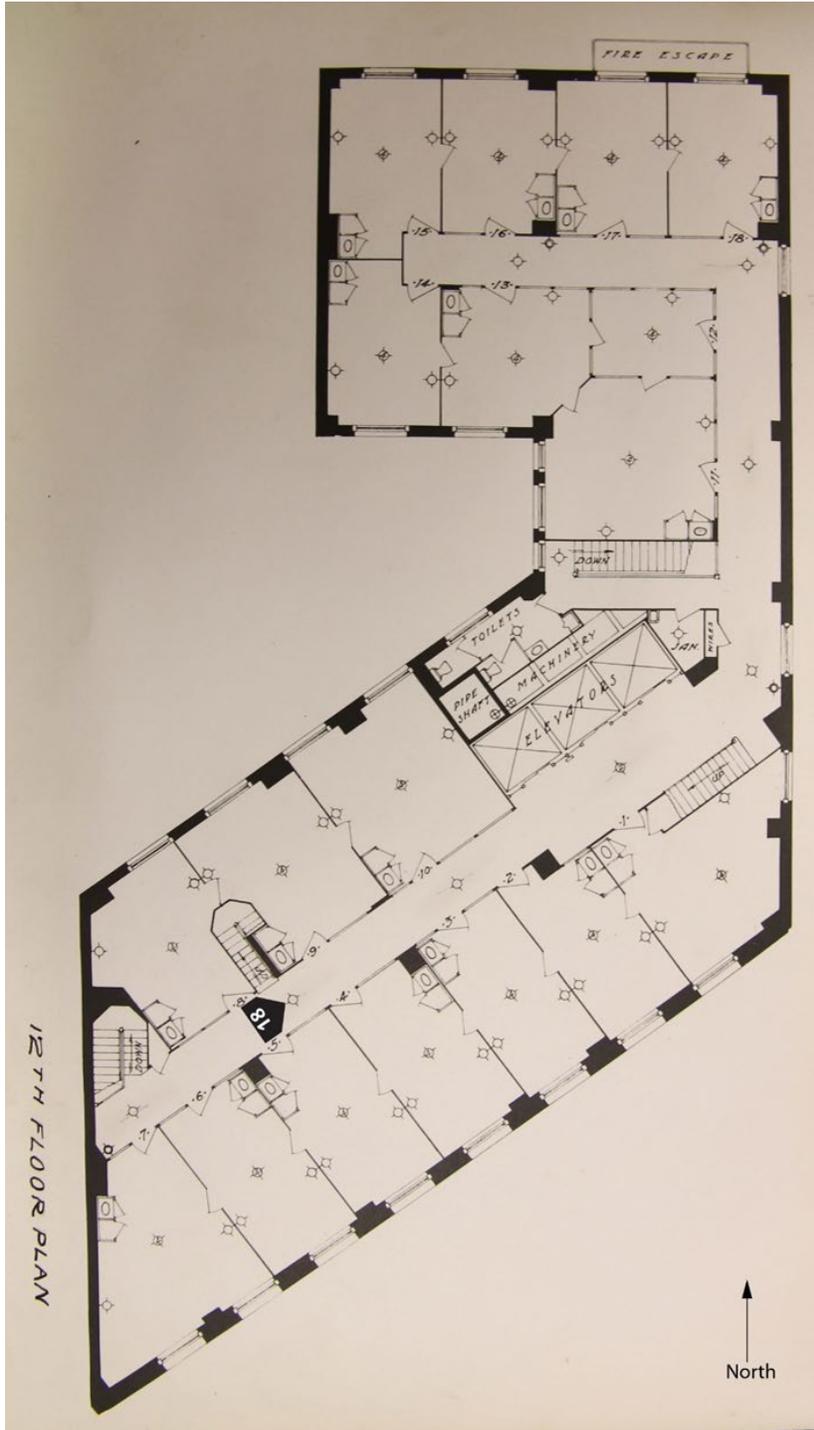


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**Sketch Map/Photo Key 4 of 5 (Interior, Twelfth Floor)**

Base map is the original 1913 plan drawing by Willis Polk & Co.

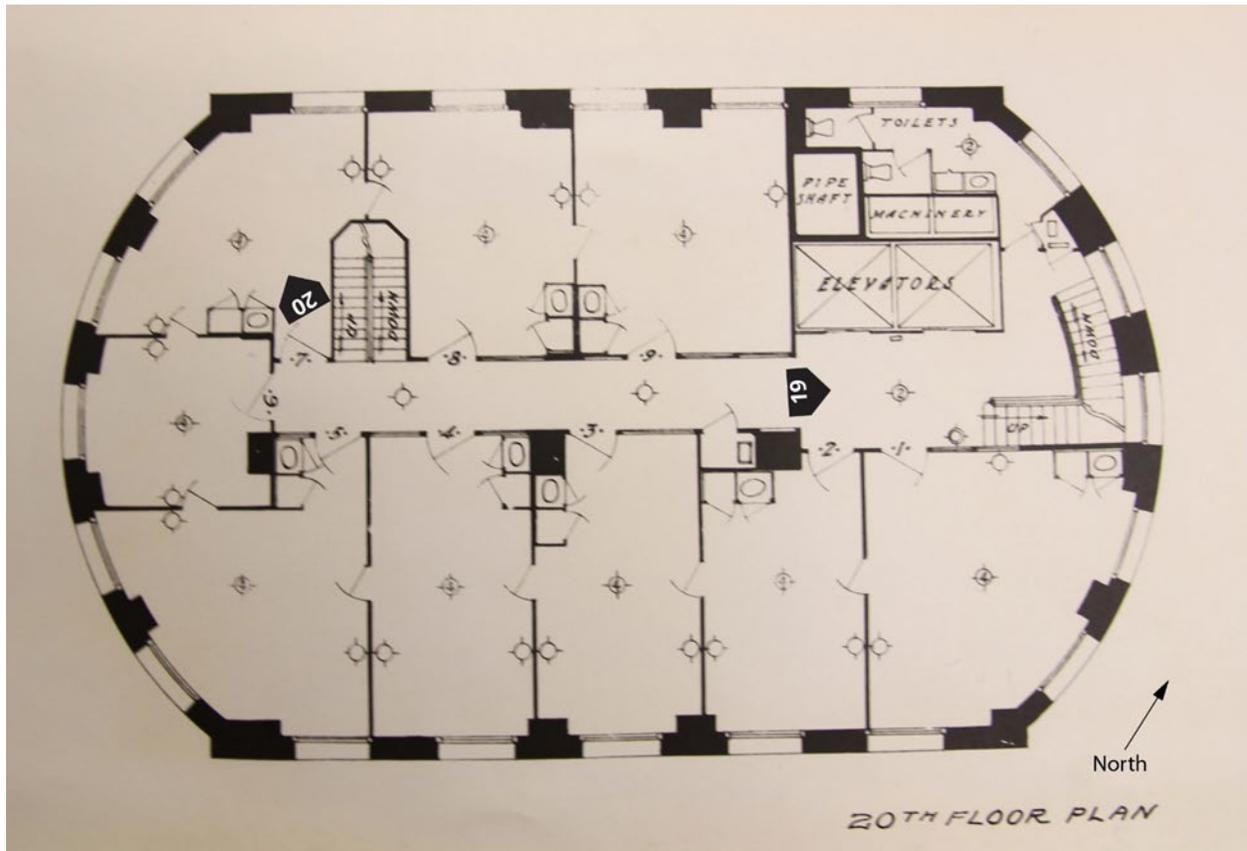


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**Sketch Map/Photo Key 5 of 5 (Interior, Twentieth Floor)**

Base map is the original 1913 plan drawing by Willis Polk & Co.

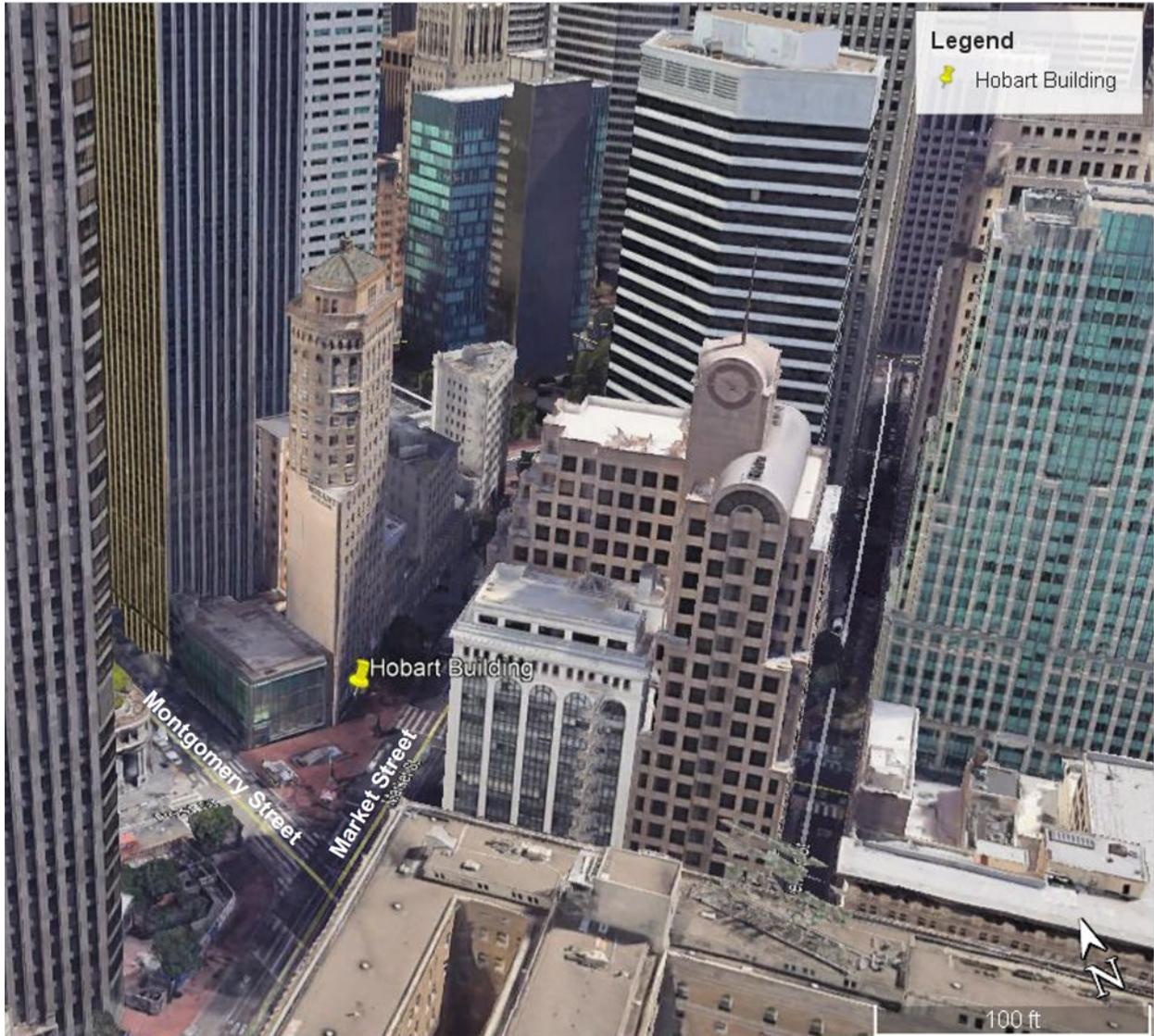


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**Figure 1 Birds Eye View**

Source: Google Earth, 2021, edited by Page & Turnbull, 2021



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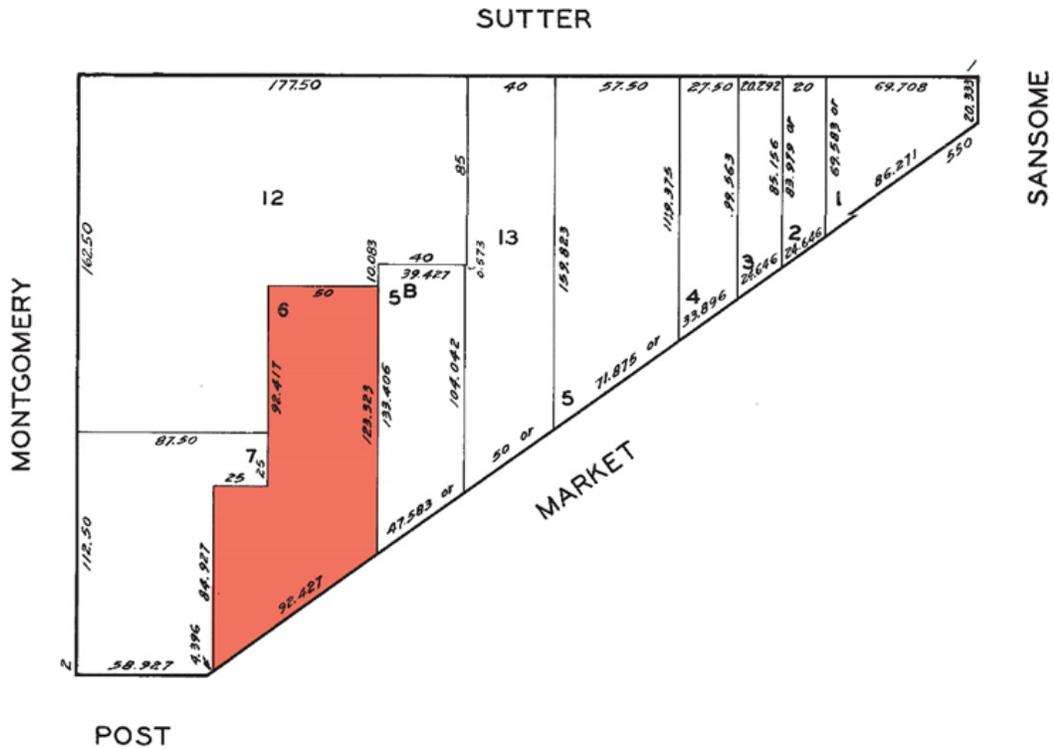
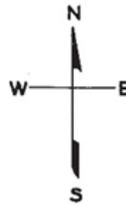
### Figure 2 Property Boundary Map

Source: City of San Francisco Assessor Property Map, edited by Page & Turnbull, 2020

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CITY & COUNTY ASSESSOR 1995

**291**  
50 VARA BLK 57  
REVISED 1964  
" '73

LOTS MERGED  
LOT 7A INTO LOT 7-1943



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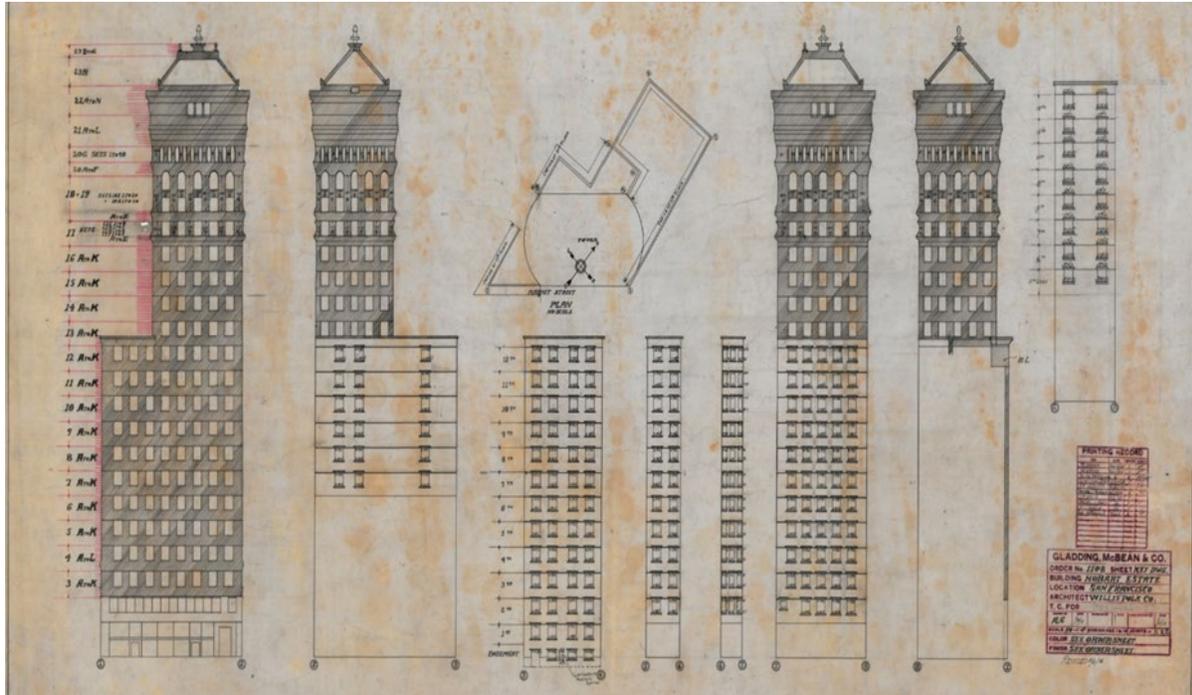
**Figure 3** Hobart Building under construction, 1914, viewed from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, looking north toward Market Street; Source OpenSF History



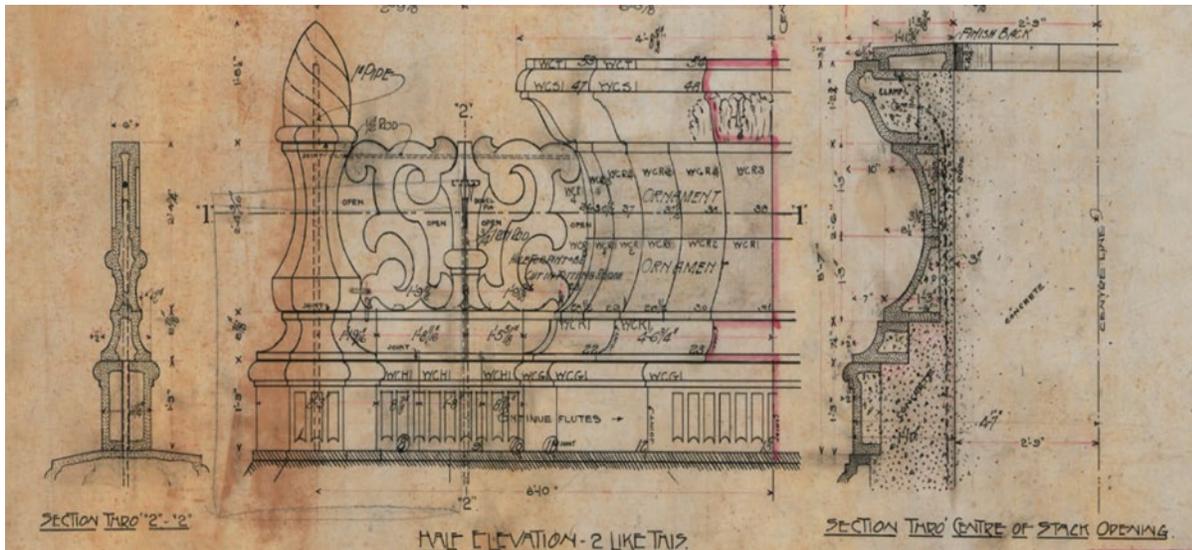
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**Figure 4** Key drawing of Hobart Building elevations for Gladding, McBean & Co. terra cotta manufacturing and installation, 1914; Source: Gladding, McBean & Co. archives



**Figure 5** Detail, Hobart Building penthouse roof decoration drawing by Gladding, McBean & Co. for terra cotta manufacturing and installation, 1914; Source: Gladding, McBean & Co. archives



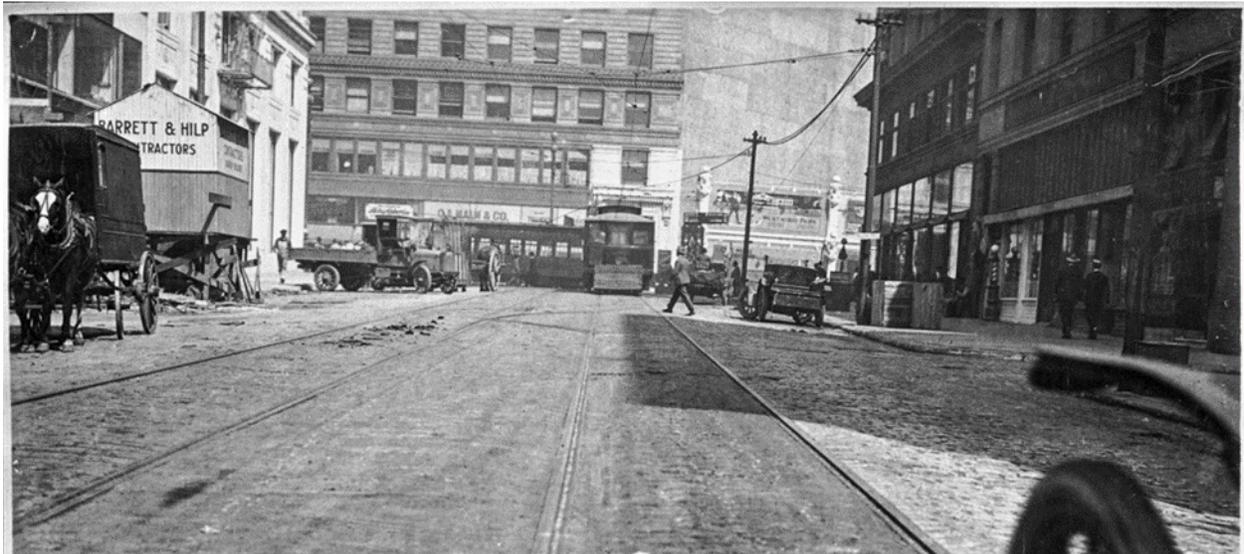
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**Figure 6** View downtown from nearby building, looking west, 1915, Hobart Building right of center; Source: OpenSF History



**Figure 7** Detail, looking north along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street towards Market Street with the lower floors of the Hobart Building visible, 1917; Source: OpenSF History



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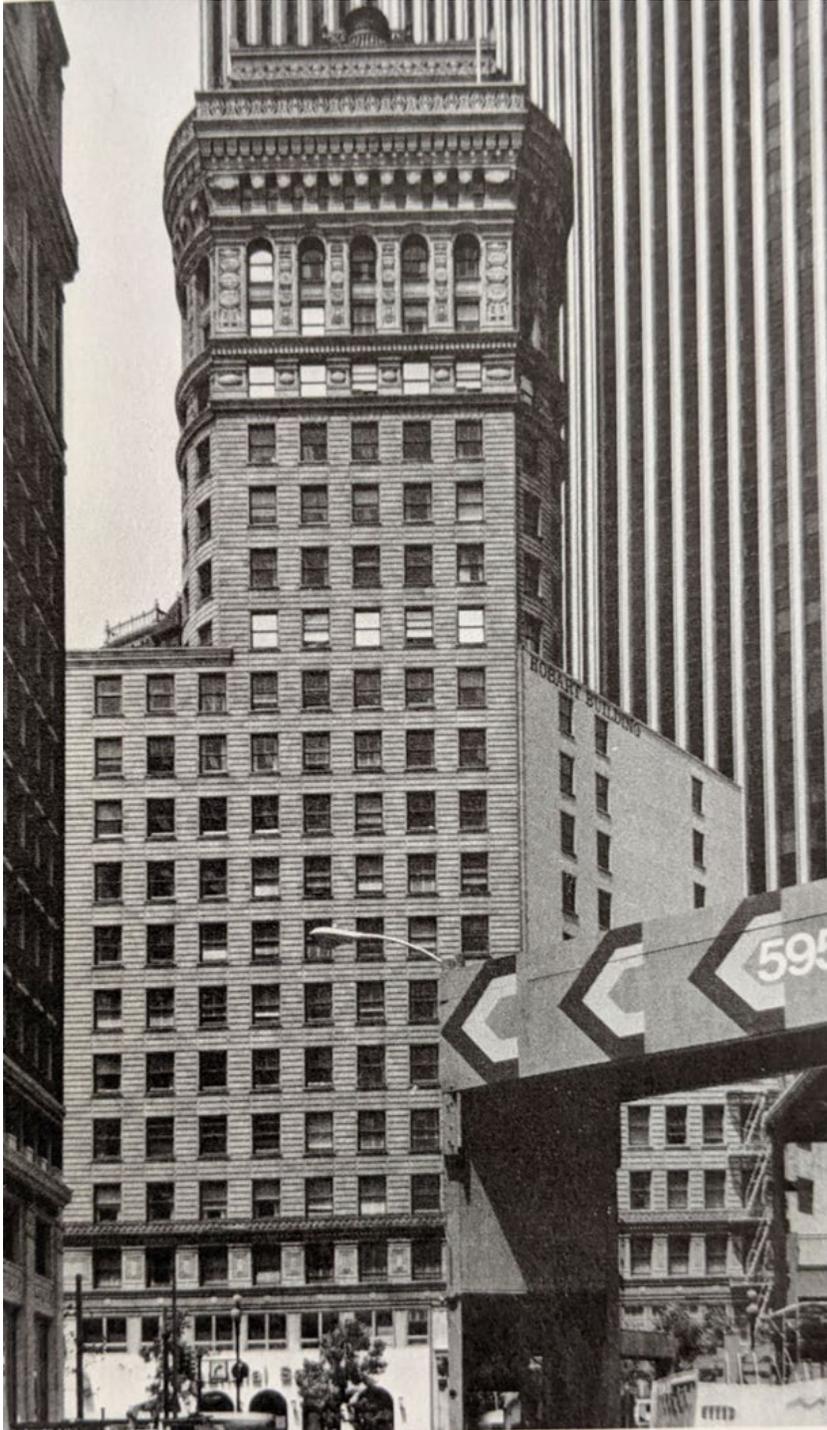
**Figure 8** Looking east along Market Street, 1920s; Source: OpenSF History



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**Figure 9** Looking north from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, circa 1979; alterations to ground floor and second floor commercial units completed in the early 1970s; Source: Michael Corbett et al., *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage*



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**Photo 1** Primary (southeast) façade, looking north from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.



**Photo 2** Primary (southeast) façade, looking north from further south along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.



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**Photo 3** Oblique view of primary façade and east façade (over adjacent building) from Market Street, looking northwest.



**Photo 4** Oblique view of primary façade and west façade (over adjacent building along Montgomery Street), looking northeast from center island on Market Street.



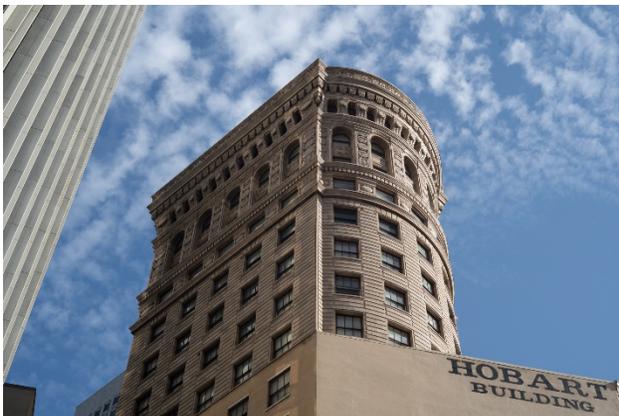
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**Photo 5** West façade of Hobart Building (over adjacent building along Montgomery Street), looking east from One Post Plaza.



**Photo 6** North and west façades of the Hobart Building's tower, looking southeast.



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**Photo 7** Detail of north and west undecorated facades of the Hobart Building as visible from Montgomery Street. Looking southeast.



**Photo 8** Lower floors of primary façade along Market Street, looking north from intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Market streets.



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**Photo 9** Detail of main office entrance of Hobart Building, looking slightly northwest.



**Photo 10** Oblique view of south façade of penthouse at twenty-first floor, looking east.



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**Photo 11** Detail of terra cotta decoration along roofline of penthouse at twenty-first floor.



**Photo 12** Entrance vestibule to main office lobby along Market Street, looking slightly northeast.



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**Photo 13** Detail of ceiling and transoms within entrance vestibule. Looking up and northeast.



**Photo 14** Interior of office lobby, looking south.



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**Photo 15** Interior of office lobby, showing elevators. Looking north.



**Photo 16** Office corridor at the eleventh floor. Looking west.



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**Photo 17** Typical office unit, shown here at the eleventh floor. Looking north.



**Photo 18** Office corridor at the twelfth floor. Looking east.



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**Photo 19** Stairwell at the twentieth floor provides access to the twenty-first-floor penthouse.  
Looking east.



**Photo 20** Typical office unit within the curved section of the Hobart Building's tower, shown here at the twentieth floor. Looking west.

