



Fireman's Fund Insurance Company  
Name of Property

San Francisco, CA  
County and State

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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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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE Business

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

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION Research Facility

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

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT International Style

MODERN MOVEMENT

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

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: glass

Walls: aluminum

Walls: brick

Walls: concrete

Roof: asphalt

Other: metal

Landscape walls: brick

Gates in landscape walls: metal

Sidewalks: exposed aggregate concrete

Terraces and patios: exposed aggregate concrete divided into panels by inlaid rows of brick

Circular tree beds: modular sections of concrete

### 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 Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office is a 10.2-acre property in a central, predominantly residential area of San Francisco called Laurel Heights. From the property there are views in various directions to distant parts of San Francisco. The property consists of two buildings and a landscape that were designed to function as a single entity. The main building, referred to in this nomination as the Office Building, is a large three- to seven-story building

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located in the center of the property. There is also a much smaller, one-story Service Building in the northwest corner of the property. The two buildings were designed to complement each other in character and materials. The Office Building is a glass walled building with an open character. The Service Building is a brick building with a closed character. The Office Building is an International Style building which despite its size is built into its sloping hillside site in such a way as to minimize its presence. Its four wings, each built for different functions, range from three floors to seven floors. It is characterized by its horizontality, its bands of windows separated by the thin edges of projecting concrete floors, and brick trim. The wings of the building frame outdoor spaces whose landscape design connects the outdoors with the indoors both functionally and conceptually. The landscape design includes outdoor spaces for use by employees, parking lots, circulation paths, and vegetation. The principal outdoor spaces are the Entrance Court, the Terrace, and small areas around the Auditorium.

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## Narrative Description

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**SETTING**

The Fireman’s Fund Home Office property is located in a central area of the north half of the City of San Francisco near the intersection of two principal streets, California and Presidio. The property occupies almost all of a large irregular block bound by California Street on the north, (continuing clockwise) Presidio Avenue on the east, Masonic Avenue on the southeast, Euclid Avenue on the south, and Laurel Street (in straight and curved sections) on the west. Fireman’s Fund occupies about 10.2 acres—the entire block except for a small triangular parcel at the corner of California and Presidio. (See Map 1 and Map 4)

The site itself slopes down from about 300 feet in elevation in the southwest corner to about 225 feet in the northeast corner. It is part of a cluster of low hills associated with Lone Mountain whose several high points were developed as cemeteries in the nineteenth century. The Fireman’s Fund site was previously a portion of the Laurel Hill Cemetery, and was long recognized for its views. Today there are distant views from the property to the southeast and downtown, to the northwest and a partial view of the Golden Gate Bridge, and to the west into the Richmond District.

The property is surrounded on all sides by thoroughly developed parts of the City of San Francisco. The site itself is at a junction of several different historical developments. To the east and north, the streets are laid out in a modified extension of the original grid of the city. Across Presidio Avenue on the east the neighborhood is called the Western Addition, characterized by a mix of middle-class homes built in the nineteenth century, and by flats and apartments built in

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the years after the earthquake and fire of 1906. To the north, Presidio Avenue is the dividing line between two of San Francisco's wealthiest late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century neighborhoods, Pacific Heights to the east and Presidio Heights to the west. To the west along California Street is Laurel Village, a post-World War II strip shopping center. To the west and south is Laurel Heights, a post-World War II residential development of houses and apartments. To the southeast across Masonic Avenue is Station 10 of the San Francisco Fire Department.

## **BUILDINGS**

There are two buildings on the Fireman's Fund property. The Office Building, which is by far the larger of the two and is sometimes referred to as the main building, is located in the center of the property and is surrounded by lawns, gardens, and landscaped parking lots. The Service Building, referred to as the Annex since 1985, is a relatively small building located at the northwest corner of the property. Although different in size and function, the two buildings were designed to relate to each other as part of the overall design of the property. The materials and character of the two buildings express these relationships which are simultaneously contrasting and complementary. The character of the Office Building is dominated by its extensive exterior use of glass for walls, which form long bands between the thin exposed edges of its reinforced concrete floors. Brick is used as a secondary material in the building, but also as a visual connector to features of the landscaped grounds and to the Service Building. The Office Building, clad in glass, provides views of the city for its occupants and presents a transparent character to the outside. The almost windowless Service Building encloses its machinery and utilitarian work space.

### **Office Building**

The Office Building as it exists today is the product of two principal periods of construction. The original building was completed in 1957 with the design of its siting, plan, and structure intended to accommodate future expansion. Between 1963 and 1967, a major expansion was undertaken in three phases. Other than these, during the period of ownership of the property by Fireman's Fund, there were many alterations made to the configuration of interior spaces, as was intended in a building with a flexible office plan. All of these changes were designed by the original architect or his successor firm and built by the original general contractor. (See Map 2)

Since Fireman's Fund sold the building in 1983, there have been extensive changes to interiors but only two important changes to the exterior—a new main entry and a darkening of the windows.

#### *Plan*

Today, the 354,000 square foot office building occupies a footprint consisting of four rectangular wings. Three of these wings are at right angles to each other and to the principal surrounding

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streets—to California Street, Presidio Avenue, and the grid plans of the Western Addition, Pacific Heights, and Presidio Heights. The fourth wing is at an angle to the others but is parallel to Euclid Avenue.

These four wings have been named in various ways but for the purposes of this nomination are named as follows. The Office Wing (north), parallel to California Street, and the Office Wing (east), parallel to Presidio Avenue, together described as the Office Wing, were designed to house the principal employee work areas and associated functions. With levels of parking partially below ground (referred to as sub-levels), the Office Wing (east) is sometimes called the Garage Wing. The Executive Wing, parallel to Euclid Avenue, was designed for executive offices (and sometimes has been called the Administrative Wing). The Cafeteria Wing, parallel to Laurel Street, which connected the Office Wing and the Executive Wing, was designed to house the cafeteria and other employee services.

Considerations in the arrangement of the four wings of the building included the relation to their functions, the topography of the site, views to and from the building, relationships to the surrounding neighborhoods, access to the site, relationships to outdoor spaces framed by the wings of the building, and parking.

The largest and tallest part of the building—the combination of the Office Wing (north) and the Office Wing (east)—is situated on the lowest elevation, an arrangement that minimizes its visual presence on the surrounding streets and from afar. The lowest part of the building, the Executive Wing, is on the highest ground, which is a way of being the least conspicuous in the most visible location. As much as feasible for a very large building, the Fireman's Fund Home Office blends into its site and its largely residential setting. The horizontality of its design intentionally emphasizes its connection to its site.

The principal entrances to the building are on California Street and Laurel Street. From California Street, the Employee Entrance was designed primarily to provide access for workers in the Office Wing, and the Auditorium entrance was for workers and visitors to the Auditorium and nearby offices. From Laurel Street, the Executive and Visitor Entrance, near the north end of the Cafeteria Wing, was originally the principal entrance both for executives and visitors to the building. Secondary entrances along the east side of the Cafeteria Wing, provide access to the Terrace Garden from the Cafeteria and the employee's lounge.

The Office Wing (east) and the Garage on which it sits altogether is seven stories in height. It consists of three sublevels for parking and four office floors above. The parking garage extends further to the north and west than the office floors but because of the topography and landscaping is not highly visible. The most visible feature of the garage is its pair of circular entrance and exit ramps north of the rest of the structure. On the south side of this wing is a rectangular auditorium



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that extends beyond the volume of the main structure. The north end of the office floors of this wing is raised above the top of the parking garage on concrete piers so that there is a covered driving and parking area. Inside, this wing was designed as open office space with scattered enclosed offices for departmental managers.

The Office Wing (north) is a four-story building. Both California Street entrances are in this wing, one leading back to the Auditorium and the other, which is generally on axis with the entrance gate on California Street. This entrance was altered in 1984–1985 with a remodeled interior lobby and a new entranceway structure on the outside (described below under alterations). Inside, this wing was designed with a central circulation and service core surrounded by generally open office areas on each floor. Scattered on the periphery of the open office areas were a few enclosed offices for departmental managers.

The Cafeteria Wing is a three-story building—the lower story is built into the hillside so that it is exposed only on the east side adjacent to the Terrace. Employee service functions are on the Terrace level where there is access to outdoor gardens and there are distant views to the east. The Executive and Visitor Entrance is on the second level adjacent to the Entrance Court on the west side.

The Executive Wing is a three-story building with its lower story partially built into the hillside. Inside, central corridors originally opened onto private offices for executives on each side. At the east end, offices at the junction with the Cafeteria Wing were originally for the president and the chairman of the Board of Directors of the company; nearby were board rooms, secretaries' offices, and service spaces. Upstairs above the president's office an original penthouse with a lounge, dining room, and outdoor deck was replaced by the 1963–4 addition.

#### *Structure, Materials, and Mechanical Systems*

At the most general level, the structure and materials of the building consist of concrete pile foundations, a mix of steel and reinforced concrete columns, concrete floors and roof, and exterior curtain walls of glass except for limited areas where walls are brick.

Because of the original 1957 plan of the Office Wing (north), special steel columns were designed for this section. The Office Wing was designed with a central reinforced concrete service core surrounded by open office space. To create an office space with a minimum of columns, the concrete roof spanned fifty-five feet from the core to the perimeter. Forty feet from the core were steel columns, beyond which the concrete roof was cantilevered. Ordinary steel columns could not practically be made to support these loads, so special columns were designed with steel channels fastened together as columns. This method produced slimmer columns than other approaches, minimizing their visual presence in the open office areas. When the Office

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Wing (east) was added in 1966–1967, this same structural system was employed to provide a similar interior arrangement.

To produce concrete floors with narrow cantilevered outer edges, which would enhance the appearance of the building as a glass box, floor structures are built of one-way concrete girders and joists. Beyond the line of the windows, the concrete floor structures serve as platforms for washing windows.

Between the concrete floor structures interior spaces are enclosed by continuous horizontal bands of windows. The windows themselves are in regular vertical rectangular units. Extruded aluminum frames hold large middle panels of clear glass above bottom panels of ceramic coated glass, originally blue in color. In alternate window units, there are two types of operable panels at the junction of the top and bottom panels.

Red brick laid in running bond is used in scattered locations for a mix of both functional and aesthetic reasons. It is used at the principal entrances on California and Laurel Streets to make their locations clear. It is used at the west end of the Executive Wing to present a more domestic face to the houses that are near-by on Laurel Street—this brick wall also blocks the afternoon sun from overheating the interior and prevents glare seen from the west. Brick is used for the auditorium extension on the south side of the Office Wing. And, brick is used at the east end of the building on the exposed level of the mostly underground parking garage to screen the parking area from view.

The principal structural features of the auditorium are grouted brick walls and two deep reinforced concrete roof beams. The walls are formed of brick inner and outer surfaces with rebar and grout in between. The angled brick bays of the walls and the plaster over some interior surfaces were used for acoustical reasons.<sup>1</sup>

### *Architecture*

The design of the building is associated with the International Style and the idea that form follows function. The simple structural concept is clearly evident in the appearance of the building. By virtue of its consistent design and use of materials, the building reads visually as a single structure. At the same time, the functions of its different wings are expressed in their size, context, and relationships to the gardens, lawns, and parking areas around the building and to the views to and from the building. The four-story Office Wing accommodates the largest number of workers, originally in open offices. From its open-office floors, there are wide views of the city of San Francisco. The smaller Executive Wing accommodates a relatively small number of

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<sup>1</sup> N. C. Stone, "In the News: Fireman's Fund Building Has Unique Acoustic," *Architect and Engineer* 210, No. 3 (September 1957): 43. Robert Cosby, Telephone conversation with Michael Corbett, 3 February 2018.

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workers, originally in private offices. The smaller scale of this wing is oriented to the Entrance Court on the north and a wide lawn on the south.

### **Service Building**

The Service Building, described on original 1955 plans as a Garage and Service Building, has had two substantial additions within the period of significance. Both were designed by the original architect and built by the original general contractor. The brick exterior of the additions matches that of the original building and that used on the Office Building.

As originally designed, the Service Building had an L-shaped footprint of two slightly overlapping rectangles enclosing 10,500 square feet. The larger rectangle was occupied as a garage and the smaller as a maintenance shop. As altered, the footprint is now an irregular cluster of attached rectangles enclosing 13,000 square feet for mechanical and maintenance functions.

The Service Building is a steel frame and reinforced concrete structure enclosed in brick. Its openings are limited to glass and aluminum doors, a few window openings, and ventilating louvers in the boiler room.

## **LANDSCAPE**

### **Landscape Features Associated with the Mid-1950s Design**

The landscape was an integral part of the original design for the new corporate headquarters commissioned by Fireman's Fund in the mid-1950s. The San Francisco-based firm of Eckbo, Royston, and Williams (ERW) was the landscape architect for the original landscape design, completed in 1957, and its successor firm Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams (EDAW) designed the landscape associated with the mid-1960s additions. The landscape setting around the modernist Office Building integrates functional needs (such as parking lots and internal circulation) with large areas of lawns and structured outdoor spaces (the Terrace, Entrance Court, and the Auditorium's outdoor spaces). The landscape is designed to promote the integration between architecture and landscape and uses forms and materials that are characteristic of modernist designs from the mid-twentieth century. (See Map 2 and Map 3)

#### *Brick Wall*

A brick wall, which takes different forms, provides a continuous and unifying element around the edges of the site. It exists as a retaining wall along the perimeter of the property's northeast, north, and west sides. Three gated entrances—one for the employees on California Street and the service and executive/visitor entrances on Laurel Street—are integrated into these sections of the wall. Each of these three entrances has a separate vehicular and pedestrian opening framed by brick pillars and secured by a double-leaf, metal rail gate when the property is closed. On the south side of the Executive/Visitor Gate, the perimeter wall is transformed into low retaining

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walls that define a series of planting beds along the west end and south side of the Executive Wing. The wall continues along the outer edge of the Terrace garden, along the bank that parallels Masonic Avenue, and then reconnects to the southeast corner of the Office Wing (east). Here rectangular brick planting beds have been incorporated into the wall, creating a zig-zag alignment similar to that found in other locations (i.e., on the bank along Laurel Street in the vicinity of the Entrance Court, on the southwest side of the Terrace, and in the bench wall that frames the eastern side of the Terrace).

#### *Parking Lots and Internal Circulation*

Two parking lots occupy the land in front (north) of the Office Building. The East Parking Lot and the West Parking Lot sit on either side of the entry drive, which aligns with the Employee Gate and an employee entrance (E2) into the Office Building.

The entry drive from California Street branches near the front of the Office Building; it continues to the east to provide access into the East Parking Lot and the circular ramps to the Garage. The western branch provides access to the West Parking Lot, and exits at the Laurel Street Service Gate. A short service road connects this branch of the entry drive to the Entrance Court parking lot and provides access to a service area at the west end of the Office Wing.

#### *Topography in Relationship to the Spatial Organization and Function of the Site*

The site slopes downward from its southwest corner, at the intersection of Euclid and Laurel streets. Grading has modified the topography so that the main outdoor spaces are located at different levels of the Office Building, as appropriate to their functions. Although the East and West Parking Lots are at a slightly lower elevation than the Office Building, the design of the landscape links these directly to its first floor. The Terrace garden, framed by the Office and Cafeteria Wings and originally intended to provide employees an outdoor setting for lunch and breaks, provides a direct connection into the Cafeteria Wing. And the Entrance Court, which originally provided parking for the executives and visitors, is at the same grade as the Executive/Visitor Entrance.

#### *Major Vegetation Features*

Lawns create the setting for the Office Building along the west and south sides of the property (and create a compatible connection between the property and the surrounding residential neighborhood) and slope downward toward California and Masonic Streets, respectively.

Some of the large trees which were part of the Laurel Hill cemetery vegetation were saved and ERW incorporated these into planting islands in the East and West Parking Lots in their mid-1950s design. Two Monterey cypress trees on a low mound in the East Parking Lot and a blue gum eucalyptus and several Monterey cypress in the West Parking Lot are remnants of this design feature. Monterey cypress, which were planted at some point after the addition of the

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Garage in the mid-1960s, occupy the land between the East Parking Lot and California Street. These trees, and the brick perimeter wall, buffer views of the parking lots from the street and lessen the apparent size of the Office Building.

Landscaped banks along the west and southeast sides of the site provide a transition between different elevations of the land within the property and the surrounding streets. The presence of these landscaped banks (planted mainly with grass, some larger shrubs, and several trees) help to reduce the need for tall retaining walls and also increase the amount of green space around the edges of the property.

#### *Entrance Court*

The Entrance Court on the west side of the Office Building—in the outdoor space between the Office, Cafeteria, and Executive Wings—provides parking and access to the building's Executive/Visitor Entrance and was one of the two structured outdoor spaces in ERW's mid-1950s design. A narrow, rectangular planting bed (10' x 55') at the center of the asphalt paving creates a U-shaped drive, which connects to the Executive/Visitor Gate on Laurel Street. Sidewalks (exposed aggregate concrete) and narrow planting beds (with Japanese maple trees, azaleas, rhododendron, New Zealand flax, and decorative rocks) line the sides of the Entrance Court's parking lot.

#### *Terrace*

In ERW's mid-1950s design, the principal structured outdoor space was the Terrace, which was intended as a place for employees to sit outside during lunch and at breaks. The Terrace is framed by the south side of the Office Wing and the east side of the Cafeteria Wing, where it is protected from the prevailing west wind and provides views to the east and south of San Francisco. This garden area has two levels. The lower level contains a biomorphic-shaped lawn and a paved patio, which wraps around the lawn's north and east sides. Steps along the east side of the upper-level terrace connect down to the lower level of the garden. Both the terrace and patio are paved with exposed aggregate concrete which is divided into rectangular panels by inlaid rows of red brick aligned with the window frames of the building. A brick retaining wall runs along the east and north sides of the lower-level patio. A raised planting bed, to the east of this wall, provides a visual boundary along the Terrace garden's east side. Three raised, circular beds (one on the upper-level terrace, one at the western edge of the lawn, and one at the north end of the lawn) each contain a tree; the sides of these circular beds are constructed of modular sections of pre-cast concrete. (See Map 3)

The plan for the Terrace provides a classic modernist composition. The biomorphic-shaped lawn contrasts with the rectilinear pattern of the pavement and the geometric form of the three, circular tree beds, the zig-zag alignment of the wall along its eastern edge, and the curved arch of

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hedge in the raised planting bed along its eastern edge. The triangular relationship between the three circular tree beds adds yet another level to the geometry of the composition.

Benches, which appear to have been custom-built for the mid-1950s design, are attached to the interior face of the wall along the Terrace's east side. The wooden boards for the seat and back are attached by metal bolts to a metal frame, which is attached to the wall; both the wood and metal are painted black. Benches of a similar design (three wood boards mounted on a bent metal frame) are mounted onto the patio at various places along its inner edge.

### **Landscape Features Associated with the Mid-1960s Design**

EDAW, the successor firm to the ERW partnership which was dissolved in 1958, prepared the landscape design that accompanied the mid-1960s additions to the Office Building. Just as the mid-1960s architectural additions were intended to be compatible with the original Office Building's design vocabulary, EDAW's design was intended to compliment and reference the original, mid-1950s ERW design. The key parts of the mid-1960s landscape design included the addition of paved features around the east, south, and west sides of the new Auditorium—to create outdoor sitting areas and to facilitate pedestrian circulation—and rebuilding a portion of the brick perimeter wall along Masonic Avenue. These two outdoor sitting areas—one on the east side of the Auditorium and one on its west side—connect to entrances into the Auditorium. (See Map 3)

The Auditorium is located below and to the east of the Terrace. A ramp begins on the south side of the Terrace and leads down to the Auditorium. The ramp bisects the landscaped bank that extends from the Terrace down to Masonic Avenue. The ramp, a part of the original mid-1950s design, is paved in the same exposed aggregate concrete as the Terrace, but lacks the inlaid rows of brick.

The outdoor area on the Auditorium's west side is paved with exposed aggregate concrete divided into panels by a double row of inlaid brick that references, but is not identical to, the pavement in the mid-1950s Terrace. Black metal benches are mounted along the eastern and western sides of the pavement. A raised circular tree bed (with concrete walls identical to the three circular tree beds at the Terrace) is located on its western side.

The outdoor area on the Auditorium's east side is paved with concrete divided into rectangular panels by wood inserts. The east and south sides of this area are enclosed by rectangular brick planting beds which are incorporated into the Masonic Avenue brick perimeter wall. The arrangement of these beds creates a zig-zag alignment for the wall, which is similar to that found in other locations (i.e., the brick perimeter wall along Laurel Street below/west of the Entrance Court, in the retaining wall at the southwest corner of the Terrace, and along the bench wall that frames the east side of the Terrace).

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The landscape along the east side of the property—which is at the same grade as Presidio Avenue—consists of a row of redwood trees planted across the eastern façade of the building, a level lawn between the building and street, and the Presidio Avenue Service Drive which provides access to the sub-level three of the Garage.

## CHRONOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

### Overview

The Fireman's Fund Home Office was built in five principal phases. The first four phases were under the ownership of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company, and the buildings in these first four phases were designed by the same architect and structural engineer and were built by the same general contractor. The grounds were designed within these first four phases by the same landscape architectural firm and its successor firm. The fifth phase was carried out under a new owner—3333 Investors—who purchased the property from Fireman's Fund.

In addition, there have been many interior alterations throughout the life of the building, many within the period of significance and many outside of the period of significance. These are addressed in a general way after the five phases of construction below.

### Buildings

#### *Phase I: Original Construction 1955–1957*

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company bought the site of its future headquarters in March 1953 for \$650,000 from the San Francisco Unified School District.

Among many stated reasons that Fireman's Fund chose the site were access to public transportation, room on the site to expand, the cost of the site and the cost to build a low structure rather than a tall building downtown. An interview with the architect noted that the site “lent itself to a low-level building, which studies proved was preferable for efficient operation of the company's business.”<sup>2</sup> In 1953–1954, in-depth preliminary studies of operations and work flow were undertaken by the architect, Edward B. Page, working with Nicholas Begovich, head of Management Services for Fireman's Fund. In April 1954, Page showed plans of the building to the Laurel Heights Improvement Association which was pleased with “a most attractive building and landscaping.”<sup>3</sup>

In mid-June 1955, Edward B. Page submitted applications for building permits for both the Office Building and the Service Building. Plans submitted with the applications were dated 1

<sup>2</sup> Robert George Higginbotham, “Fireman's Fund Building,” Student project for Architecture 2N-4, University of California, 1958. Northern Regional Library Facility of the University of California.

<sup>3</sup> Laurel Heights Improvement Association, Correspondence between Harry Thompson and Bernard Kernfeld, 18 April 1954. Archives of the Laurel Heights Improvement Association.

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June 1955. For both buildings, the designers working with the architect were, the structural engineering firm of John J. Gould and H. J. Degenkolb; R. Rolleston West, mechanical engineer; Clyde E. Bentley, electrical engineer; Maurice Sands, interior decorator; and Eckbo, Royston, & Williams, landscape architects. The general contractor for the buildings was MacDonald, Young, & Nelson. The landscape contractor was Watkin & Sibbald.

According to an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the company began moving into the Office Building on 17 June 1957. The dedication of the building on 9 July 1957 was attended by San Francisco Mayor George Christopher and many local business dignitaries. The final cost of the buildings was \$4.5 million, including \$80,000 for the Service Building, plus \$600,000 for the furniture and \$300,000 for the landscaping.

The company stressed that the buildings were designed both for efficient operation and to provide a pleasant working environment, recognizing that insurance companies were noted for high employee turnover and hoping that comfortable and attractive surroundings would help retain employees. Some of the means of establishing these conditions were providing good light and air, views, access to outdoor gardens, recreation facilities, a cafeteria, comfortable furniture, thoughtful choice of colors, and plentiful parking.

While there is no evidence of a master plan, the company and its designers anticipated the future need to expand. According to the general contractor at the time the building was first built, "The Building has been planned for an expansion factor of thirty percent. Future needs will be satisfied by adding a complete floor above the present floors or by adding a wing."<sup>4</sup> Guided by City Planning Commission Resolution 4109, the expansions, which occurred in several phases between 1963 and 1967, were made in a way that would not change the character of the main building or harm the attractive environment created by the landscaped grounds and the relationships between the landscaping and the buildings.

The Fireman's Fund Home Office was the subject of wide popular and professional press coverage when it was first completed. In addition to numerous articles in the San Francisco press, *Business Week* ran an article on the company to coincide with the completion of the building.<sup>5</sup> The principal west coast architectural periodical, the *Architect and Engineer*, ran a long cover story on the building.<sup>6</sup> And, the prominent French journal, *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, devoted two pages to the architecture and landscape design of the property in a special issue

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<sup>4</sup> Graeme K. MacDonald, "New Fireman's Fund Building Incorporates Many Construction Innovations and Ideas," *Architect and Engineer* 210, No. 3 (September 1957), 16.

<sup>5</sup> The most complete San Francisco newspaper article was *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Fireman's Fund Shows New Home," 9 July 1957; *Business Week*, "Casualty Insurer Faces the Music: Fireman's Fund, hardest hit by disasters of 1956, is pushing a comeback program that others may have to copy," 27 July 1957, pp. 92-98.

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald, 11-19.



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on office buildings around the world.<sup>7</sup> Fireman's Fund was the only American building featured among forty-three buildings in sixteen countries on three continents.

#### *Phase II: One-story Addition 1963–1964*

On 15 November 1963, Fireman's Fund applied for a building permit to add one story to a portion of the original building at a cost of \$800,000. This would add a floor to the Executive Wing, the Cafeteria Wing, and a portion of the west end of the Office Wing (north) with a total of 27,000 square feet. Construction began on 2 March 1964 and was completed in December 1964. The addition matched the original building in its design, materials, and details visible on the exterior.

The architect for this addition was the same as for Phase I and the structural engineer was H.J. Degenkolb & Associates, the successor to the original firm following the death of John Gould. The mechanical engineer was K.T. Belotelkin & Associates and the electrical engineer was Charles M. Krieger & Associates.

#### *Phase III: Parking Garage, Auditorium, and Office Addition 1965*

In the first half of 1965, Fireman's Fund initiated work on two related additions carried out under separate building permits, one for work that was much larger than the other. On 19 February 1965, the company applied for a permit for an addition on the east side of the Service Building and to build a new underground service tunnel between the Service Building and the main building. The addition was a rectangular block with a flat roof, the same size as the existing Service Building and clad in matching brick on the exterior.

The company applied for a second permit on 24 June 1965, for a large, partially underground, three-level addition whose primary purpose was a parking garage, but which also included more office space and an auditorium. The permit was issued on 24 August 1965 for work to cost \$1,500,000. The footprint of this new 120,000 square foot building was irregular, but the main part of it could be enclosed by a rectangle parallel to Presidio Avenue and at a right angle to the existing California Wing of the Main Building. At the north end of this building were two cylindrical ramps for access to the parking levels from the roof at the level of the previous parking area. The garage provided parking for 271 vehicles. At the south end of the structure was the auditorium which had seating for 300 people. The auditorium was entered at the first sub-level of the structure, one level below the ground floor of the original office building.

This addition was of reinforced concrete construction. The exposed north end of the garage was undisguised concrete. The exposed east side of the first and second sub-levels of the structure

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<sup>7</sup> V. Janson de Fischer, "Le Siege d'une Compagnie d'assurance, a San Francisco," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 30, No. 82 (January 1959), 82-83.

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was clad in brick with glass clerestories on the second sub-level and in the same aluminum frame and glass window wall as in the original building on the first sub-level. The auditorium was enclosed in brick.

The architect and engineers for this phase were all the same as in Phase II.

#### *Phase IV: Parking Garage Superstructure and Fourth Floor Additions 1966–1967*

On 14 February 1966, Fireman's Fund notified the Laurel Heights Improvement Association that it was seeking approval for the completion of the fourth floor addition from Phase II and the construction of a three-story office building on the roof of the parking garage built in Phase III. The permit for this work, to cost \$2,000,000, was issued 24 March 1966 and the work was completed in 1967. These changes were in the same materials and details as the original so that the character of the 1957 building remained intact.

Another addition was made under this permit to the Service Building. This was small rectangular building to serve as a new boiler room. Like the previous addition, this was clad in the same brick as on the original.

The architect and engineers for this work were the same as in Phases II and III.

#### *Interior Alterations 1958–1982*

Building permits were issued for many interior alterations to the building during its ownership by Fireman's Fund. Until the last couple of years, most of these were small jobs involving office spaces, sprinklers, and service features. In 1968–1969 and in 1975–1976, office areas throughout the building were renovated. The flexibility of the large open office areas of the original design anticipated reorganizations and remodelings of these spaces.

Until 1968, the architect for all of this work was Edward B. Page. Beginning in 1968, the work was done by his successor firm of Page, Cloudsley, & Baleix. Until 1970, the general contractor for the work was always MacDonald, Young, & Nelson and its successor firm of MacDonald & Nelson. Beginning in 1971, the contractor for many interior alterations was Herrero Brothers.

#### *Overcrowding*

By 1970, the building was running out of space. A new three-story office building was proposed about a half block away on Masonic Avenue near Geary, but was never built. Subsequently, planning began for a large new office building and data center on Lucas Valley Road in Marin County for 800 "technical and clerical" employees and for the company's large IBM computers.

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According to the San Francisco Chronicle, this move was necessary because, "Height limitations prevented adding to the existing building."<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in 1977, the corporate owner of Fireman's Fund since 1968, American Express, occupied space in the building and sometimes hired different contractors. By 1982, when portions of the building were leased to outside tenants, interior spaces were remodeled by different teams of designers and builders.

## Landscape

The site was previously a portion of the Laurel Hill Cemetery, which closed in the late 1930s. Prior to construction of the Fireman's Fund Home Office, debris from the cemetery was cleared, taking care to leave several large trees which were incorporated into the landscape design.

### *Phase I: 1955–1957*

The firm of Eckbo, Royston, and Williams (ERW) prepared the landscape design and worked with the architects on the site plan that determined the location of the building and the arrangement of the parking, internal roads, and outdoor spaces.<sup>9</sup> Garrett Eckbo's description of the challenges of the design process for a building and site, found in his book *Urban Landscape Design*, provide insights into the resolution of the design for the Fireman's Fund property.

*[T] he site is a piece of real estate, variable in size, form, and topography, produced by land subdivision . . . Thus the landscape design problem is to achieve the best possible development of a space or series of spaces determined by the relationship between the building and the site boundaries. Within these, the specific demands of the program must be satisfied. Problems of orientation and climate control—sun, wind, heat, glare, reflection—must be resolved. Visual demands created by the form and height of the building and the size and position of glass areas must be satisfied. The exterior landscape, beyond the site*

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<sup>8</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Massive New Data Center," 30 May 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Typically, one of the ERW partners would take the lead on a specific project and then oversee all phases of the work. The plans for the ERW design were not located during the research for this nomination, and the lead ERW partner for the Fireman's Fund landscape design could not be determined. A caption for a photograph, in a 1969 article in the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle* (Adams 1969), attributed the design to Ed Williams. This attribution seems reasonable for several reasons. Logistically, the Fireman's Fund project would have been handled by the San Francisco office under the direction of one of the two San Francisco-based partners—Ed Williams and Robert Royston; Garrett Eckbo operated out of their southern California office. Second, Eckbo attributed the Fireman's Fund design to Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams (EDAW), the successor firm to ERW, in his 1964 book *Urban Landscape Design*. In other places in this book, he attributed designs prepared by Royston while an ERW partner (Krusi Park [1954] and Mitchell Park [1956]) to Royston's firm (Royston, Hanamoto, and Mayes) and would have done so with Fireman's Fund if Royston had been the lead designer. Finally, the landscape design for the mid-1960s additions to the Fireman's Fund office building were undertaken by EDAW, which supports the assumption that one of the partners who remained with EDAW being the designer for the original, mid-1950s plan.

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*boundaries, must be analyzed and included or excluded by judicious screening or framing elements. Finally yard spaces which do not relate to building or specific function must be developed in meaningful forms. All of this will be more difficult if the building has been conceived as a self-sufficient unit, and less difficult if the organization of building and site spaces is conceived as one coherent pattern at one time.*<sup>10</sup>

Eckbo considered the Fireman's Fund site to be an example of this approach for the design process between a building and its site and included a description, site plan, and nine photographs of Fireman's Fund as one of the five projects he used to illustrate the "Building and Site" chapter of the book.

The connections between the Fireman's Fund office building and its landscape were a critical part of the image that the company was promoting with its new headquarters. Descriptions of the property in contemporary articles emphasized the "park-like setting" for the building and parking, which together occupied less than half of the site's 10.2 acres. The description in the *Architect and Engineer* in April 1956, noted that "the structure, which will overlook San Francisco, has been designed to relate to its park-like setting."<sup>11</sup> An extensive article on the new headquarters, in the *Architect and Engineer* in September 1957, explained that "The building itself occupies 1.74 acres, and there are 2.75 acres of off-street parking for more than 250 cars. On the rest of the land area, a truly superb job of landscaping has been done. This includes 110 varieties of trees, plants and ground cover that give the area surrounding the building a park-like aspect."<sup>12</sup> Eckbo made a similar point (" . . . leaving the major portion of the site for gardens") in his description in *Urban Landscape Design*.<sup>13</sup>

The size (10.2 acres), topography and location of the site (sloping downward from the southwest corner and with a panoramic vista of downtown), and the location of existing large trees influenced arrangement of the site features. Garrett Eckbo, describing the design process for the landscape, in *Urban Landscape Design*, wrote that "considerable care was taken in the arrangement of the building, parking areas, and levels [grading] to save all the existing trees."<sup>14</sup> These mature trees, which were mainly in the large parking lots to the north of the Office Building, helped to frame the building in views from California Street and provided vegetation that was proportional to the three original stories of the building's north façade.

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<sup>10</sup> Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Fred W. Jones, "Ten Years of Building and Engineering Construction," *Architect and Engineer*, 205, No. 1 (April 1956), 12.

<sup>12</sup> MacDonald, "New Fireman's Fund Building," 17.

<sup>13</sup> Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 47.

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

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The Office Building was conceived as a series of wings set at right angles to each other, which, in turn, divided the land next to the building into outdoor spaces designed to provide connections between the architecture and the landscape. Additionally, the horizontality of the architecture both in its long, low wings, and in the specific design features of the wings—the division of floors by continuous thin edges of concrete and the walls of the floors consisting of long repetitions of similar window units—helped to balance the massing of the Office Building with the surrounding landscape. The exterior glass walls provided views into the landscape of the outdoor spaces and at certain times of day reflected landscape features (trees, lawn, walls, patterned pavement, etc.), adding yet another level of integration between interior and exterior spaces.

The principal outdoor space—the Terrace—was set on the east side of the building, framed by the Office and Cafeteria Wings, where it was “protected from the prevailing west wind” and on a portion of the site that had been graded to provide “a good view of a large part of San Francisco.”<sup>15</sup> Here a biomorphic-shaped lawn was framed on its west, north, and east sides by a patio, whose exposed aggregate pavement was divided by rows of brick that aligned with the window frames of the building. Benches attached to the niches of the zig-zag of the seat wall, which enclosed the eastern side of the Terrace, provided places for employees “to relax in the sun during lunch or coffee breaks.”<sup>16</sup>

The Entrance Court on the west side of the Office Building—framed by the Office, Cafeteria, and Executive Wings—provided access to the Executive/Visitor Entrance into the building. A narrow, 80-foot-long, rectangular reflection pool at the center of the paving (asphalt divided by rows of red brick inset into the pavement) created a U-shaped drive. Arbor-covered sidewalks lined the outer edges of the pavement, with parallel parking next to the sidewalks.

A brick wall, which took several different forms, provided a continuous and unifying element around the edges of the site. It created a boundary wall along the property’s northeast, north, and west sides, and the three gated entrances—one for the employees on California Street and the service and executive/visitor entrances on Laurel Street—were integrated into these sections of the wall. It was transformed into low retaining walls that defined a series of planting beds along the west end and south side of the Executive Wing, and continued—again as a boundary wall—along the outer edge of the Terrace and the parking lot to the east of the building. The brick in the various sections of this wall and in the pavement patterns of the Terrace and Entrance Court was the same as that used in the Office Building and Service Building and helped to integrate the architecture and landscape.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

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Lawns, the iconic symbol of the landscape in post-World II suburban design, created the setting for the Office Building along the west and south sides of the property and provided an appropriate interface with the surrounding residential neighborhood. In *Urban Landscape Design*, Eckbo noted that plant materials were chosen based on the existing trees on the site and the climatic conditions. Live oak and red-flowering eucalyptus were the primary species planted, with “secondary themes . . . carried by the Monterey cypress, olives, redwoods, and Bishop pines” that were planted.<sup>17</sup> Shrubs and groundcovers were chosen to add color, fragrance, and “to provide interesting combinations of foliage, color, and texture, so that at all times of the year there will be something of special interest for the passerby to see.”<sup>18</sup>

#### *Phase II: 1963–1964*

There were no additions or major changes to the ERW landscape design during Phase II.

#### *Phases III and IV: 1965–1967*

EDAW, the successor firm to the ERW partnership which had been amicably dissolved in 1958, prepared the landscape design that accompanied the mid-1960s additions to the Office Building. Just as the architectural additions were intended to be compatible with original Office Building’s design vocabulary, EDAW’s design was intended to compliment and reference the original, mid-1950s ERW design. The portion of the parking lot that wrapped around northeast corner of the site and a portion of the original brick perimeter wall along the eastern edge of this lot were removed when the office wing extension, garage, and auditorium were built. The planting islands within the remaining portion of the east parking lot were rearranged to accommodate a new parking pattern. A service drive was added from Presidio Avenue to the ground floor of the Garage. The brick wall, along Masonic Avenue, was rebuilt to accommodate the additions to the building and new service drive. A row of redwood trees were planted across the new eastern façade of the newly extended office wing, and the level land between the building and the street was planted with grass. Paving was added around the east, south, and west sides of the new Auditorium to create outdoor sitting areas and to facilitate pedestrian circulation.

EDAW designed an entrance terrace on the west side of the Auditorium, paved with exposed aggregate concrete divided by rows of inlaid brick that referenced the paving found in the original, mid-1950s Terrace. The new concrete-paved landing on the east side of the Auditorium provided a second, but smaller, outdoor sitting area; this area was enclosed on its east side by rectangular brick planting beds which were incorporated into a new section of the brick wall. The brick in the new planting beds and the new wall section was similar to that of the original wall.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48.

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### **3333 Investors**

#### *Phase V: Presidio Corporate Center 1984–1985*

About 1983, Fireman's Fund sold the property to a new owner called 3333 Investors. In 1984 and 1985, 3333 Investors took steps to transform the property into the Presidio Corporate Center, an office building open to leasing by multiple tenants. Apart from numerous relatively minor interior office alterations, this owner made two distinctive changes visible on the exterior of the building.

In the spring of 1984, the aluminum window frames throughout the building were painted a dark color and the glass in the windows including the blue bottom panels of each window unit was darkened. The tinting of these windows was said to have a fifteen year life expectancy.<sup>19</sup>

In permits dated 6 October 1984 and 8 January 1985, the original entrance lobby on California Street was remodeled and a new exterior entrance gateway structure was built. Apart from serving to mark the entrance and to represent a new owner and a new use, it is not clear that this structure had any function. The architect for the new entrance structure was CRS Serrine of Houston in association with EPR of San Francisco.

### **University of California**

In February 1985, 3333 Investors sold the property to the Regents of the University of California to be used as the Laurel Heights Campus of the University of California, San Francisco. Since it has owned the property, the university has made minor exterior alterations and extensive interior alterations. The principal exterior alterations have been a project begun in 1986 that added a loading dock on Presidio Avenue and another that added rooftop screens to hide added mechanical equipment.

During the ownership of the University of California, space in the building has been occupied by the California Department of Transportation as well as by the University of California, San Francisco.

In preparation for a move to the new Mission Bay Campus and elsewhere, in 2012 the university began investigating options for the site. On 13 March 2015, the university signed a ground lease with Laurel Heights Partners, a development firm with plans to make extensive changes to the site. In April 2018, Laurel Heights Partners stated that they recently became the fee owner of the property.

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<sup>19</sup> University of California, San Francisco, *Office of the Chancellor with the assistance of Ira Fink Associates, University of California, San Francisco – Laurel Heights Site Development Plan: Draft Environmental Impact Report*, ([Berkeley]: Regents of the University of California, 1986), 73.

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## INTEGRITY

For the period of significance 1957–1967, alterations to the property are addressed below for the buildings and the landscape separately, followed by an evaluation of integrity of the property as a whole.

### Buildings

The two buildings of the Fireman's Fund Home Office have a high degree of integrity. Although the original 1957 buildings were altered with major additions in 1963–1967, the changes were all within the period of significance and all were carried out by the same primary team of the architect, the engineer, and the general contractor.

After the period of significance additions and alterations to the buildings have been relatively minor in the context of the whole. Altogether, these changes, which are described herein, have had a limited effect on the character of the buildings.

The principal changes after the period of significance to the Office Building were the addition of two service entrances, a gateway in front of the Employees Entrance on California Street, the darkening of the glass walls, and the addition of rooftop screens to hide mechanical equipment. The most significant of these are the darkening of the windows and the addition of the entrance gateway.

The entrance gateway was built in 1984–1985. It is a two-story structure that frames the path of entry from the street and also the existing walkway along the front of the North Wing. The ground level of this structure is clad in the same brick that is used elsewhere in the building. The second level, which spans brick supports on both sides, is glazed. The use of glass here is compatible with the glass windows that dominate the exterior surface of the original building in the Fireman's Fund era, but is different in its details and character. At present, the gateway is partially hidden by trees, lessening its impact.

Also in 1984–1985, the windows were darkened. This change involved tinting of the glass itself, the aluminum frames of the units of the windows, and the blue bottom panels of the window units. This change affects the character of the building as a whole but does not alter its essential features or design as a glass box open to its immediate landscape and to distant views.

Other alterations visible on the exterior are less important. A service entrance consisting of a roll-up door and loading area was added at either end of the Office Building, accessible from the service drive parallel to Laurel Street at the west end and from Presidio Avenue at the east end. The rooftop screens around mechanical equipment evoke the penthouses on the roofs of the Executive Wing and the Office Wing (north), which were removed in the additions of 1963–1967. They do not have a significant impact on the character of the building.



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Interior changes since the Fireman's Fund era have altered the interior for new uses. As the headquarters of a national insurance company, the interior was designed to provide offices and support services for clerical workers, managers, executives, and others in a mix of open office areas, private offices, meeting rooms, public rooms, and rooms for office machines. For its current use by the University of California (for academic and administrative offices, office-based instruction, and social and behavioral research) open offices have been partitioned, old partitions have been removed or changed, and spaces have been created for specialized purposes. In 1987, a large MRI center was built on the ground floor of the California Street Wing. Along with these changes, for security reasons the building has been divided inside into sections that do not communicate and lobby areas have been remodeled as security checkpoints. These changes alter the visual relationship between the design of the building and its structure. These altered conditions are apparent to occupants and users of the building but cannot be seen from outside the building or by the general public.

The Service Building has been altered with three additions, each in the character of the original, each in the same brick as the original, and all within the period of significance.

### **Landscape**

The landscape is an integral part of the design for the corporate headquarters commissioned by Fireman's Fund in the 1950s and to the additions to this facility from the 1960s. The ERW/EDAW design retains a high degree of integrity and continues to create a landscape setting around the International Style Office Building. The landscape design continues to promote the integration between interior and exterior space on the site, and the original forms and materials of its key features, which were characteristic of modernist designs from the mid-twentieth century, remain in place.

The Terrace, which was designed as the "centerpiece" of the landscape, continues to integrate the architecture of the building with the site and with the broader setting (through views of San Francisco). The Terrace retains its characteristic biomorphic-shaped lawn surrounded by a paved terrace and patio, and there have been only minor alterations since the end of the period of significance. One tree (likely an oak) at the south end of the lawn has been cut down, and new benches and tables have been added. Some of the original shrubs and flowering plants—described by Eckbo in his book *Urban Landscape Design*—are no longer present; however, the locations of the plants and their general character (trees in circular beds and flowering shrubs and groundcovers in planting beds) remain.

The Entrance Court was altered both during and after the period of significance. Sometime during the period of significance, the reflecting pool at the center of the parking lot was removed and converted into a planting bed; a review of aerial photographs indicates that this alteration occurred between 1961 and 1968. Several other changes occurred after the end of the period of

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significance. Between 1993 and 2001, the distinctive brick stripes in the parking lot pavement were paved over, and the arbors that covered the sidewalks on the north, east, and south sides of the parking lot were removed; the arbor on the west side was left in place. The exposed aggregate concrete paving for the sidewalks was also redone at this time. In the late 1990s, the configuration of the concrete pavement and the arrangement of the custom-built mid- 1950s benches to the north of the parking lot were altered. However, the general design and function of the Entrance Court—as an outdoor connection between the Executive/Visitor Gate and the entrance to building on the west side of the Cafeteria Wing—are still evident, and the Entrance Court continues to contribute to the overall integrity of the landscape design.

The short service drive to the west of the Office Building was altered both during and after the period of significance. During the period of significance, the west side of the road was widened to provide additional parking; this change occurred between 1961 and 1968. After the period of significance, a portion of the east side was also widened for parking. However, the original alignment of this short road and its function within the overall landscape design remain. The service drive continues (1) to connect the entry drive and Entrance Court and (2) to provide access from a service area on the west side of the Office Building to the Laurel Street Service Gate. Additionally, the overall design of the internal circulation system (with the two parking lots in front of the Office Building and internal roads) remains intact.

A new feature was added in 2000–2001 (after the end of the period of significance) when a fenced outdoor child care/play area was built on the south side of the Office Building; this area had previously been planted with grass and was part of the large lawn along the south side of the property. As part of this change, a new pedestrian entrance was created for the Terrace's southwest corner by removing a part of the brick retaining wall along the outer, southern side of the Terrace and adding a metal gate. A new sidewalk and pedestrian ramp were added to provide access between Euclid Street and this new entrance. However, the overall design of the Terrace was not altered by the addition of this play area. Additionally, enough of the lawn remains to convey the original landscape setting along the south side of the property.

Some of the materials associated with the vegetation features have been changed. Specifically, most of the original shrubs, groundcovers, and smaller plants have been replaced. Most of these changes to materials likely occurred incrementally, after the end of the period of significance, when plants reached the end of their lifespan, when certain species did not thrive in a specific location, or when the popularity of species changed. However, the major vegetation features retain their original locations and functions within the landscape design and continue to contribute to the historic character of the landscaped setting of the Fireman's Fund property.

The key materials and workmanship of the landscape structures and site furnishings remain including the brick used in the walls throughout the landscape; the exposed aggregate concrete

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for sidewalks; the exposed aggregate concrete divided into panels by rows of brick in the pavement at the Terrace and in the Auditorium's west-side sitting area; the metal for the entrance gates; the custom-designed wood benches found in the Terrace and at the Entrance Court's outdoor sitting area; and the circular tree beds constructed of modular sections of concrete found in the Terrace and in the Auditorium's west-side sitting area.

### **Combined Buildings and Landscape**

Together the buildings and landscape of the Fireman's Fund Home Office constitute a single resource that possesses integrity as measured by the seven aspects of integrity, as follows:

- 1) Location: The property is in its original location. It has not been moved.
- 2) Design: The property retains the essential elements of its design and the relationship between the parts of the design. Alterations to the design since the period of significance are relatively minor. It retains integrity of design.
- 3) Setting: The setting of the property is the same in all major respects as at the time it was first built. It retains integrity of setting.
- 4) Materials: The materials used in the buildings and landscape during the period of significance are all present. The property retains integrity of materials.
- 5) Workmanship: Evidence of workmanship, both from craftsmanship (brick and landscape features) and industrial processes (glass manufacture, concrete finishing, extrusion of aluminum) are all present. The property retains integrity of workmanship.
- 6) Feeling: Because the property as a whole—its buildings and landscape—are little altered and have been well-maintained, it retains integrity of feeling from the period of significance.
- 7) Association: Apart from the lettering on the outside wall near two entrance gates with the name of the current occupant of the property, the property is almost indistinguishable from the time of its ownership by Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. Thus it retains integrity of association.

### **CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES**

#### **Office Building**

Plan of the building with wings open along the sides to the immediate landscape and to views of the distant city

Horizontality of massing

Horizontal lines of projecting edges of concrete floors

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Horizontal bands of nearly identical window units

Uninterrupted glass walls

Window units of aluminum and glass

Circular garage ramps

Exposed concrete piers over the Garage

Wrought iron deck railings that match gates in the landscape

Brick accents and trim

### **Service Building**

Massing of rectangular volumes

Brick walls with a minimum of openings

### **Landscape**

Terrace, as the “centerpiece” of the landscape, designed to integrate the architecture of the building with the site and with the broader setting (through views of San Francisco); key character-defining features include its biomorphic-shaped lawn surrounded by a paved terrace and patio (paved with exposed aggregate concrete divided into panels by rows of brick); brick retaining wall and large planting bed around the east and north sides of the paved patio, custom-designed wood benches, and three circular tree beds constructed of modular sections of concrete.

Entrance Court, providing a connection between the Executive/Visitors Gate on Laurel Street and an entrance to the building on the west side of the Cafeteria Wing; key character-defining features include a central paved parking lot surrounded on its north, east, and west sides by narrow planting beds; exposed aggregate sidewalks along the north, east, and west sides of the parking lot; and a low free-standing brick wall along its north side.

Auditorium’s two outdoor sitting areas—one on the east side of the Auditorium and one on its west side—that connect to entrances into the Auditorium; key character-defining features for the area on the west side of the Auditorium include the pavement (exposed aggregate divided into panels by rows of bricks), circular tree bed constructed of modular sections of concrete; and metal benches; key character-defining features for the area on the east side of the Auditorium include the pavement (concrete divided into panels by wood inserted into expansion joints).

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Brick wall (constructed of red brick set in running bond pattern similar in appearance to brick used in exterior of main building) that takes several forms and which forms a continuous and unifying element around the edges of the site.

Three gated entrances—one for the employees on California Street and the service and executive/visitor entrances on Laurel Street—that are integrated into the brick perimeter wall.

Internal Circulation System (entrance drive, service drive, East and West Parking lots)

Vegetation features that helps to integrate the character of the Fireman's Fund site with that of the surrounding residential neighborhoods including (1) the large trees in and around the East and West Parking Lots, (2) the lawns on the west, south, and east sides of the property, and (3) the planted banks along Laurel and Masonic streets.

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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

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

COMMERCE

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

**Period of Significance**

1957-1967

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

**Significant Dates**

1957

1964

1965

1967

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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

**Cultural Affiliation**

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

**Architect/Builder**

Edward B. Page, Architect  
John J. Gould & H.J. Degenkolb/Henry J. Degenkolb & Associates, Structural Engineer  
Eckbo, Royston, & Williams (ERW)/Eckbo, Dean, Austin, & Williams (EDAW), Landscape  
Architects

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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 Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level. Under Criterion A, it is significant in the area of Commerce for its association with the San Francisco insurance industry, an important industry in the history of the city from the Gold Rush to the present. In particular, it represents the postwar boom in San Francisco's insurance industry when many companies built new office buildings. At that time, Fireman's Fund was one of the largest insurance companies in the United States. It was the only major insurance company headquartered in San Francisco. It was a leader among all insurance companies in San Francisco in its embrace of new ideas, symbolized by its move away from downtown to an outlying location. Under Criterion A, the Fireman's Fund Home Office is significant in the area of Community Planning and Development as one of the principal embodiments of the postwar decentralization and suburbanization of San Francisco. Fireman's Fund was the first major office building to be built outside of downtown in a suburban setting and it was the first whose design was fully adapted to the automobile. Under Criterion C, the Fireman's Fund Home Office is significant as the work of three masters, the architect Edward B. Page, the engineering firm of John J. Gould & H.J. Degenkolb/Henry J. Degenkolb & Associates, and the landscape architectural firm of Eckbo, Royston, & Williams (ERW)/Eckbo, Austin, Dean, and Williams (EDAW). As a modernist, through his experiences in Paris in 1930, Edward Page had direct links to the birth of modern architecture and to its development in the United States. The Fireman's Fund Home Office is his best known and most important work. The Fireman's Fund Home Office—with its innovative structural design that provided open floors with minimal columns and exterior walls of glass—represents the beginning of the reputation of the Gould and Degenkolb engineering firms as among the leading structural engineers in San Francisco in the post-World War II period. ERW/EDAW was recognized as one of the country's leading landscape architectural firms during the period of significance, and their designs and writings contributed to the popularization of the modernist landscape design vocabulary and to modernism as an approach to creating outdoor spaces that addressed contemporary needs within a broad range of settings. The Fireman's Fund Home Office represents an example of the firm's mastery of modern design within a corporate landscape context. Additionally, the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office, a single property including both architectural and landscape architectural elements which were designed to complement each other, is significant under Criterion C as an example of a corporate headquarters in San Francisco that reflects mid-twentieth-century modernist design principles. The period of significance is 1957 to 1967, covering the period from the year when the first phase of the buildings and landscape were completed (1957) to the year the final phase of construction was undertaken (1967) by Fireman's Fund. The Fireman's Fund company continued



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on this site as a leading insurance company in San Francisco and nationally until it sold the property in 1983. Although there are numerous alterations, these alterations do not alter the essential character of the property and it retains a high level of integrity.

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

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**CRITERION A: COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

For at least twenty-five years after World War II ended in 1945, there was an accelerated general movement of population and growth in the United States out of the central cities and into outlying areas. This regional decentralization and suburbanization took place in housing, retail, office, industrial, and institutional developments. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the two largest urban centers—San Francisco and Oakland—lost population as new housing and other

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developments boomed on agricultural land and sparsely settled areas of Marin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties. While there were many reasons for this movement, a primary factor was the growing use of motor vehicles. In contrast to the densely concentrated older cities, these new suburban areas were spread out, a development facilitated by construction of bridges across the bay in the 1930s to 1950s and the beginning of the construction of freeways.

San Francisco itself experienced its own internal version of this movement. While the City and County of San Francisco shared the same boundaries and much of its expanse was occupied by traditionally dense urban development, there were substantial areas outside the core—but within the city boundaries—that had never been developed or, because of changing conditions, were newly available for development.

Little new industry entered San Francisco in these years, but every other major land use was expanded. The spectrum of new developments of this period did not simply replicate old patterns of development. Instead, they were shaped by the forces that drove suburbanization elsewhere. In addition to motor vehicles, which were used for private transportation, for hauling goods for business and industry, and in competition with streetcars and other forms of transit, cheap energy and plentiful water played a fundamental role. Also, social forces such as a growing middle class, and “white flight” from perceived overcrowding and changing population demographics in central cities were major factors.

Between 1945 and the late 1960s, years that included the construction of the Fireman’s Fund Home Office in Laurel Heights, many of the principal developments of the city itself were part of this movement. The developments of these years were different in fundamental ways from what had been built before. The cumulative effort of all these changes changed the character of the city as a whole. By the end of this period, San Francisco was not the dense pedestrian and streetcar city that grew up in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It had become a mix of the earlier city and the “New City,” a term used by University of California scholar James Vance to describe these changes.<sup>20</sup> The co-existence of these two types of urban development in one city introduced new benefits and new problems. The city could better accommodate changing social and economic conditions, but it was plagued with traffic congestion, lack of parking, decreased support for mass transit, air pollution, proliferation of one-way streets, and construction of freeways.

Fireman’s Fund was among several large and notable developments of San Francisco’s postwar New City. Three of these developments were built on adjacent properties in the southwest corner

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<sup>20</sup> James Vance, *Geography and Urban Evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of Governmental Studies, 1964), 68.

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of the city. Park Merced, a residential development by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York consisting of garden apartments and thirteen-story towers on almost 200 acres, was begun just before the war but mostly was built after it, opening in 1950. Stonestown, a complex that included a shopping mall, ten-story towers and garden apartments, and a medical office building on 67 acres, was built in 1949–1952. San Francisco State College (now University), although planned before the war, was built in 1949–1954 on 140 acres. Across town in the southeast corner of the city, Candlestick Park, a 44,000 seat professional sports stadium, was built in 1958–1960. Residential tracts in the central and western parts of the city with hundreds of new homes and housing units, like Lakeshore Park, Laurel Heights, Anza Vista Heights, Midtown Terrace, and Country Club Acres, filled up most of the last open land in San Francisco in the 1940s and 1950s. Also in this period, planning began by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency for Diamond Heights, a 300-acre site in the center of the city for retail, housing, schools, and other neighborhood functions.

In addition to these large projects, smaller new developments of every kind throughout the city were also shaped by the same conditions. Strip shopping districts (like Laurel Village), new branch libraries, churches, small office buildings, motels, drive-in restaurants, and other types of development were built on in-fill sites and in new areas. A common feature of all of these was the accommodation of automobiles including on-site parking garages and the placement of new buildings with parking lots around them.

As San Francisco was affected by decentralization and suburbanization, both within its borders and in nearby counties, traditional patterns of development persisted as well. One of the strongest traditional patterns was the location of large office buildings downtown. Between 1946 and 1967, twenty-one large office buildings were built in San Francisco. Nineteen of these were medium or high rise buildings on restricted lots downtown.

Despite the strength of the downtown, two major office buildings were built in central areas far from the traditional core of the city. The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office, originally a 194,000 square-foot building (equivalent to a twenty-story skyscraper on a downtown lot), was a sprawling low-rise building on a 10.2-acre site surrounded by landscaping and parking; it was built in a predominantly domestic-scale residential area. The Jack Tar Hotel and Office Building of 1960, including landscaped grounds, was built in a central location on Van Ness Avenue in a dense urban neighborhood of apartment buildings and multistory automobile dealerships; this large complex included an eight-story hotel and a twelve-story office building of 214,422 square feet.

While Fireman's Fund and the Jack Tar were the only major office developments in this period to locate outside of the traditional downtown but still within the city of San Francisco, they were

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also part of a larger movement that saw new corporate office buildings and other large developments located in suburban areas outside of the city.

### **Evaluation**

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A as one of the principal embodiments of the post World War II decentralization and suburbanization of San Francisco. Fireman's Fund was the first major office building to be built outside of downtown in a suburban setting and it was the first whose design was fully adapted to the automobile.

### **CRITERION A: COMMERCE**

Two conditions of San Francisco's early history and growth, namely its reliance on maritime commerce and its frequent large and destructive fires, quickly gave rise to an insurance industry. This industry would play an important role in the local economy as an employer and as a source of investment money in the region. Because insurance companies had a significant presence in San Francisco from the beginning, the city became a center for the insurance industry on the west coast that has diminished since the 1980s but still continues to the present day.

The first of the two conditions was the isolation of San Francisco and its overwhelming dependence on maritime transportation. For the first twenty years of the American period, the most important means for the delivery of goods and people to California was by ship. While the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 introduced another means of transport, San Francisco Bay remained a major world port until after World War II and still remains a significant port today. Ships owned by people and companies in other places came from all over the world to San Francisco. The owners of these ships and their cargos purchased insurance against loss from companies in the eastern United States and Europe. Very early in the period of American control of California, in 1849, insurance companies headquartered in distant places opened offices in San Francisco. In the next ten years, numerous companies from New York, London, Germany, and elsewhere opened San Francisco offices initially for the sale of marine insurance.

The second early condition that gave rise to the San Francisco insurance industry was an outcome of the rapid growth of the city, the haphazard construction of its buildings in flammable materials; these resulted in the destruction by fire six times in the 1850s of large parts of the city.

In response to both of these conditions insurance was provided at first only by distant companies and fire insurance was available only at exorbitant rates if it was available at all. High insurance rates were a primary factor in the improvement of building practices. Under the influence of insurance companies, building laws were enacted and continually strengthened and new buildings in the central commercial district were required to be built in fire-resistant materials.

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Within a few years, local companies emerged in competition with outside companies primarily to sell two primary forms of insurance—marine insurance and fire insurance. Among more than thirty local insurance companies formed in San Francisco in the 1850s–1860s, Fireman's Fund Insurance Company was formed in 1863. Many of these lasted only briefly before they were bought by rivals or went out of business. Fireman's Fund was among the few San Francisco companies that became well-established and among these it was the only one left in business by 1895.<sup>21</sup>

Fireman's Fund succeeded where other local companies failed for a number of reasons. Among these, the company quickly established branch agencies in distant places and sold insurance throughout the United States and abroad, it paid its claims in a number of high risk and high profile situations which gave it a reputation for honesty and reliability, it had wealthy owners who could provide enough capital to survive in more than one case, and it made key innovations on a number of occasions that proved to be influential within the industry.

When the company was founded by local businessmen in 1863, its initial plan was to pay volunteer fire companies ten percent of the company profits for a charity associated with the Fire Department, and came up with the name "Fireman's Fund" for that reason. The idea of the company founders was that firemen would be more conscientious in putting out fires at buildings insured by Fireman's Fund, Fireman's Fund would prosper, and the charity would prosper. The idea didn't work, but the company kept the name.

Within five years of its founding, the company had branch agencies all over California and in New York and Chicago. By the time of the disastrous Chicago fire of 1871, which wiped out much of the central business district, Fireman's Fund covered many buildings there. The company might have gone under like many others did, but by collecting assessments from its stockholders, raised enough money to pay all claims and stay in business. With this action Fireman's Fund became the leading locally based insurance company in San Francisco, a position that it never relinquished.

In 1867, the company built an imposing headquarters in a prestigious location at the southwest corner of California and Sansome Streets. Situated among the leading banks and financial institutions of San Francisco on the principal street of the financial district of that time, the location itself was a statement of the ambitions of the company for success.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, the company prospered while taking over other San Francisco insurance companies and expanding its operations. The company paid claims after big

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<sup>21</sup> William Bronson, *Still Flying and Nailed to the Mast: The First Hundred Years of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 63.

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fires in Boston and Virginia City, solidifying its reputation. By 1895, it had branch offices for its four regional departments around the country. At the end of the century, the company insured ships and enterprises associated with the high-risk environment of the Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska and Canada. By 1905, the company had regional department offices in Chicago, Boston, New York, Macon, Georgia, and London and had expanded internationally, with “general agents” in Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore, and Honolulu.

Fireman’s Fund was by far the leading local insurance company at the time of the 1906 earthquake and fire. Despite the loss of its building and all records, and claims far exceeding the assets of the company, it paid all claims by again assessing its stockholders and by paying in installments. Within six years, the company had fully recovered and increased its assets from about \$3 million to \$9 million.

The importance of the various insurance companies, both home-grown and out-of-town, in San Francisco after the 1906 disaster was reflected in their buildings. Because of the nature of their business and the nature of the disaster, the location, design, and construction of buildings for the San Francisco insurance industry were particularly important. Like the most prestigious banks, San Francisco insurance companies preferred to locate on California Street near Montgomery, and as close as possible to that intersection on nearby streets. Fireman’s Fund repaired and re-occupied its old building at the southwest corner of California and Sansome Streets; in 1915 the company completed a new building on the old site. The new building was in the form of a Roman temple. Located across California Street from another Roman temple, the oldest and most prestigious San Francisco bank, the Bank of California, the Fireman’s Fund Building asserted the wealth, stability, and historic roots of the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company. The Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company, a British company in San Francisco since 1852, built a variation of a classical temple across California Street from Fireman’s Fund in the same block in 1912. Another British company, The Royal Globe Insurance Company which was also in San Francisco since the 1850s, built an eleven-story office building at the corner of Sansome and Pine Streets, a block south of Fireman’s Fund. Other insurance companies occupied other office buildings in this area.

As the insurance industry prospered, this area was strengthened as its center. In 1913, the Insurance Exchange, a centerpiece of the local insurance industry, opened a new eleven-story exchange and office building next door to Fireman’s Fund’s headquarters. Later, in 1924, Fireman’s Fund built a new eight-story office building next door at 233 Sansome Street, enlarged with another five stories in 1929. In 1927, the sixteen-story Insurance Center Building was built at the northeast corner of Pine and Sansome Streets. All of these insurance company buildings from the years after 1906 were designed by prominent architects of the time. Collectively they asserted the importance of the industry and its associations with San Francisco history and finance.

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Fireman's Fund's leading place in the competitive world of San Francisco insurance was partly due to various innovations and early adoptions of business ideas which gained advantages over rivals. In the nineteenth century, Fireman's Fund was a pioneer in the sale of insurance for grain, cotton, and other agricultural products. In the twentieth century, the company was early to sell automobile insurance. It made money with "war-risk" insurance during World War I. Among companies in San Francisco, it was early to enter new fields like life insurance and health and accident insurance. In the 1920s, Fireman's Fund grew substantially and was known as "the Tiffany" of the insurance world."<sup>22</sup>

The insurance industry throughout the country was fundamentally changed by a United States Supreme Court decision in 1943 that for the first time defined insurance as interstate commerce. This changed the structure of most insurance companies, including Fireman's Fund. This reorganization coincided with the general postwar economic boom, which for some companies including Fireman's Fund, was accompanied by large and rapid growth.

From 1946 to 1954, Fireman's Fund's income from the premiums of policy holders increased from \$67 million to \$191 million. The company benefitted from the introduction of a Special Home Owners policy in 1951 that was a prototype for the standard "all risk" home insurance that became universal within a few years. A historian of the company described 1954 as "one of the most interesting and successful years in the Company's history" during which "an unusual number of aggressive steps [were] initiated... to expand operations and introduce new forms of insurance." In that year the company bought the National Surety Corporation in "one of the largest transactions of its kind ever made."<sup>23</sup>

By the time of World War II, Fireman's Fund was spread out among several buildings in downtown San Francisco. The growth of the postwar years resulted in even more employees and produced a great need to consolidate in one location. Thus, in the booming years after the war the company bought the site for its new headquarters in Laurel Heights in 1953 and built the building that was completed in 1957. A factor in the company's interest in the site was its address on California Street. Although twenty-six blocks west of its traditionally prestigious downtown location, it still had a coveted California Street address.

This was a period of growth for San Francisco's insurance industry in general. Between 1950 and 1960, seven major insurance companies built new office buildings in San Francisco: Home Insurance Company (1950), Pacific Mutual Life (1954), Equitable Life (1955), America Fore (1956), California Union Insurance (1957), John Hancock (1959), and Occidental Life (1960). All of these were tall buildings downtown and none were as large as Fireman's Fund. Other

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 163.

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slightly later insurance company buildings were Hartford Insurance (1964), the Pacific Insurance Company (1971), and Aetna Life & Casualty Company (1969); the Hartford and Aetna buildings were about the same size as Fireman's Fund after its expansions of the mid 1960s. The best-known and largest building of this period associated with the insurance industry was the Transamerica Pyramid, completed in 1971 two blocks from the heart of the traditional downtown center of San Francisco's insurance industry for the Transamerica Corporation, a holding company for insurance companies and other kinds of financial businesses.

The opening of Fireman's Fund's new building was not accompanied by a slowing of the company's growth. An important and newsworthy source of new business was in the category of inland marine insurance which "will insure any insurable interest against all perils anywhere in the world."<sup>24</sup> This covered motion pictures and their casts, rodeo performers, professional athletes, and other types of activity. Fireman's Fund was second internationally to Lloyd's of London in providing this type of insurance and was often in the news for this line of work.

In 1963, Fireman's Fund combined with the American Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey, with Fireman's Fund becoming a holding company and changing its name to Fireman's Fund American Insurance Companies. In 1964, a company advertisement stated that "Today, Fireman's Fund American is the largest property and casualty insurance company headquartered in the West. It offers every basic line of insurance for both personal and commercial coverage... through more than 25,000 agents and brokers..."<sup>25</sup> In this period, substantial additions to the Laurel Heights building were made. In 1968, Fireman's Fund and American Express were combined, with American Express moving many employees to Laurel Heights.

## Evaluation

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Building is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its association with the growth and development of the San Francisco insurance industry, an important industry in the history of the city from the Gold Rush to the present. In particular, it represents the post World War II boom in San Francisco's insurance industry when many companies built new office buildings. At that time, Fireman's Fund was one of the largest insurance companies in the United States. It was the only major insurance company headquartered in San Francisco. It was a leader among all insurance companies in San Francisco in its embrace of new ideas, symbolized by its move away from downtown to an outlying location.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>25</sup> Fireman's Fund American Insurance Companies, "How a San Francisco Insurance Company Became a Pacesetter in the Industry" [advertisement], *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 January 1964.



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## CRITERION C: DESIGNERS

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office was designed by a team under the leadership of the architect, Edward B. Page. The members of the design team including the architect, structural engineer, and landscape architect are presented below, followed by an evaluation.

### Architect: Edward B. Page

Edward B. Page (1905–1994) was an architect who fit the description of many identified by Pierluigi Serraino in his book, *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism*, as largely forgotten but important players in a vital period of architectural practice after World War II.<sup>26</sup> Like many in that period, Page was trained in the Beaux-Arts method and exposed to traditional ideas about planning and style. But in his own work Page was a modernist. He is remembered today largely for his design of one building, the Fireman's Fund Home Office in San Francisco, but in his day was well-recognized for his expertise and for the designs of a number of buildings.

Edward Bradford Page was born in Alameda, a member of the fourth generation of his family in the Bay Area. His great grandfather was a physician from Philadelphia who practiced medicine in Chile, acquired Rancho Cotati in Sonoma County in 1850, and designed a utopian plan for the town of Cotati. Edward Page was one of five brothers and the son of Charles R. Page who became president of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company in 1937 and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1943 to 1962.

Edward Page studied engineering at the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale and upon graduation in 1928 started another undergraduate course of study in architecture at the Yale School of Fine Arts. He was critical of the program and was encouraged to take a leave of absence. He spent the year 1930 traveling and studying architecture in Europe. Living mostly in Paris, his inclinations toward architectural modernism were confirmed by a brief disillusioning experience working on a competition entry for the Grand Prix de Rome for Jean Labatut at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He also studied at the Ecole Americaine at Fontainebleau.

Describing himself in later years, as recorded in an interview at the Environmental Design Archives of the University of California at Berkeley, he rejected the traditions of the Beaux Arts and learned as much as he could about modernism. He said that the most valuable part of his education at that time was in Paris cafes, particularly Les Deux Magots which was renowned as a center for artists, writers, and other cultural figures and had an "architects' table"—"you sat there long enough and every architect in the world who came to Paris would come by." In this way he

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<sup>26</sup> Pierluigi Serraino, *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), 8-20.

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met prominent and experienced architects from all over, people who as a young student he would have had no opportunity to talk with otherwise. "We were all rebels," he said, "well into the Modern world of architecture, sneering at the Beaux Arts."<sup>27</sup>

After a year he returned to Yale and, in 1932, received a degree in architecture. He returned to San Francisco at the worst part of the Depression. There was no work in architecture but he got a job as a laborer building the Bohemian Club, an experience that gave him a ground level view of construction and corresponded to one of the essential elements of an education at the Bauhaus.

From 1934 to 1936, Page worked as a junior draftsman for Arthur Brown, Jr., San Francisco's pre-eminent Beaux-Arts architect. In that job, he prepared full size details of pediments, cornices, and other decorative features used in the Department of Labor-Interstate Commerce Commission complex in Washington, D.C. Contrary to his expectations, he came to admire Brown and his work. Without giving up his Modernist ideals, he later modeled his own practice in part on the observation that Brown "did things with pride, never turned out anything second class," and never let considerations of money affect the level of his efforts.<sup>28</sup>

In 1936, Page moved across the hall on the eighth floor of 251 Kearny Street to the office of Bakewell & Weihe. John Bakewell, Jr. was a distinguished Beaux-Arts architect and had been Arthur Brown's partner, and Ernest Weihe was also educated in Paris in the Beaux-Arts method. When business was slow in the office, Page was allowed to work there on his own projects and in 1937-1938 was a draftsman for the Golden Gate International Exposition (G.G.I.E.). Later in life he remembered his design for the Island Club (demolished) at the G.G.I.E. with particular pride. In that job he met John J. Gould and Henry J. Degenkolb with whom he formed a close friendship.<sup>29</sup> Later, Gould and Degenkolb's postwar firm would be the structural engineers for the Fireman's Fund Home Office and Page and Degenkolb worked on several projects together in the course of their careers.

After receiving his architectural license in 1938, Page worked for himself and for others on small projects from 1939 to 1942. On one of these projects, for Lewis Hobart, another prominent Beaux-Arts architect, he worked on drawings for the floor of Grace Cathedral. From 1942-1947, he worked as the Chief of Architecture and Engineering for San Francisco architect Wilbur D. Peugh supervising wartime projects for U.S. Naval Operations.

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<sup>27</sup> Edward B. Page, Interview by Michael Corbett, 4 April 1980. Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Loring Wylie, Telephone conversation with Michael Corbett, 1 February 2018; Bob Cosby, Telephone conversation with Michael Corbett, 3 February 2018.

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In 1947, Page opened his own office in San Francisco. Many of his early projects were in association with others, including the Glen Craggs Housing Project with Wilbur D. Peugh in 1951 and two schools with Cantin & Cantin in 1952. His design for the 1954 Mason B. Wells house in Belvedere won an Award of Merit from the Northern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

As Serraino observed, many Modernist architects of the postwar generation in the Bay Area, did not seek publicity and, despite the quality and success of their work were not well recognized and have not been remembered. Edward Page's approach to his practice fit this profile. He did not seek publicity, he intentionally kept his office small so he would have control over his own projects, and he obtained work largely through referrals. "I operated by selling trust," he said, which was gained by "achieving competence" in dealing with client's needs from listening and responding.<sup>30</sup>

When Page was hired in 1954 to design the Fireman's Fund Home Office, his father was Chairman of the Board of Directors. He insisted however, that he earned the job over many competitors through a series of small projects for the company. One lead to another over a period of time and when the big job came up, he had gained the trust and respect of company managers. On the Fireman's Fund project, Page coordinated the contributions of all. He was described as "the master" by Loring Wylie, an engineer in the Degenkolb office who had a major role working on the additions of the 1960s. Wylie remembered Page's deep involvement with and lead in solving issues with expansion joints as representative of his high level of competence and control.<sup>31</sup> On another technical matter, he designed an innovative system of dispersed lighting for Fireman's Fund in an effort to provide better working conditions.<sup>32</sup>

Following the success of the first phase of the Home Office in 1957, Page designed three subsequent additions in 1963–1967, and branch offices in Fresno, Riverside, San Jose, and Los Angeles. He also consulted on the designs of branches outside of California including those in New York, New Orleans, and Atlanta, where he advised primarily on matters related to the way the insurance business works. Apart from Fireman's Fund, his later projects included his own residence in Sausalito, a garage at the San Francisco airport, and the Faculty Club at Stanford University.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Page, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Wylie, telephone conversation.

<sup>32</sup> Cosby, telephone conversation.

<sup>33</sup> Page's interests extended to history and preservation. With three others including the engineer John J. Gould, he founded the Fort Point Museum Association in 1959. The association initiated efforts to preserve Fort Point, now a part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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In the work of Edward Page, the Fireman's Fund building was the high point of his career in several ways. It was his largest and best-known building. Its success led to work on at least seven other buildings for Fireman's Fund over the next fifteen years – Fireman's Fund would be the most important client in the history of the firm. Page's success with Fireman's Fund also opened the door to work for other corporate clients.

The International Style design of the Fireman's Fund building represented Page's personal experience of the formative period of modernism in Europe before the Bauhaus was closed by the Nazis and its leaders scattered to the United States and elsewhere. Modernism in America was initially shaped largely by immigrant architects from Europe and by Americans who studied in the United States with European immigrants like Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. Page was among a small number of Americans whose travels and encounters with modernist architects in Europe directly shaped his ideas about architecture. As his largest and best-known building, the Fireman's Fund building is the foremost example in Page's work of this experience.

The core of Bauhaus teachings was about more than the appearance and style of buildings. It was also about the process of design, the relationship of architecture and engineering, the fundamental role of engineering in architecture, and the role of the architect as the master of a collaborative effort. The Fireman's Fund building represents these things in the work of Edward Page. Working with a team that included distinguished engineers, designers, and contractors, Page was recognized and admired as the master in charge whose vision and principles were realized under his leadership.

In 1968, Edward Page took on two partners, John U. Cloudsley, Jr. and John Baleix, long-time employees who had both been hired when the work on the Fireman's Fund Home Office began. The firm of Page, Cloudsley & Baleix continued as the architects for all work on the Home Office, all of which was for interior remodelings, as long as Fireman's Fund owned the property. The principal work of the firm was for Fireman's Fund and remodeling downtown office buildings.<sup>34</sup>

### **Engineers: John J. Gould & H. J. Degenkolb, Structural Engineers**

The structural engineer for the original 1957 phase of the Fireman's Fund Home Office was the firm of John J. Gould & H. J. Degenkolb. Henry J. Degenkolb had been an employee of Gould until he became a partner in 1956. Fireman's Fund was the first big project of the new

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<sup>34</sup> John U. Cloudsley, Jr. (1926–2013), grew up in Stockton, the son of an architect. John Baleix (1928–2014) grew up in Oakland. Both studied architecture at the University of California at Berkeley. Both spent their entire careers with Edward B. Page and Page, Cloudsley & Baleix except for three months in 1959 when Baleix worked for Reid, Rockwell, Banwell & Tarics.

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partnership. After Gould died in 1961, the firm continued as Henry J. Degenkolb & Associates. The Degenkolb firm designed the principal additions to the Fireman's Fund Home Office in the period 1963–1967.

John J. Gould (1898–1961) was born in Switzerland and studied at the Engineering School in Zurich. He worked in Switzerland, Germany, France, the Middle East, and New York City before coming to San Francisco in 1925. From 1933 to 1935 he worked for the State Division of Architecture where he was involved with issues of seismic safety for schools. In 1935 he became the Chief Structural Engineer for the Golden Gate International Exposition. In 1940 he started his own firm. He was active in professional organizations and served as president of the Structural Engineers Association of Northern California. He had a particular interest in the effects of seismic forces on buildings and in designing safely in relation to those forces.

Henry J. Degenkolb (1913–1989) received a B.S. degree in civil engineering from the University of California in 1936. In 1937–1938 he worked for John J. Gould at the San Francisco Bay Exposition Company designing facilities for the Golden Gate International Exposition. During World War II he worked in various industries and in 1946 he was hired by John J. Gould as the firm's chief engineer. Looking back on his career in 1986 he said, "John [Gould] ran the office—that is, the business, the contracts, the management—and I was the center of the back room. I ran the drafting and the design and everything like that."<sup>35</sup> From this, it appears that Degenkolb was the principal structural designer of the Fireman's Fund Home Office in all its phases.

The Firm designed many of San Francisco's major structures of the 1940s–1960s including Park Merced, the International Building, the Bank of California tower, expansion of the San Francisco airport, parking garages at St. Mary's Square and the Civic Center, and many branches of the Bank of America and Pacific Telephone. The Fireman's Fund Home Office was the first large project of the firm after Degenkolb became a partner. According to the National Academy of Engineering, Henry J. Degenkolb "was responsible for the structural design of some of the most distinctive structures in California."<sup>36</sup>

Henry J. Degenkolb was a man of enormous energy and accomplishment. He was an "earthquake chaser" who traveled to earthquake sites around the world to better understand the effects of seismic forces on buildings. He was active in many professional groups, especially those concerned with seismic issues and building codes. At the time of the completion of the Fireman's

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<sup>35</sup> Henry J. Degenkolb, *Henry J. Degenkolb: Connections*, The EERI Oral History Series, an oral history conducted 1984-1986 by Stanley Scott, Institute of Governmental Studies, and the Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, CA (Oakland: Earthquake Engineering Research Institute), 1994.

<sup>36</sup> William J. Hall, "Henry J. Degenkolb, 1913-1989," *Memorial Tributes: Volume 4* (Washington: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 1991), 46.

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Fund Home Office in 1957 he was president of the Structural Engineers Association of Northern California. He was also a lecturer in engineering at the University of California from 1946 to 1961.

The Fireman's Fund building was the first major project of the firm of John J. Gould and H.J. Degenkolb, which later became Henry J. Degenkolb & Associate. The firm is noted for its innovative designs in a long-lived practice that has included many of San Francisco's major structures during the initial design and subsequent expansions of the Fireman's Fund building and continuing up to the present day. The Fireman's Fund building—with its innovative structural design that provided open floors with minimal columns and exterior walls of glass—was a successful debut for the partnership of John J. Gould and Henry J. Degenkolb and for Degenkolb's role as principal designer of the partnership and his subsequent practice after Gould's death. Fireman's Fund represents the beginning of the reputation of Gould and Degenkolb as among the leading structural engineers in San Francisco in the post-World War II period.

#### **Landscape Architects: Eckbo, Royston, and Williams (ERW)/Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams (EDAW)**

In 1945, Garrett Eckbo, Robert Royston, and Ed Williams—three of the pioneers of modern landscape architecture—formed the partnership of Eckbo, Royston, and Williams (ERW). The firm was responsible for the original mid-1950s landscape design for the Fireman's Fund site, which embodied the characteristics of the modern movement in landscape architecture after World War II. The firm's projects (1945–1958) helped to expand the profession of landscape architecture beyond the scale of the individual residential garden and contributed to the popularization of the modernist landscape design vocabulary and to modernism as an approach to creating outdoor spaces that addressed contemporary needs. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), in a history that accompanied an award presented to EDAW (its successor firm), noted that ERW “established a compelling portfolio of modernist landscapes.”<sup>37</sup> The partnership soon became “one of the leading firms in the country, highly regarded for its advanced planning, innovative modern vocabulary, and its quality of execution,<sup>38</sup> and in 1950, ERW was awarded the Gold Medal in Landscape Architecture by the New York Architectural League.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> ASLA, *EDAW: Firm History*, accessed 4 January 2018, [http://www.asla.org/uploadedfiles/EDAW\\_History.pdf](http://www.asla.org/uploadedfiles/EDAW_History.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Marc Treib and Dorothee Imbert, *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, “Arts Awards Announced, Architectural League Gives Medals in Gold Medal Show,” 2 June 1950.

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ERW actively promoted its work and was regularly written about in popular magazines, professional journals, and newspapers of the era; examples include *Sunset*, *House Beautiful*, *House & Garden*, *Architectural Review*, *Progressive Architecture*, and *Architectural Record*. Additionally, ERW designs were regularly used to illustrate a reoccurring feature on modern residential landscape design that ran in the *Los Angeles Times* during the 1950s. The firm gained additional exposure in the early 1950s after Eckbo's book *Landscape for Living*, which was illustrated with examples of ERW's work, was published. The book defined "the modern discipline of landscape architecture for his professional peers and a broader readership"<sup>40</sup> and placed these ideas within the context of the post-World War II society.

As was true of all landscape architectural practices during the early years after the war, ERW was heavily involved in creating residential gardens. By the early 1950s, ERW had "hundreds of completed gardens in four states," with more than 50 located in Marin County alone and others in virtually all of the developing suburban communities in the Bay Area.<sup>41</sup> The firm was a pioneer in expanding the practice of landscape architecture into the scale of neighborhood and community design.<sup>42</sup> The Standard Oil Rod and Gun Club in Richmond (1949) was Royston's (and the firm's) first major park commission. "The facility was an immediate success and attracted the attention of Bay Area planners representing several municipalities."<sup>43</sup> Other park and playground projects soon followed, "many of which gained attention in the national media."<sup>44</sup> The firm worked on numerous new housing projects in both northern and southern California. The 258-acre cooperative housing project of Ladera on the San Francisco peninsula featured an innovation design with "a linear park which tied together the residential clusters and separated automobile and pedestrian circulation."<sup>45</sup> This was an early application of Royston's concept for the "landscape matrix," which was his term for the use of connective or continuous open space around which the balance of the design was oriented.<sup>46</sup> The implementation of this concept into community planning was a major innovation within the profession.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to Fireman's Fund, ERW worked on a range of public outdoor spaces in San Francisco in the post-World War II era including the Venetian Room Roof Garden at the

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<sup>40</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Garrett Eckbo*, accessed 4 December 2017, [http://tclf.org/pioneer/garrett\\_eckbo](http://tclf.org/pioneer/garrett_eckbo).

<sup>41</sup> *Marin Independent Journal*, "Prize-Winning Landscape Firm," 19 January 1952.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Walker and Melanie Simo, *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 141.

<sup>43</sup> Reuben M. Rainey and J.C. Miller, *Robert Royston*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://tclf.org/pioneer>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> John Wallace, *Robert Royston, Landscape Architect* (University of California, Thesis, May 1992), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Rainey and Miller, *Robert Royston*.

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Fairmont Hotel (1946), the entrance court to the Palace of the Legion of Honor (1950), Portsmouth Square (1954), and St. Mary's Park (1957). St. Mary's was one of the earliest large-scale roof-top gardens in the city and sat atop a parking garage in the Chinatown neighborhood. ERW was the landscape architect for Stonestown, a retail, residential, and office complex in the suburban western part of San Francisco (built between 1949 and 1952).

In 1946, Eckbo moved to Los Angeles and opened a second office. This move "expanded the firm's opportunities and gave each partner more breathing space."<sup>48</sup> Royston and Williams, both of whom lived in Marin County, remained in the San Francisco office. Although each partner typically took the lead on a specific project and then oversaw all phases of the work, the designs were generally a combination of individual and collaborative input. Williams, describing the partners working methods in a 1952 profile in the *Marin Independent*, stated that "although we work as individuals—there is a complete exchange of ideas."<sup>49</sup> Another profile of the firm, in the September 1946 issue of the *Architect and Engineer*, explained that the three met as needed in Paso Robles, which was the halfway point between their two offices, "to continue and extend the original ideal of their association which is based upon the premise that three minds are better than one if the best each one has to offer is brought to the fore."<sup>50</sup>

In their history of this pioneering firm in the book *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape*, Peter Walker and Melanie Simo noted that "although each [partner] was unquestionably capable of running his own firm . . . the three achieved greater strength and flexibility in partnership. Eckbo, the preeminent theorist and reformer, not only led the firm intellectually but also had a broad vision of the potentialities of the field—perhaps broader than any other practitioner at the beginning of the postwar era in the United States. Royston, a gifted designer with a fascination for formal exploration, remained deeply committed to the social purposes of his built work, particularly the private gardens, neighborhood parks, and playgrounds."<sup>51</sup> Williams was "an open space enthusiast who, long before the environmental movement, saw the importance of managing urban growth and conserving natural environments."<sup>52</sup>

In 1958, the ERW partnership was amicably dissolved. Robert Royston formed a new firm with Asa Hanamoto and David Mayes, two associates at ERW. Eckbo and Williams along with Francis Dean, who had become an ERW partner in 1953, formed Eckbo, Dean, and Williams.

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<sup>48</sup> Walker and Simo, 132.

<sup>49</sup> *Marin Independent Journal*, "Prize-Winning Landscape Firm," 19 January 1952.

<sup>50</sup> *Architect and Engineer*, "Landscape Architecture A Professional Adventure in Use of Outdoor Space," (September 1946), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Walker and Simo, 118.

<sup>52</sup> Fay Sweet, *The Bigger Picture* (London: Blackdog Publishing, 2009), 6.



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With the addition of Don Austin, in 1964, the partnership became Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams (EDAW). The firm officially became known as EDAW in 1973.

During the 1960s, landscape architectural firms became involved in planning and analysis for entire regions not just individual communities. EDAW, “guided by a progressive vision of the leadership role of landscape architecture,”<sup>53</sup> took on these larger scale projects and was at the forefront of this expansion of the profession. The firm prepared California’s first state-wide open space study and followed this with a similar plan for the State of Hawaii.<sup>54</sup> During this period, EDAW began to work on international projects, and as a result of this work, EDAW is recognized as having made a significant contribution to opening the door for western design and planning firms to work in Asia. As it expanded the scale and complexity of its work, EDAW added new professional skills to its capabilities and became recognized for its environmental resources planning and management and its visual analysis capabilities.<sup>55</sup>

By the 1990s, EDAW had grown into a 400-person firm with sixteen offices, including ones in London, Sydney, and Hong Kong that accommodated the needs of its growing international presence. Its expertise ranged from “urban planning and urban regeneration to environmental management and resort design.”<sup>56</sup> Examples of three projects that illustrate the scope of the firm’s work include a plan for the restoration of the Everglades, Washington, D. C.’s Monumental Core Framework Plan, and the Jinji Lake Waterfront, a masterplan for a new 600,000-person community, in Suzhou, China.<sup>57</sup>

In 2005, EDAW, was acquired by AECOM Technology Corporation, “an expanding family of companies offering integrated services in engineering, transportation, planning and environmental expertise.”<sup>58</sup> The firm continued to operate as a distinct entity, as EDAW AECOM, until 2009. At that time, the EDAW name was retired as AECOM fully merged the identities of all its subsidiary firms under the AECOM logo.<sup>59</sup> In recognition of the firm’s contributions to the profession of landscape architecture ASLA awarded EDAW the Landscape Architecture Firm Award in 2009.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *EDAW*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://www.tclf.org/pioneer>.

<sup>54</sup> EDAW, *Open Spaces* (San Francisco, CA: Diablo Press, 1969), back cover.

<sup>55</sup> Sweet, 6-9 and 220; ASLA, *EDAW: Firm History*.

<sup>56</sup> Sweet, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Sweet, 6-9 and 220; ASLA, *EDAW: Firm History*; The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *EDAW*.

<sup>58</sup> Sweet, 9.

<sup>59</sup> *World Landscape Architect*, “EDAW is now fully merged into AECOM,” accessed 4 January 2018, <http://worldarchitect.com>.

<sup>60</sup> Sweet, 9; ASLA, *EDAW: Firm History*.

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*Garrett Eckbo*

Garrett Eckbo (1910–2000) was born in New York but moved with his family to Alameda, California in 1912, where he spent the remainder of his childhood. He studied landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley and graduated in 1935. After a one year stint designing residential landscapes for a nursery business in Los Angeles, Eckbo placed first in a nationwide design competition and received a scholarship to Harvard's Graduate School of Design; he graduated with a Masters in Landscape Architecture in 1938. While at Harvard, Eckbo chafed at the restrictive Beaux Arts education that dominated the landscape design department. He found more in common with the idea that "architecture and design had a social role and could help improve the quality of life," which was being put forth by Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius and architect/designer Marcel Breuer, both of whom came to Harvard after fleeing Nazi Germany.<sup>61</sup> It was during this period that Eckbo began his life-long practice of writing about his ideas and pushing to expand the boundaries of the landscape architecture profession. In 1938–39, he published, with Harvard classmates Dan Kiley and James Rose, three articles in *Pencil Points* (a leading architectural journal) that described their modernist design ideals and laid out how society, ecology, and landscape architecture were interrelated; these essays became known as the "Harvard Revolution" and helped to usher in the modern era of landscape design.<sup>62</sup>

Eckbo directly influenced several generations of practitioners through his teaching—first at the University of Southern California (1946–58) and then at the University of California, Berkeley (1963–1969) where he was chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture—and through his writing. His book *Landscape for Living*, first published in 1950 and illustrated with examples of work by ERW, defined "the modern discipline of landscape architecture for his professional peers and a broader readership"<sup>63</sup> and put these ideas into the context of the post-World War II society. Eckbo went on to write additional books, each of which continued the themes of his first book within different contexts. He devoted the last ten years of his life to "theoretical study and publication."<sup>64</sup> His last book, *People in a Landscape*, was published in 1998 and continued reoccurring themes of his professional life that landscape design can be an agent of societal change<sup>65</sup> and that "landscapes can link society and nature."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sweet, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Treib and Imbert, 25-28 and 182-183; University of California Berkeley Environmental Design Archive, *Garrett Eckbo*, accessed 4 December 2017, <http://archives.ced.berkeley.edu/collections/eckbo-garrett>.

<sup>63</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Garrett Eckbo*.

<sup>64</sup> Treib and Imbert, 185.

<sup>65</sup> Dorothee Imbert, *Garrett Eckbo*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://tclf.org/pioneer>.

<sup>66</sup> Julie V. Iovine, "Garrett Eckbo Is Dead at 89," *New York Times*, 18 June 2000.

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In his numerous residential designs of the 1950s, Eckbo developed a “contemporary vocabulary drawn from the arts of painting and sculpture” that resulted in “spaces and forms that viewers read immediately as modern.”<sup>67</sup> A sampling of his other major design contributions—which illustrate the breadth of his work—include his collaboration (1939–1942) with architects Vernon DeMars and Burton Cairns and landscape architect Francis Violich in applying modernist ideas to the design of approximately 50 migrant worker’s camps for the Farm Security Administration; the widely-publicized ALCOA Forecast Garden (1952–1966) where Eckbo demonstrated the multiple uses for aluminum in the landscape; the Fulton Mall (completed in 1964) which redesigned Fresno’s central business district into a pedestrian mall in an effort to retain its viability as a regional retail center; and the Union Bank Square in Los Angeles (1968), a three-acre plaza next to the 40-story Union Bank headquarters where the design’s “biomorphic and organic forms recall paintings by Joan Miro.”<sup>68</sup>

In their book *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living*, that accompanied an exhibition on his life, work, and influences on the profession at the University Art Museum in Berkeley in the late 1990s, Marc Treib and Dorothy Imbert wrote that Eckbo “played a central role in the formation and practice of modern landscape architecture”<sup>69</sup> and is considered “. . . one of the most influential landscape architects of this century, fitting design to the needs and desires of contemporary life. His contribution [was] distinct for addressing in equal measure society, the natural landscape, art, and technique.”<sup>70</sup> He was awarded the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Medal (1975), the highest honor bestowed on an individual by the society. In 1998, he became the first person to be named a Distinguished Alumnus at the University of California, Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design.

### *Robert Royston*

A California native, Royston (1918–2008) was raised on his family’s walnut ranch in the Santa Clara Valley and received his degree in landscape architecture from the University of California, Berkeley in 1940. After serving in the United States Navy during World War II, Royston returned to the Bay Area and joined Eckbo and Williams to form ERW in 1945. In 1958, Royston separated from ERW and formed Royston, Hanamoto, and Mayes (RHM). The Royston firm had a number of different partnership structures and names through the years before becoming Royston, Hanamoto, Alley, and Abey (RHAA) in 1979. RHAA continues to exist today and maintains offices in San Francisco and Mill Valley.

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<sup>67</sup> Treib and Imbert, 94-95.

<sup>68</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Union Bank Square*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/union-bank-square>.

<sup>69</sup> Treib and Imbert, inside cover.

<sup>70</sup> Treib and Imbert, viii.

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Royston played a major role in the development of the post-World War II landscape in the Bay Area, and, as noted in a profile in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2006, “it’s hard to spend a day in the Bay Area without seeing a landscape designed by the firm.”<sup>71</sup> Royston’s firm designed the landscapes associated with civic buildings, numerous education campuses and planned communities, and over sixty parks.<sup>72</sup> His early suburban park projects—undertaken between 1946 and 1965—are considered among the most important achievements of his career. In their book *Modern Public Parks: Robert Royston and the Suburban Park*, Reuben Rainey and J. C. Miller made the following assessment of this contribution: “During this twenty year period Royston and his professional partners created a series of suburban parks of varying scale that pioneered new directions in American park design. These projects were innovative in their spatial organization, design details, and materials, creatively reshaping American park design traditions to meet the unprecedented needs of postwar suburban expansions. They attracted national attention in design periodicals and earned a number of design awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects.”<sup>73</sup>

By the time he retired in 1998, Royston was widely recognized as one of the pioneers in modern landscape architecture. He influenced the profession through his design innovations in the 1950s and 1960s, the collaborative work of his firm, and his impact on future landscape architects as an educator at his alma mater and other institutions. Royston was awarded numerous awards during his career including ASLA Fellow (1975), the AIA Medal (1978), and the ASLA Medal (1989), the highest honor awarded by the organization.<sup>74</sup> In 2000, he was named a Distinguished Alumnus at the University of California, Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design.

### *Ed Williams*

Ed Williams (1914–1984) was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1914 but moved with his family to Berkeley in 1929. He was a classmate and friend of Eckbo’s at UC Berkeley and graduated with his degree in landscape architecture 1935. The range of his work, cited in a profile of ERW in the *Architect and Engineer* in 1946, highlighted both William’s interests and the expanding breadth of the profession of landscape architecture; the article stated that he had designed parks and playgrounds, had worked on preparing a post war program of public works for San Mateo County that “served as a model for other counties and communities,” and had experience in zoning, transit surveys, master planning, subdivision design, private gardens, and

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<sup>71</sup> Dave Weinstein, “Painting an Abstract Landscape . . .,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 December 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Reuben M. Rainey and J.C. Miller, *Modern Public Parks: Robert Royston and the Suburban Park* (San Francisco, CA: William Stout Publishers, 2006), 140.

<sup>73</sup> Rainey and Miller, *Modern Public Parks*, ix.

<sup>74</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Robert Royston*.

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estates. During World War II, he became the head of the mechanical engineering section at Western Pipe and Steel.<sup>75</sup>

In 1940, he and Eckbo founded their first partnership. Williams went on to be a founding partner in the two important twentieth century landscape architecture firms—ERW and EDAW—that evolved from this initial partnership. Williams remained in the EDAW partnership through the rest of his career. In a profile on the ERW in *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape*, Peter Walker and Melanie Simo noted that Williams was a “skillful designer” who had “placed second in the national competition that sent Eckbo to Harvard.”<sup>76</sup> However his real impacts on the profession were in his work in environmental planning and his management abilities that nurtured the growth of EDAW from a small firm to a large corporation with offices around the globe. Walker and Simo noted that “as the firm grew, Williams assumed more responsibilities in management and planning. For his partners and younger associates, he remained a stabilizing influence—a rock of integrity in a fluid, changing world.”<sup>77</sup> In the 1960s, Williams became the partner in charge of EDAW’s large-scale planning efforts and was at the forefront of expanding the profession into environmental planning. He directed EDAW’s efforts for California’s first state-wide open space study in the mid-1960s and a similar plan for the State of Hawaii.<sup>78</sup> Williams was made a Fellow of ASLA for his designs and for his service to the profession.<sup>79</sup>

## Evaluation

The Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company Home Office is significant under Criterion C as the work of three masters, the architect Edward B. Page, the engineering firm of John J. Gould & H.J. Degenkolb/Henry J. Degenkolb & Associates, and the landscape architectural firm of Eckbo, Royston, & Williams (ERW)/Eckbo, Austin, Dean, and Williams (EDAW).

Edward B. Page was a member of the postwar generation of architects in the Bay Area who introduced modernism on a large scale to the area. He was also a direct link through his experience as a young man, to the architectural ferment over modernism in Europe. The Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company Home Office was his largest and best-known project and is the best representative of his career and work.

John J. Gould & H.J. Degenkolb/Henry J. Degenkolb & Associates and its successor Degenkolb Engineers has been one of the leading structural engineering firms in California from its

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<sup>75</sup> *Architect and Engineer*, “Landscape Architecture A Professional Adventure in Use of Outdoor Space,” 20-22.

<sup>76</sup> Walker and Simo, 133.

<sup>77</sup> Walker and Simo, 133.

<sup>78</sup> EDAW, *Open Spaces*, back cover.

<sup>79</sup> ASLA, *EDAW: Firm History*; ASLA, *Fellows Data Base*.

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founding to the present day. The Fireman's Fund building—with its innovative structural design that provided open floors with minimal columns and exterior walls of glass—represents the beginning of the reputation of Gould and Degenkolb as among the leading structural engineers in San Francisco in the post-World War II period.

ERW was established in 1945 by three of the pioneers of modern landscape architecture—Garrett Eckbo, Robert Royston, and Ed Williams. ERW was responsible for the original mid-1950s landscape design for the Fireman's Fund site, and its successor firm EDAW designed the landscape features associated with the mid-1960s additions. During the period of significance, ERW /EDAW was recognized as one of the country's leading landscape architectural firms. Their designs and writings contributed to the popularization of the modernist landscape design vocabulary and to modernism as an approach to creating outdoor spaces that addressed contemporary needs within a broad range of settings. The Fireman's Fund site is significant as an example of the firm's mastery of modern design within the corporate landscape context.

### **CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE/LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office is a single property that has significant components of architecture and landscape architecture, each of which has a specific context. These contexts are presented below followed by an evaluation of the property as a whole.

#### **Modern Architecture**

The design of the Fireman's Fund Home Office Building drew on the main stream of the history of Modern Architecture, beginning with its European origins: the Bauhaus and the International Style. At the same time, it was influenced by the forces that translated European modernism for the United States.

The Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, was a school of the arts that sought to heal the division that many saw between the arts and craftsmanship, a division that was an outgrowth of capitalism and the industrialization of western society. The school taught a great variety of crafts and building construction along with theory of art. All of these things could be brought together in architecture, unofficially the first among equals. Unlike the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Bauhaus taught that good design, which was the product of this education, should be applied to mass production and that this was necessary in a modern highly technological society. The mass production of well-designed products including building parts and buildings was an important means of addressing the need for housing and other social issues. The creation of beautiful and useful products in a technological society required collaborative efforts that combined art, craftsmanship, and engineering.

As an emblem of its ideals, in 1926 the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to a new building in Dessau. The building was a composition of rectangular wings, all but one of them two to four

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stories in height, at right angles to each other. Each wing was functionally differentiated from the others and they were arranged so that they framed outdoor spaces. In this way the building and its outdoor spaces functioned together as one. The building was a modern structure of reinforced concrete with steel sash windows. No ornament was applied to the building apart from the lettering of its name.

The idea of the International Style was based in large part on the example of the Bauhaus and the work of its teachers and students. The style was named in a 1932 book, *The International Style* by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, who wrote it as a follow-up to an exhibition they curated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1964, Hitchcock said that the term, “defines a type of architectural design which came into existence in the early 1920s, developed at the hands of a few leaders to classic expression by 1930, and from that time on found wider and wider acceptance throughout the world.” Its three principal elements, he said, were “[1] a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass,... [2] regularity rather than axial symmetry ... as the chief means of ordering design,” and [3] a proscription against “arbitrary applied decoration.”<sup>80</sup> The idea was not that the International Style was a single style but that it was a way of responding to technology that should be the same in any country and that it represented a viable way of addressing the needs for housing and other social problems.

Politics in Germany closed the Bauhaus in 1933 and many of its leaders came to the United States. Walter Gropius went to Harvard, Mies van der Rohe, the head of the Bauhaus at the time it closed, went to the Illinois Institute of Technology, and others went to various parts of the country. Other European modern architects not connected to the Bauhaus—Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler, Erich Mendelsohn, and Serge Chermayeff—went to California. These architects and Americans who were influenced by their work brought the International Style to the United States. Before World War II, the number of International Style buildings in the United States was extremely limited.

After World War II as it took hold in the United States, the International Style was embraced in varying degrees for different types of buildings and clients, perhaps most of all for corporate office buildings. In the process of its popularization, the designers and builders of the style omitted the social goals that were part of its original rationale. The style came to represent the values of modern corporations including faith in technology and solving problems based on reason and science. The design of International Style buildings depended on physical features like new technologies and materials. It also depended on a deep understanding of the purpose of buildings and on research on how they are to be used.

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<sup>80</sup> Gerd Hatje, ed., “International Style,” *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 151-155.

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In San Francisco, the best-known early examples of the International Style were a few houses designed by Richard Neutra in the 1930s. After the war, Erich Mendelsohn designed the Maimonides Health Center in 1950. The office of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill opened in San Francisco in 1945 and designed International Style buildings like Mount Zion Hospital in 1950, the Greyhound Maintenance Facility (now California College of the Arts) in 1951, and the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey in 1954.

The most concentrated area of new corporate office buildings was in downtown San Francisco where the principal builder of these buildings was the insurance industry. Most but not all of these buildings were in the International Style. Of fifteen corporate office buildings downtown built between 1946 and 1965, thirteen were in some version of the International Style, one was in the Moderne Style, and one was based on Independence Hall in Philadelphia, an eighteenth-century Georgian Style brick building. Nine of the fifteen buildings including the Georgian Style building were for the insurance industry.

Modern Architecture had to do with more than the look of buildings. It had to do with the process of the design of buildings, with the adoption of new technologies and materials, and with the relationship of buildings to their surroundings, both their immediate surroundings and their greater surroundings—with their own site and with the city. It also had to do with the expression of the relationship between structure and technology, represented by Louis Sullivan's statement that "form follows function."

The architect of the Fireman's Fund Home Office Building, Edward Page, absorbed ideas about modernism from architectural journals, conversations with architects from many countries in Paris cafes, travel around Europe in 1930 to see early buildings of the Modern Movement, and from fellow architects of his generation. His experience, and that of the architectural profession in the United States in general during World War II reinforced many elements of the Modern Movement—the role of engineers, the use of new technologies and materials, designing without ornament, an economy of means, and the primacy of function as a generator of design.

According to Serraino, writing about San Francisco's modern architects in the 1940s–1960s, "Each took a stance on what being modern meant, and each practiced accordingly."<sup>81</sup> Edward Page's approach to modernism put a premium on technology and sophisticated accommodation of function. Among the best-known figures of Modern Architecture, Page admired Eero Saarinen above all others because "he was the only one who understood that sixty percent of a modern

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<sup>81</sup> Pierluigi Serraino, *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), 8.



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building was mechanical equipment, electrical, and air-conditioning.” Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier did not understand this, he said.<sup>82</sup>

While there is no known evidence of any direct connection, the Fireman’s Fund Home Office echoes the design of several of the most influential International Style buildings. Its basic organizational concept is like that of the Bauhaus itself, an arrangement of low-rise perpendicular wings with separate functions and with the wings framing outdoor areas that function with the building. Like the famous property of Philip Johnson, one of the authors of *The International Style*, with its Glass House and its Brick House that were completed in 1949, one of the buildings of the Fireman’s Fund Home Office is glass and the other is brick. Like the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, designed by Eero Saarinen and built 1953–1955, the Fireman’s Fund Home Office represents a radical departure from most contemporary corporate offices as a low-rise building on landscaped grounds in a suburban location.

### **Modernism in the Landscape**

American landscape design during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based on ideals of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Books, such as *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* by Henry Hubbard and Theodora Kimball (first published in 1917), codified an appropriate spatial organization, style, and features for various types of landscapes and emphasized that the designer’s skill or creative input should be focused on how to adapt these standards or patterns to a particular site. Until the latter part of the Great Depression, all university landscape architecture programs in the country taught within this Beaux-Arts framework, and landscape designers absorbed this viewpoint during their training and put it into practice when they graduated. They typically selected or adapted structures, planting arrangements, and details, such as site furnishings, from multiple eras and European traditions to create a formal organization of landscape space with an eclectic mix of historical references.<sup>83</sup>

By the late 1930s, a Modernist sensibility to landscape design had just begun to evolve. In 1938, Harvard professor and designer Christopher Tunnard published *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* in which he asserted that “the old values and the old forms . . . could no longer satisfy contemporary artistic and planning needs.”<sup>84</sup> He believed that the right style for the twentieth century was no style at all but rather a new conception of planning the human environment.<sup>85</sup> Tunnard was reacting against the lack of connection between landscape design within the

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<sup>82</sup> Page, interview.

<sup>83</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Beaux Arts/Neoclassical*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://tclf.org>.

<sup>84</sup> Marc Treib, “Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture” in *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 36.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Tunnard, “Modern Gardens for Modern Houses . . .,” *Landscape Architecture* 32 (January 1942).

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predominant Beaux Arts tradition and the realities of modern life. Through his writing and teaching at Harvard, Tunnard championed a modern landscape commensurate in its conceptual and aesthetic authority to the best of modern architecture.<sup>86</sup>

Modernism in the landscape first appeared in residential garden design<sup>87</sup>, and during the 1940s, California designer Thomas Church became one of the leading interpreters of modernist tenets within this setting. The importance of California to the development of the modern landscape design movement continued after World War II. The explosion of residential landscape commissions that accompanied the postwar suburban housing boom provided landscape architects with increased opportunities to apply the tenets of modernism to gardens. *Sunset Magazine*, headquartered in Menlo Park, played a major role in popularizing a version of modernism suited to the California climate and lifestyle through its ongoing articles that showed the general public what a modern garden (and house) could look like and how it could function. Dianne Harris, in her article “Writing a Modern Landscape: Thomas Church as Author,” noted that historians and theoreticians have recognized the essential role played by the popular press in publicizing modern design and in helping to promote a new way of seeing “that became essential to the formation of Modernism in design.”<sup>88</sup> Modern design became an accepted expression of California’s “age of abundance,” historian Kevin Starr’s characterization of the state’s post World War II economic boom.<sup>89</sup>

Garrett Eckbo, one of the principal theorists of modern landscape design, wrote that the “modernist approach to landscape architecture was concerned with the relationship of the landscape to modern architecture and the relationship within the site between space, materials, and people.”<sup>90</sup> Modernism in landscape architecture reflected a concern for the specific site or space rather than an adherence to established patterns based on historical forms, which emphasized the Beaux-Arts principles of balance, symmetry, proportionality, and axiality. Designers rejected the axis and symmetry and instead used geometric and biomorphic forms for arrangements of hardscape, circulation, and planting which together often created abstract spatial compositions. In the residential designs where modernism was first expressed, there was a strong functional and visual relationship between interior and exterior space, as expressed in buildings featuring large expanses of windows, courtyards being framed by the buildings, and patios that

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<sup>86</sup> Catherine Howlett, “Modernism and American Landscape Architecture,” in *Modern Landscape Architecture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>87</sup> Treib, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Dianne Harris, “Writing a Modern Landscape . . .,” in *Thomas Church Landscape Architect* (San Francisco, CA: William Stout Publishers, 2003), 178.

<sup>89</sup> Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Walker and Simo, 7.

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extended living spaces into the outdoors. Additionally, the same materials used for buildings were often used in the landscape's structures (such as walls or arbors) and paving. Rather than merely being a decorative element, plants were used to define outdoor space. The lawn became a symbol of the landscape in post-World II suburban communities and was used in small and large settings—individual homes, parks, commercial and educational campuses, and civic spaces—as an organizing element of space.<sup>91</sup>

Modern landscapes were intended for people to use and were adapted to the real lives and needs of the times. For example given the supremacy of the automobile in the post-World War II suburban environment, parking lots were incorporated as a conscious part of designs. The expanding post-World War II economy provided landscape architects with a multitude of opportunities to adapt the modernist vocabulary for gardens to the new parks, educational and commercial campuses, and civic spaces being developed in the post war economic boom. This expansion in the profession of landscape architecture was led by a new generation of landscape architects, which included at its forefront Garrett Eckbo, Robert Royston, and Ed Williams—the three partners in the firm responsible for the landscape design of the Fireman's Fund site.

### **Landscape of the Corporate Headquarters**

A new type of cultural landscape, created by a synthesis of modernist buildings and landscape design, developed during the post-World War II era as corporate headquarters moved out of the central city. Louise A. Mozingo, professor of landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley and the author of several articles and a book on this development, has noted that corporations moved out of the urban core for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the larger sites available in the suburbs allowed corporations to construct new buildings that fit their current management structure and operational needs. "Efficient office organization now required flexible, expandable offices with movable partitions rather than fixed walls. The dense, constricted downtown became untenable."<sup>92</sup>

By the early 1950s, insurance companies had spearheaded this exodus from the central business district to the peripheral residential areas of the city or to suburban sites. An article in *Business Week* in 1951, quoted by Mozingo in her article "The Corporate Estate in the USA, 1954–1964," noted that there were not enough downtown spaces "in the right places" to meet companies' needs for expansion. The management of these insurance companies believed that it was hard to "hire first class personnel" to work in downtowns that were viewed as undesirable environments. ("Management thinks workers will be happier looking at trees instead of grimy buildings and

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<sup>91</sup> David Streatfield, "Where Pine and Palm Meet . . .," *Landscape Journal* 4, No. 2 (Fall 1985), 68; Treib, 53-59.

<sup>92</sup> Louise A. Mozingo, "Campus, Estate, and Park . . .," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 258.

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listening to birds instead of honking taxis.”<sup>93</sup>) The integration of the architecture and landscape typically featured a low-rise, centrally-sited, modernist building(s), an entry drive and large parking lots which were a reflection of the domination of the automobile as the preferred means of transportation for employees and visitors, and an enveloping landscape setting or “green surround” which was often designed to resemble an idealized suburban space.<sup>94</sup> The buildings and parking lots occupied only a fraction of a site’s acreage and the landscaped lawns and outdoor spaces contributed to the “seamlessness between the interior and exterior space, which was a common goal of the modernist architectural aesthetic.”<sup>95</sup> Mozingo noted that corporations “considered the designed landscape essential to the functioning of their management facilities.”<sup>96</sup> This new type of corporate headquarters—with its modernist architecture and landscape—became a part of the effort to “reconceive the white-collar workplace, retain targeted employee groups, and signal eminent corporate standing,”<sup>97</sup> and resulted in what became an “identifiable place, creating a tangible symbol of the corporate persona.”<sup>98</sup>

During the 1950s, landscape architects incorporated these new corporate headquarters in their practices. They became partners—with architects—in the creation of these new corporate environments and developed designs that established connections between the building, the site, and the surrounding landscape.<sup>99</sup> The site planning, automobile approaches, different hierarchies of entrances, parking lots, and lawns used to create an interface between the building and the surrounding landscape, and the outdoor spaces of the post-World War II corporate landscapes all exemplified the functionalism of mid-20th century modernism.<sup>100</sup>

The development and design of the Fireman’s Fund Home Office, located on a 10-acre site on California Street outside of the traditional urban core of the city, was an example of this new corporate environment in San Francisco that exhibited all of these characteristics. An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, published to coincide with the official dedication on 9 July 1957, noted that architect Edward B. Page designed the Fireman’s Fund building “from inside out” to meet the specific nature of the insurance company’s work flow within and between departments. The article emphasized the building’s modern sensibility as expressed through the design and materials of the architecture, the company’s concern for the working environment, and an

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<sup>93</sup> Louise A. Mozingo, “The Corporate Estate in the USA, 1954-64 . . .,” *Journal of Garden History & Designed Landscapes* 20, No. 1 (April 2000), 28.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>97</sup> Mozingo, “Campus, Estate, and Park,” 266.

<sup>98</sup> Mozingo, “The Corporate Estate,” 26.

<sup>99</sup> Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, *Corporate Office Park*, accessed 4 December 2017, <https://tclf.org>.

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identification with a suburban—rather than urban—landscape setting. This article noted that the new headquarters was “designed to provide efficient business operation and a maximum of light, air, and good morale.”<sup>101</sup> The article described the contemporary nature of the building (its “glass, steel, and aluminum structure; the “ceiling to floor windows that permit sweeping vistas of the city’s skyline”; a “feeling of spaciousness”) while noting a range of amenities that acknowledged the needs of the employees including ample parking, a large cafeteria, and “lounges, reading rooms, guest rooms, and a sheltered outdoor terrace”—all of which were set within “extensive lawns and gardens.”<sup>102</sup> Fireman’s Fund came to be recognized as a local expression of the modern suburban corporate headquarters.<sup>103</sup> It appeared in a 1969 article in the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner-Chronicle* that provided local examples of corporate plazas and landscapes that contributed to the common good while creating an identifiable image for the company. This article noted that “whereas insurance companies suffer chronically from a high rate of employee turnover, that problem has been minimal since Fireman’s Fund’s 1200 workers began enjoying the company park.”<sup>104</sup>

## Evaluation

The Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company Home Office, a single property including both architectural and landscape elements which were designed to complement each other, is significant under National Register Criterion C as an example of a corporate headquarters in San Francisco which reflects mid-twentieth-century modernist design principles. The property is a synthesis of International Style buildings and mid-twentieth century modernist landscape features which reflect key characteristics of a post-World War II suburban corporate headquarters. As an example of the International Style, the building itself expresses the use of new technologies and materials, designing without ornament, an economy of means, a focus on function, an orientation to the landscape, and a process of design that resulted in a characteristic expression in glass and concrete. Key characteristics of a post-World War II suburban corporate headquarters are expressed in the design’s centrally-sited modernist building within a park-like setting that accommodates the automobile as the primary form of transportation and through the arrangement of the office building’s low-rise perpendicular wings which frame outdoor spaces designed to function with the building. The design expresses mid-twentieth century modernist landscape forms and materials including the combination of geometric and biomorphic forms in the design of the Terrace, the use of brick and concrete materials in landscape structures and paving to promote the integration between architecture and landscape, and the presence of a

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<sup>101</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Fireman’s Fund Shows New Home, 9 July 1957.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> An article (6 February 1964) by *San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* columnist Guy Wright described Fireman’s Fund as a “refreshing example” of the type of corporate headquarters that the city should be promoting.

<sup>104</sup> Gerald Adams, “Clearings in the Concrete Jungle,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 November 1969.

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broad lawn—an iconic feature in suburban corporate landscapes during the post-World War II era—along the west side and south sides of the property.

## **BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY**

### **Laurel Hill Cemetery**

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office is located on the southeast corner of the site of the Laurel Hill Cemetery. The entire cemetery was in a multi-block area bound by Parker Avenue, California Street, Presidio Avenue, and a diagonal line from a point on Presidio Avenue between Sutter and Post Streets to a point near the intersection of Parker and Euclid Avenues.

Laurel Hill Cemetery was begun in 1854 as Lone Mountain Cemetery, one of four cemeteries established in the 1850s and 1860s in central San Francisco as Yerba Buena Cemetery and others further downtown filled up. The name was changed to Laurel Hill Cemetery in 1867. It was referred to as the "Pioneer Cemetery" and was the most prestigious San Francisco burial place for several decades.<sup>105</sup> The design of the cemetery followed the example of parklike cemeteries first built in the eastern United States in the 1830s-1840s with winding paths and landscaped grounds.

Among notable people buried there were Andrew Hallidie, inventor of the cable car; Charles Crocker, one of the Big Four builders of the transcontinental railroad; William Ralston and William Sharon of the Bank of California; and eleven U.S. senators. In addition to these and many other prominent people, there were 107 people in the Japanese Cemetery and an unknown number in the Serbian Cemetery. Altogether there were about 47,000 burials in Laurel Hill Cemetery.

A long effort to move all cemeteries out of San Francisco included banning of future burials in the city beginning 1 August 1901; a law requiring removal of cemeteries from San Francisco that was signed 17 January 1914; an eviction order from the City of San Francisco in November 1937; and removal of burials beginning 26 February 1940.

### **Laurel Heights**

The cemetery land was purchased from the cemetery association by a real estate developer, Heyman Brothers, who announced in April 1941 plans to develop "an exclusive \$10,000,000 home district, including some 600 residential sites, as well as a million dollar business district"<sup>106</sup> on the site. The original intention was to offer five acres to the city for a park or playground. The residential neighborhood would be called Mayfair Terrace and the business

<sup>105</sup> Michael Svanevik and Shirley Burgett, *City of Souls: San Francisco's Necropolis at Colma* (San Francisco: Custom and Limited Editions, 1995), 43.

<sup>106</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Laurel Hill: Tract Plans are Revealed," 21 April 1941.

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district would be called Mayfair Village. Development of the property was delayed by World War II. When work resumed in 1947-1948, the residential area was called Laurel Heights and the business district was called Laurel Village. According to the builder, 75% of the home lots were developed by October 1949.<sup>107</sup> By April 1951, a citizen's group called the Laurel Heights Improvement Association had been formed to address neighborhood issues.

### **San Francisco Unified School District Proposed Site of Lowell High School**

Around the time of the end of the war, on 27 June 1945, when the cemetery was gone and the revived development of the neighborhood was imminent, the San Francisco Board of Education initiated action to purchase a portion of the Heyman Brothers property as the site for a new Lowell High School campus. On 28 June 1946, the school district bought about twelve acres, about one fifth of the total area of the cemetery, in the northeast corner of the property for \$194,690. The site of the school property was shown on a November 1947 map called "Map of Resubdivision of a Part of Laurel Heights, San Francisco, Calif." By mid-1950, however, the Board of Education had selected another site for Lowell High School and announced its intention to sell the Laurel Heights property.

The school district offered the site to the San Francisco Department of Parks and Recreation as it was required to do, but preferred to sell it at the highest price possible, with the understanding that it could get \$450,000 for residential development and \$650,000 for commercial development. Zoned for residential use, prolonged and complicated negotiations were necessary to win approval from the City Planning Commission for a rezoning of the site for commercial use.

Taking an active role in the controversy, the Laurel Heights Improvement Association expressed concern that commercial use of the property would diminish property values and the quality of the neighborhood. Referring to the official map that was a reference for those who purchased residential lots, and the designation of the "Future Location of Lowell High School" on the map, the association stated to the City Planning Commission: "Purchasers had every right to believe that in the construction of this school the architecture would be of modern and attractive design, with proper setback lines, well landscaped grounds, open recreation fields, and off-street parking."<sup>108</sup> On 21 June 1951, the City Planning Commission granted the request of San

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<sup>107</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Hansen Homes...", 22 October 1949.

<sup>108</sup> Laurel Heights Improvement Association, "City-Owned Land Bounded by Laurel, Euclid, Presidio and California Streets," a statement presented to the San Francisco City Planning Commission, 9 May 1951.

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Francisco's Director of Property to withdraw the application which the City had filed on 27 April 1951 for reclassification of the property from First Residential District to Commercial District.<sup>109</sup>

During a two-year period reports and rumors in the press, in newspapers, and in public documents and meetings indicated that interested parties in the property included unnamed potential builders of a tall office building, the federal government, and Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. In October 1952, San Francisco's Director of Property "asked for a speedy rezoning to escape Federal condemnation of the land."<sup>110</sup> Also during this period, the city took approximately two acres from the southeast corner of the twelve-acre property for streets and a fire station.

Ultimately, after presentation of the drawings of an unnamed architect to interested neighbors, an agreement was reached for rezoning of the property for commercial use. This agreement, City Planning Commission Resolution No. 4109 of 13 November 1952, included six stipulations for any development of the site. These are, briefly: 1) that only professional, institutional, or office buildings and associated service buildings were allowed; 2) the total floor area of buildings was limited; 3) off-street parking was required in relation to the number of employees and visitors; 4) setbacks were required on the west and south except for minor service buildings; 5) any development for residential use was subject to planning guidelines; and 6) there must be "appropriate and reasonable landscaping of the required open spaces." Because of this rezoning agreement, all development plans for the property have had to be approved by the City Planning Commission to insure compliance with these requirements.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> San Francisco Department of Planning, Letter from Paul Oppermann, Director of Planning to Mr. Eugene J. Riordan, Director of Property, 25 June 1951.

<sup>110</sup> *San Francisco News*, "School Board Asks Action on Rezoning," 24 October 1952.

<sup>111</sup> San Francisco, County Recorder, "Stipulation as to Character of Improvements on that portion of Lot 1A, Block 1032 Affected by Zoning Proposal Z-52.62.2", filed 8 January 1953.



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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 # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 10.2

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

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

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

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- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

The Fireman's Fund Insurance Company Home Office occupies Block 1032 Lot 3 as shown on the Assessor's Parcel Map (Map 4 and Map 5). The property occupies most of its block, a total of approximately 447,361 square feet or 10.2 acres. Its irregular shape can be described, clockwise, by California Street on the north, the boundary with an adjacent property (Block 1032 Lot 2) measuring 232.859 feet in length, Presidio Avenue, Masonic Avenue, Euclid Avenue, and Laurel Street.

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

The property includes the entire parcel that was purchased by Fireman's Fund Insurance Company in 1953, all of which was developed by the company for its use.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Michael R. Corbett, Architectural Historian and  
Denise Bradley, Landscape Historian for

organization: Laurel Heights Improvement Association of San Francisco, Inc.

street & number: 2161 Shattuck Avenue #203

city or town: Berkeley state: California zip code: 94704

e-mail mcorbett@lmi.net

telephone: 510-548-4123

date: 19 April 2018

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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.)

### ATTACHMENTS

- Map 1 Location Map
- Map 2 Sketch Map
- Map 3 Sketch Map Detail
- Map 4 Assessor's Parcel Map
- Map 5 Property Boundary Coordinates
- Map 6 Photo Key
- Figure 1 Perspective drawing of Fireman's Fund Home Office
- Figure 2 Site Plan showing features ca. 1957-1963
- Figure 3 Photo of Terrace taken ca. 1957-1963, view east
- Figure 4 Photo of Terrace taken ca. 1957-1963, view southwest
- Figure 5 Photo of Entrance Court taken ca. 1957-1963, view west
- Figure 6 Photo of Entrance Court taken ca. 1957-1963, view east
- Figure 7 Photo of landscape along the south side of Office Building
- Figure 8 Aerial view of Fireman's Fund property in 1961
- Figure 9 Aerial view of Fireman's Fund property in 1969

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

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## Photo Log

Name of Property: Fireman's Fund Insurance Company  
City or Vicinity: San Francisco  
County: San Francisco  
State: CA  
Photographer: Michael R. Corbett and Denise Bradley  
Date Photographed: 28 November 2017, 19 December 2017, and 2 February 2018

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

- 1 of 36. Office Building (Executive Wing) and Landscape Setting, camera facing northeast.
- 2 of 36. Office Building (Executive Wing) and Landscape Setting, camera facing north.
- 3 of 36. Office Building (Cafeteria Wing) and Terrace, camera facing north.
- 4 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing) and Terrace, camera facing north.
- 5 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing) and Terrace, camera facing northeast.
- 6 of 36. Terrace, camera facing west.
- 7 of 36. Office Building (Executive Wing) and landscape along Masonic Avenue, camera facing northwest.
- 8 of 36. Office Building (Auditorium) and landscape along Masonic Avenue, camera facing northwest.
- 9 of 36. Auditorium (outdoor area on west side), camera facing north.
- 10 of 36. Auditorium (outdoor area on east side), camera facing southwest.
- 11 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing East) and landscape along Presidio Avenue, camera facing west.
- 12 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing East/Garage), camera facing southwest.
- 13 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing East), camera facing east.
- 14 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing East/Garage), camera facing northeast.
- 15 of 36. Garage (1965 Addition), camera facing northwest.
- 16 of 36. Garage (1965 Addition), camera facing south.
- 17 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing North and Entry Structure), camera facing east.
- 18 of 36. Office Building Entry Structure (1984–1985) Interior, camera facing west.
- 19 of 36. Office Building (Office Wing North), camera facing east.
- 20 of 36. Entrance Court, camera facing southeast.
- 21 of 36. Office Building (Cafeteria Wing), camera facing northeast.
- 22 of 36. Office Building (Executive/Visitor's Entrance), camera facing east.
- 23 of 36. Entrance Court (Outdoor Sitting Area), camera facing southwest.
- 24 of 36. Entrance Court (Arbor at west end), camera facing northwest.
- 25 of 36. Service Building, camera facing west.
- 26 of 36. West Parking Lot, camera facing northeast.
- 27 of 36. Employee Gate on California Street, camera facing south.
- 28 of 36. Brick wall and landscape setting from California Street, camera facing southeast.
- 29 of 36. Service Building and brick wall from Laurel Street, camera facing northeast.

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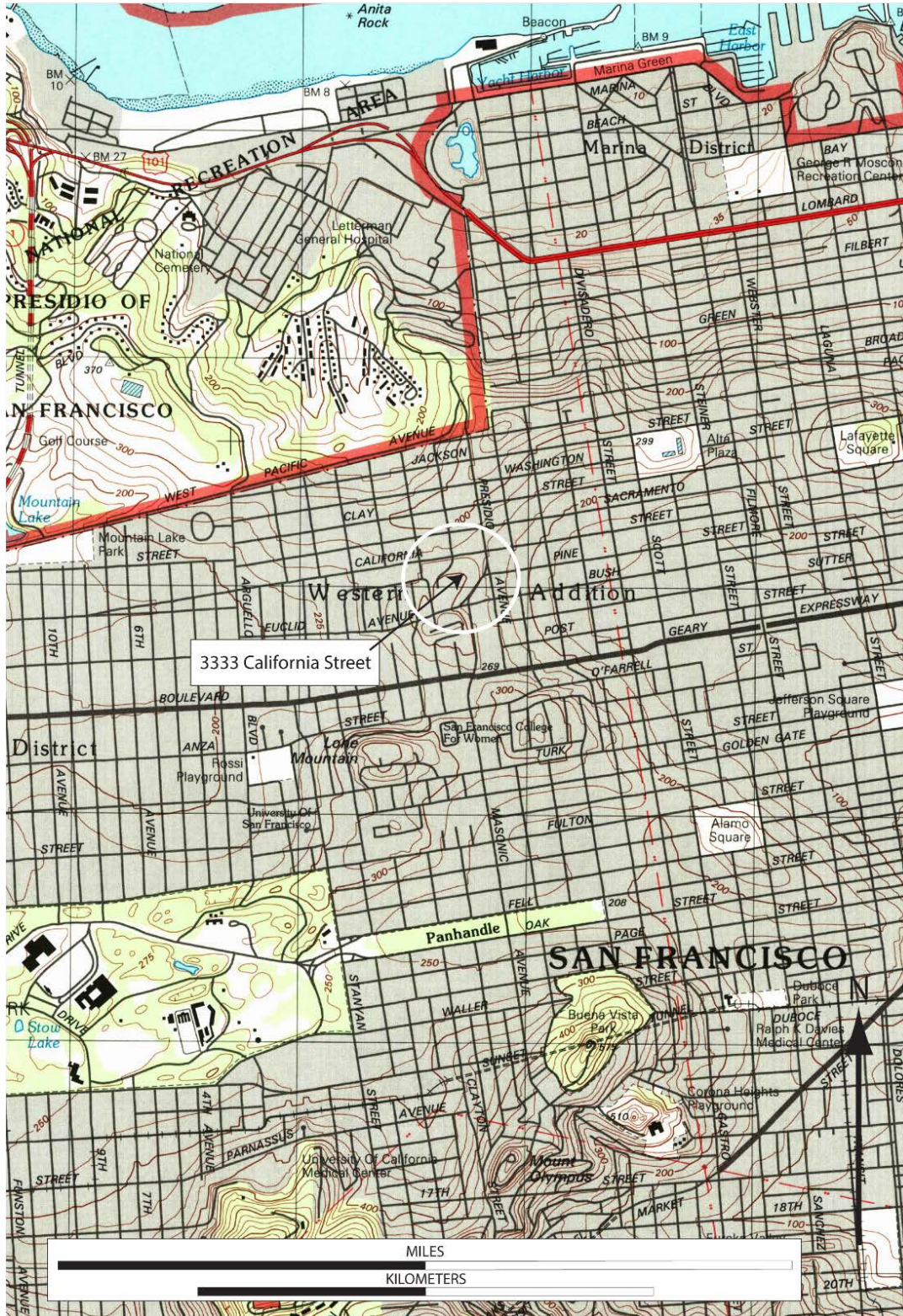
- 30 of 36. Brick wall along Laurel Street, camera facing southeast.
- 31 of 36. Laurel Street Service Gate, camera facing east.
- 32 of 36. Brick wall and landscape along Laurel Street, camera facing south.
- 33 of 36. Executive/Visitor Gate, camera facing east.
- 34 of 36. Office Building (Executive Wing), camera facing east.
- 35 of 36. Office Building (Executive Wing detail), camera facing east.
- 36 of 36. Office Building (typical window detail), camera facing north.

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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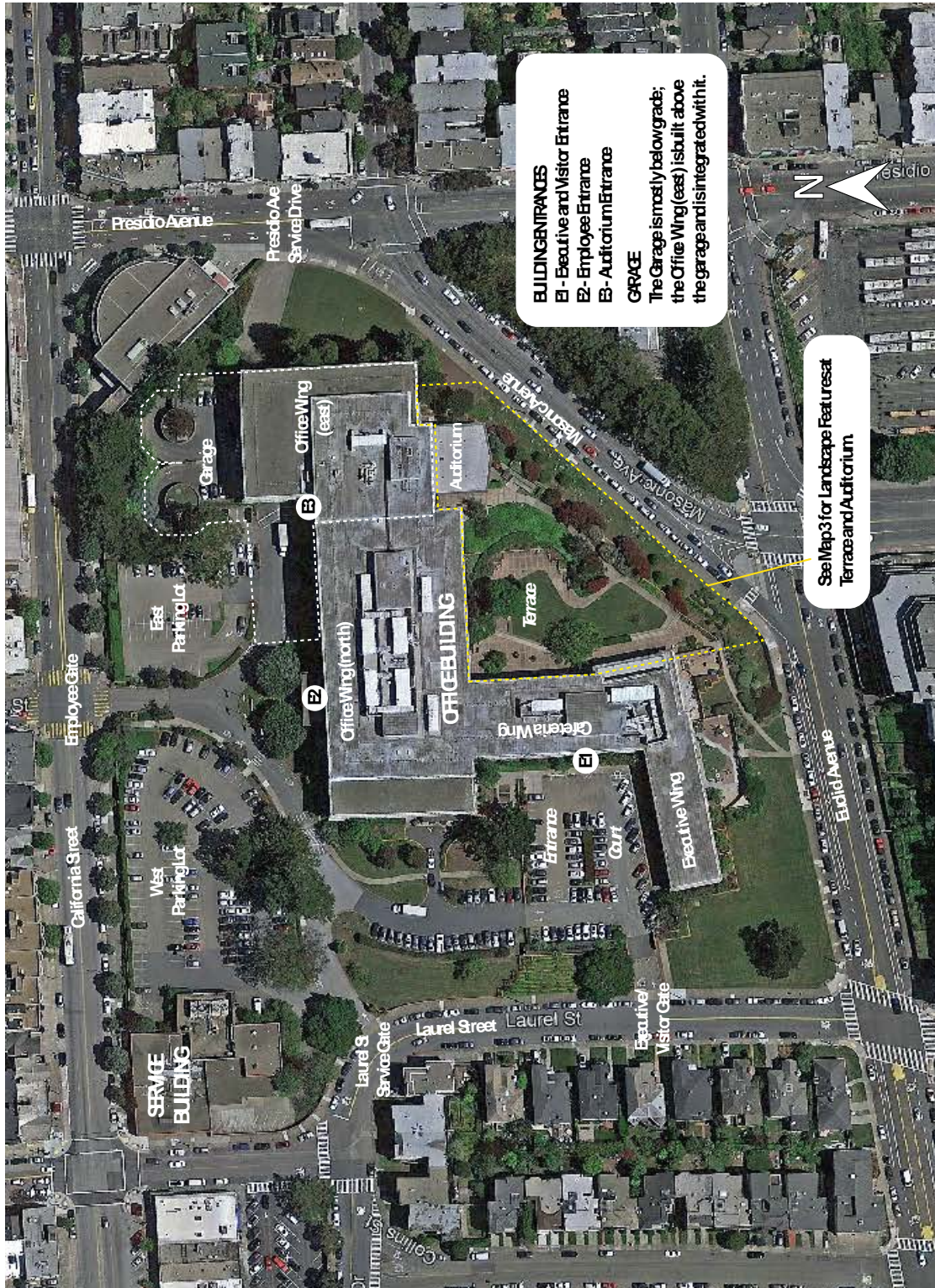


Map 1. Location Map. Source: USGS San Francisco North Quadrangle, 1995.



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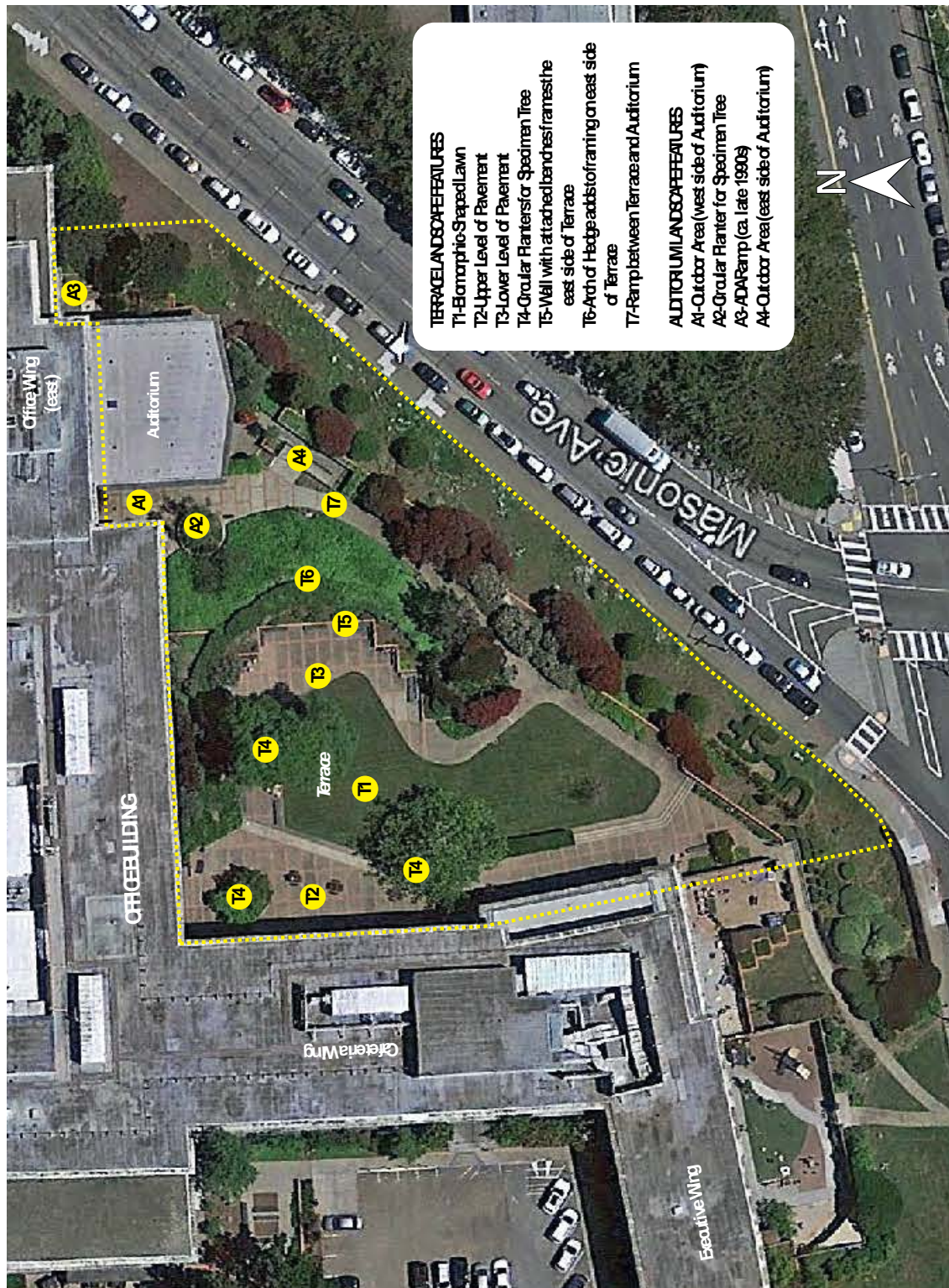
San Francisco, CA  
County and State



Map 2. Sketch Map. Source: Google Earth, photo taken April 2016, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company  
 Name of Property

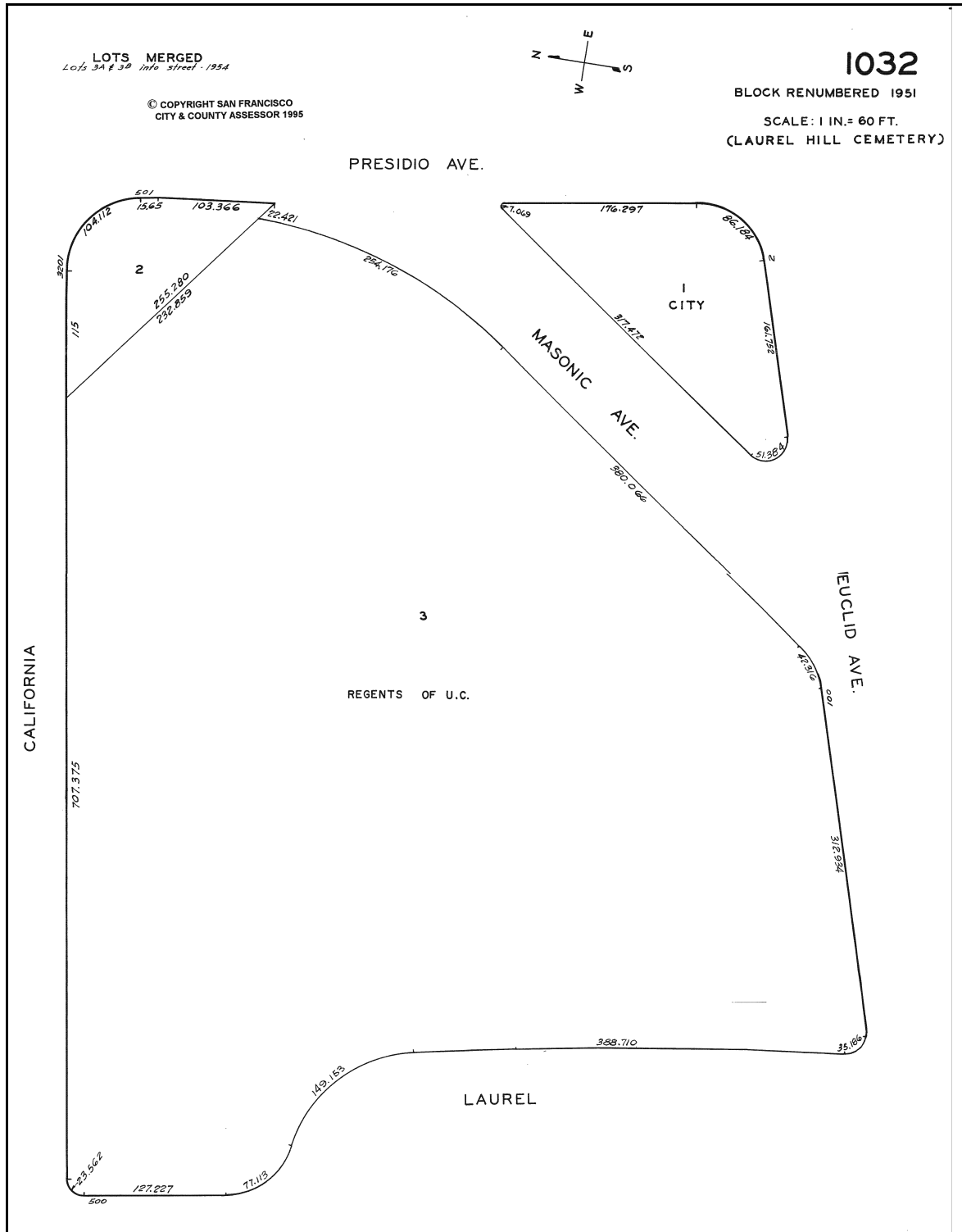
San Francisco, CA  
 County and State



Map 3. Sketch Map, Detail. Source: Google Earth, photo taken April 2016, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

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Map 4. Assessor's Parcel Map showing Fireman's Fund property in Block 1032, Lot 3. Source: City and County of San Francisco Assessor

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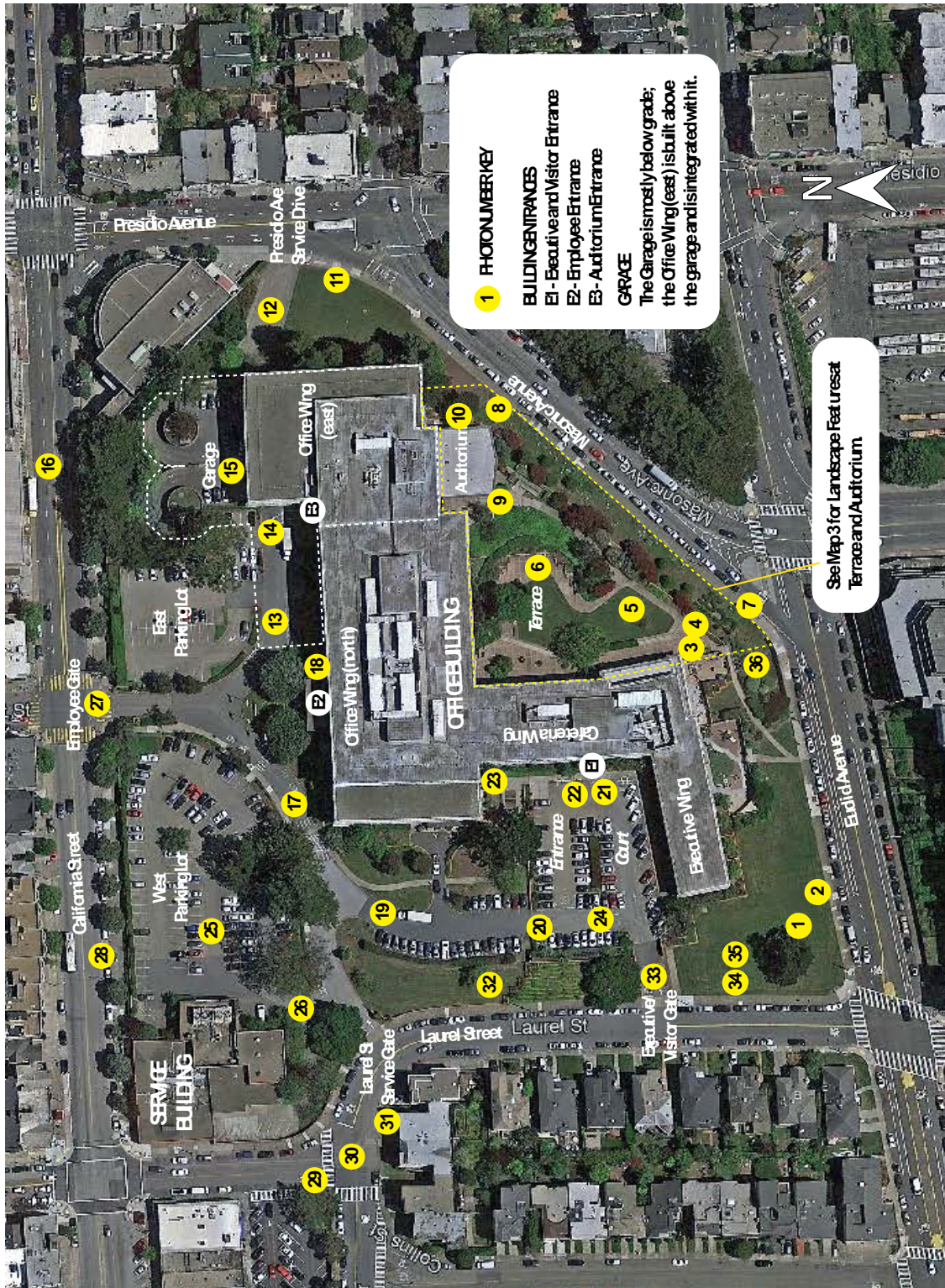
San Francisco, CA  
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Map 5. Property Boundary Coordinates. Source: Google Earth, photo taken September 2017, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

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Map 6. Photo Key. Source: Google Earth, photo taken April 2016, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

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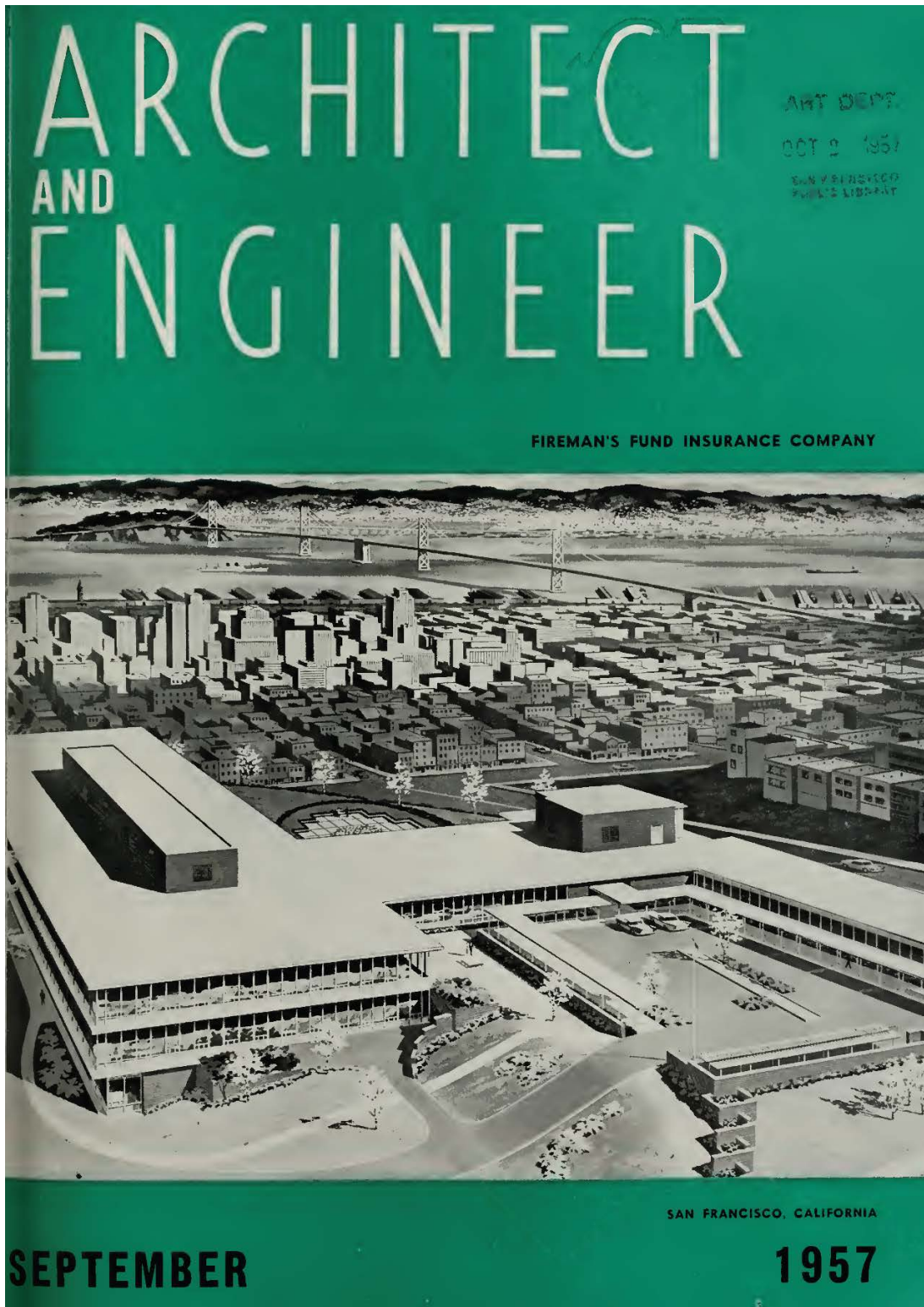


Figure 1. Perspective drawing of Fireman's Fund Home Office, view east. Source: *Architect and Engineer*, cover, September 1957

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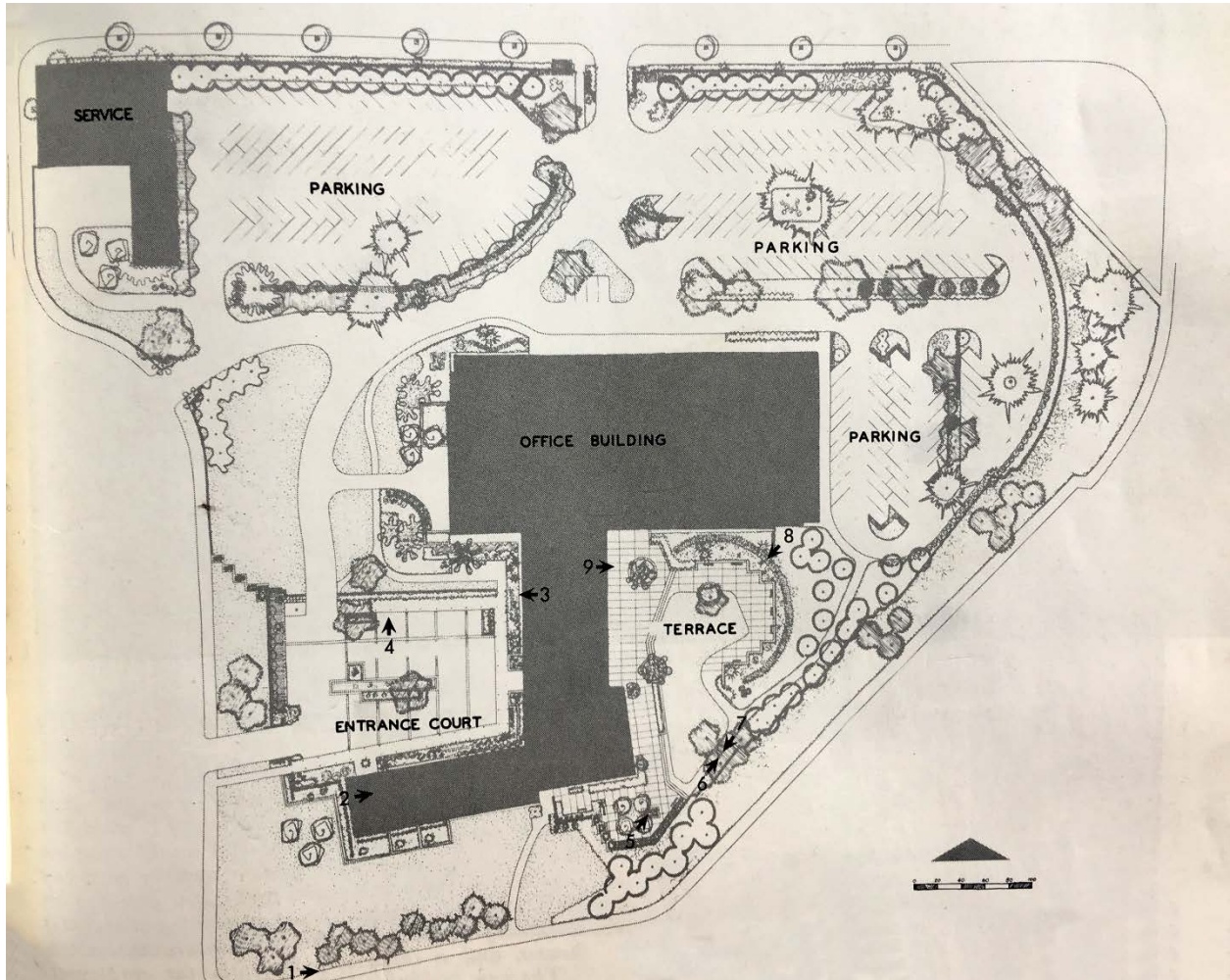


Figure 2. Site Plan showing features ca. 1957–1963. Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964

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Figure 3. Photo of Terrace taken ca. 1957–1963; view east. Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964



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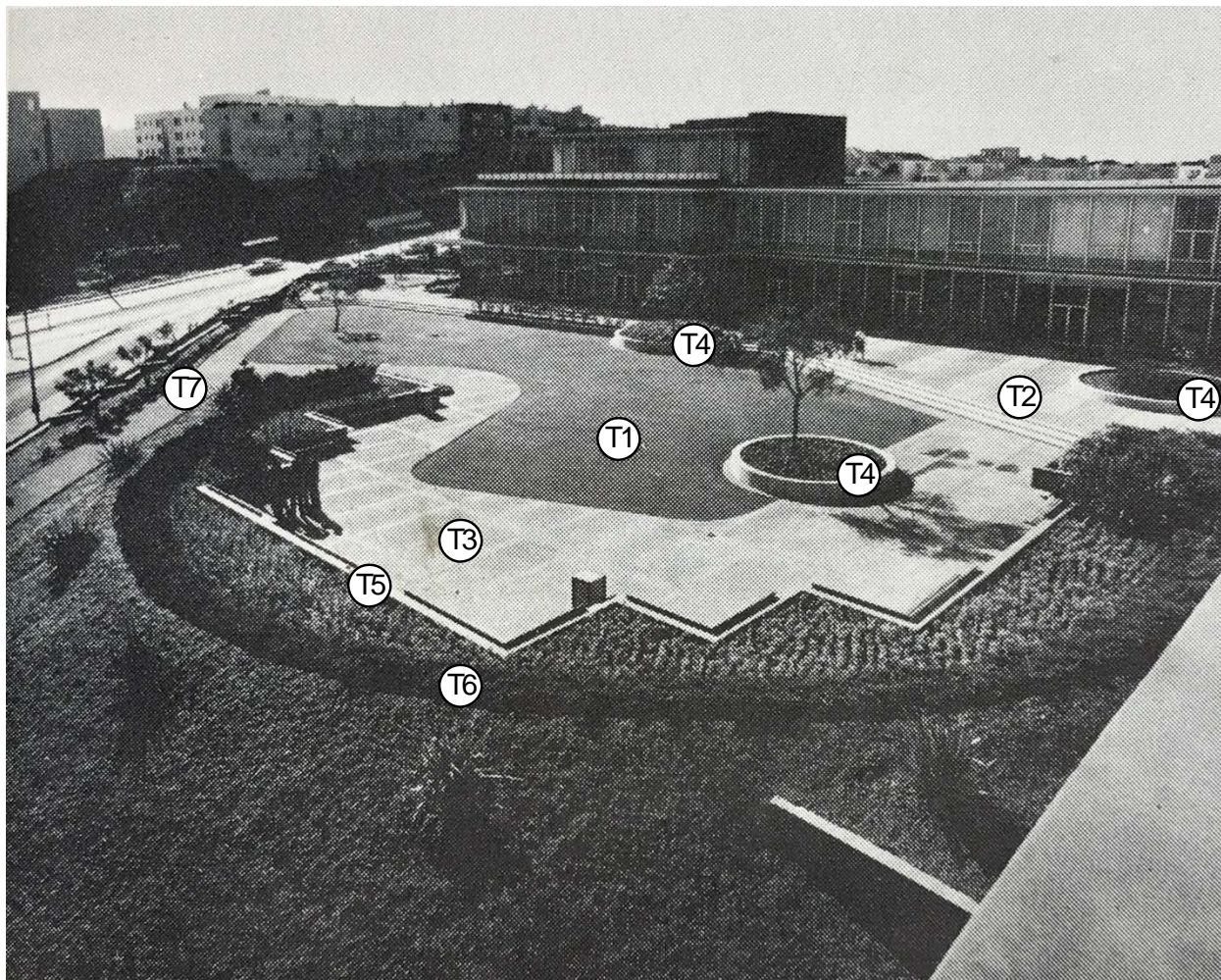


Figure 4. Photo of Terrace taken ca. 1957–1963; view southwest toward Cafeteria Wing of Office Building. Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964; annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

#### TERRACE LANDSCAPE FEATURES

T1-Biomorphic-Shaped Lawn

T2-Upper Level of Pavement

T3-Lower Level of Pavement

T4-Circular Planters for Specimen Tree

T5-Wall with Attached Benches frames the east side of Terrace

T6-Arch of Hedge adds to framing on east side of Terrace

T7-Ramp to lower level of site

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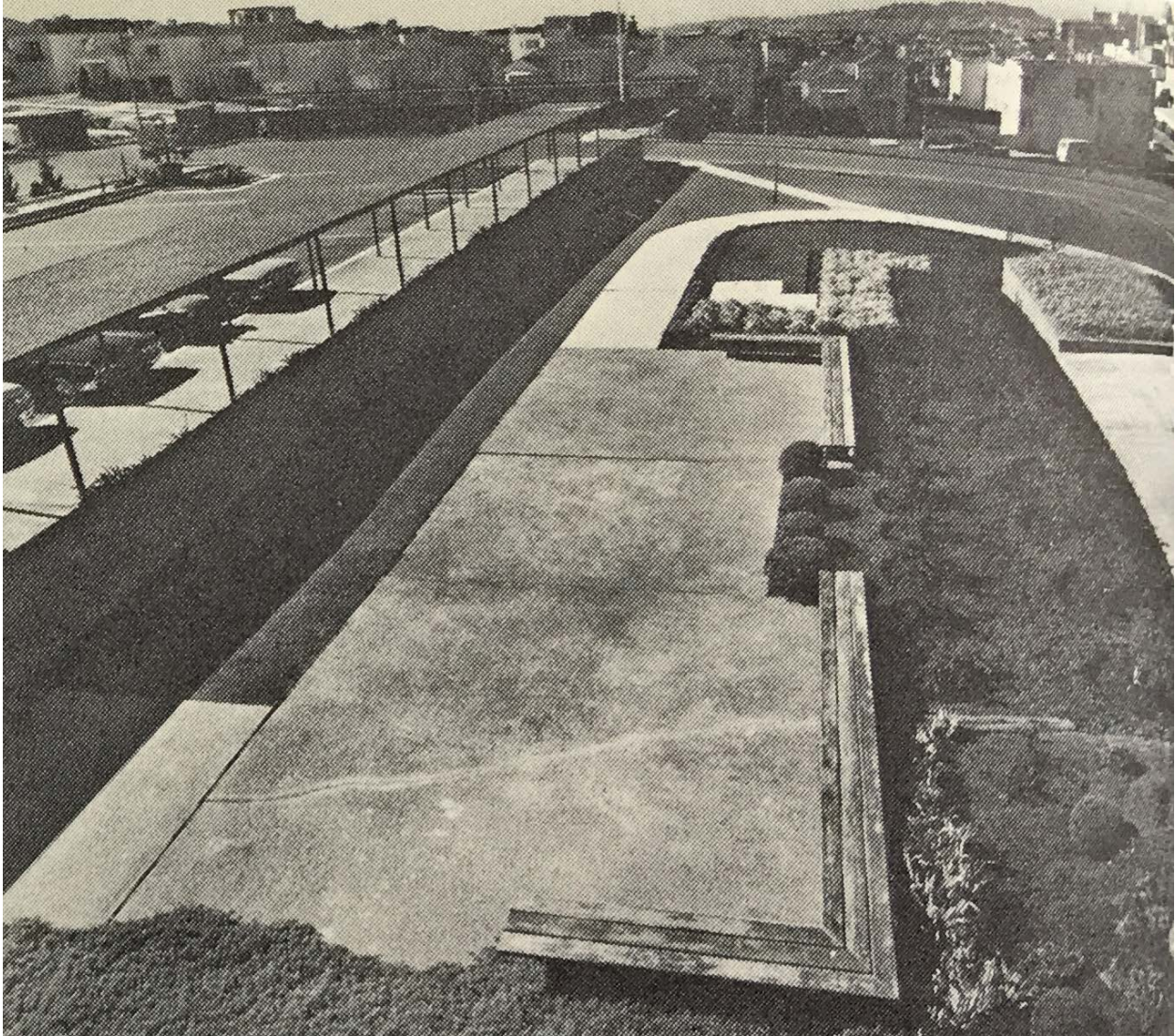


Figure 5. Photo of Entrance Court taken ca. 1957–1963; view to west with parking lot (left) and paved outdoor sitting area (right). Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964

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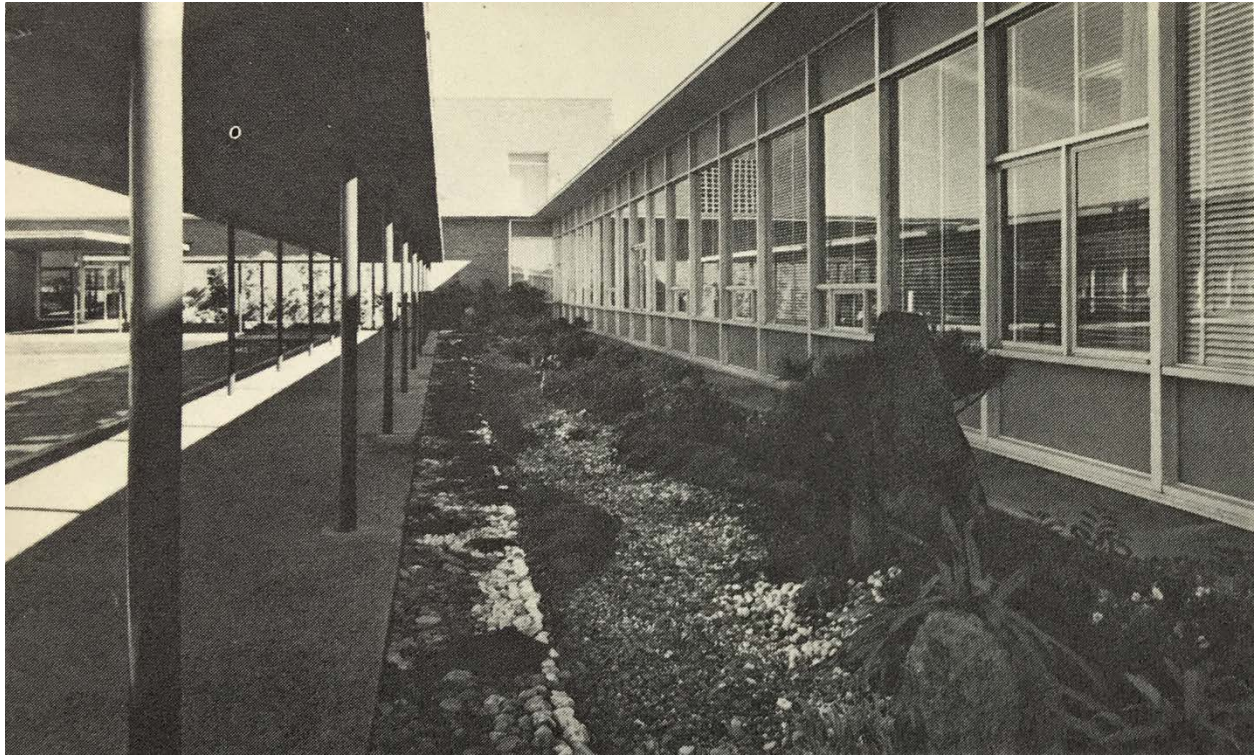


Figure 6. Photo of Entrance Court taken ca. 1957–1963; view east of arbor covered sidewalk and foundation planting adjacent to Executive Wing. Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964

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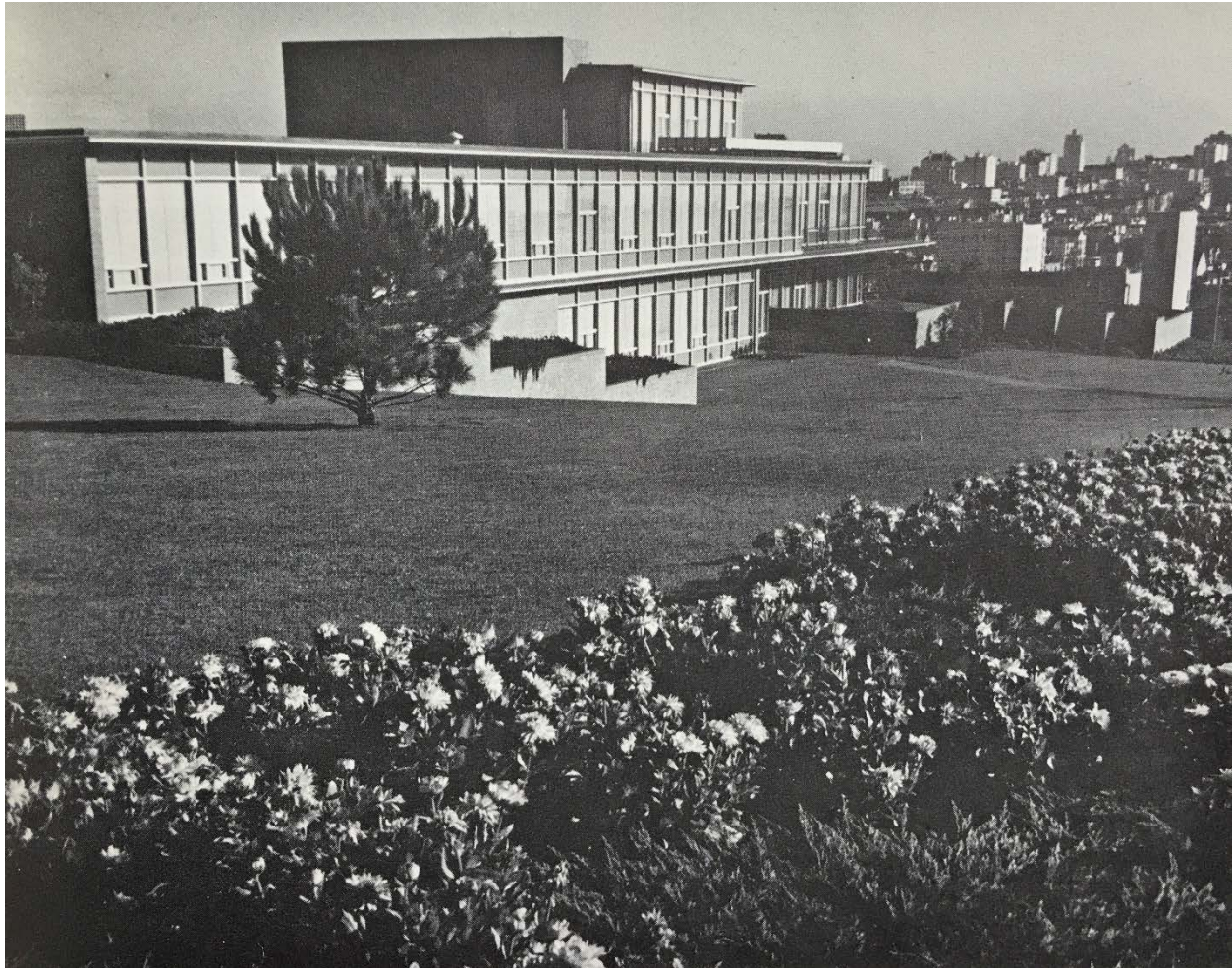


Figure 7. Photo of landscape along the south side of Office Building (Executive Wing) taken ca. 1957–1963. Source: Garrett Eckbo, *Urban Landscape Design*, 1964

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Figure 8. Aerial view of Fireman's Fund property in 1961 after completion of Phase I. Source: Pacific Aerial Surveys, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett

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Figure 9. Aerial view of Fireman's Fund property in 1969 after completion of Phases II, III, and IV. Source: Pacific Aerial Surveys, annotated by Denise Bradley and Michael Corbett