

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

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

DRAFT

**1. Name of Property**

Historic name: Women's Building, The

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

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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

**2. Location**

Street & number: 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street

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

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_national      \_\_\_statewide      \_\_\_local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A      \_\_\_B      \_\_\_C      \_\_\_D

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

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

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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>1</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/meeting hall

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

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/meeting hall

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

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> & 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

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

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stucco, brick, wood

### 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 four-story property at 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street known as The Women's Building (TWB) was erected in 1910 of unreinforced masonry. The social hall is located at the southwest corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Lapidge Streets in San Francisco's Mission District. The building is clad in stucco over brick at the north and east façades and bare, common bond brick at the south and west façades, and is capped by a built up roof. *Maestrapeace*, the 1994 mural that envelops the building's main façades, is included as a contributing resource. Alterations to the interior of the building in the 1930s and 1980-90s served to reinforce the continued use as a social hall; the property retains all aspects of integrity.

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### Narrative Description

3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street is located in San Francisco's Mission District, a mixed-use neighborhood centrally located between downtown districts and outlying residential neighborhoods to the west. The blocks surrounding The Women's Building were rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and fire, with most of the building stock "erected in the decade of unprecedented citywide reconstruction

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that followed the 1906 calamity..."<sup>1</sup> The setting is urban mixed-use, and the surrounding buildings are mainly two and three-story flats or single-family dwellings, some with street-level retail, constructed between 1906 and 1920.

The primary street-facing north and east façades are symmetrically arranged and include balconets, awnings, applied ornament, and an elaborate compound cornice interrupted by shaped parapets. The south and west façades are utilitarian with no ornament. The building meets its lot lines except for a setback at the south portion of the west façade. The interior of the building includes publicly accessible offices and meeting rooms at the first and second levels, and private offices at the third and fourth levels, while the largely unfinished basement is lightly used for storage.

## **Exterior**

### North (Primary) Façade

The north façade is divided into seven visual bays, and is arranged symmetrically around the slightly wider center (fourth) bay. The outermost (first and seventh) bays project slightly from the main volume of the building and there is a slightly raised water table line. The façade is clad in painted stucco and all windows are double hung wood windows with ogee lugs unless otherwise noted.

At the first level, the primary entrance is centered and is composed of a pair of fully glazed aluminum leaf doors with sidelights, set within a drop-arched recess (**Photo 5**). Prior to 1993, the primary entrance was composed of a pair of deeply recessed, fully glazed wood doors flanked by curved walls clad in glazed ceramic tile. Above the entrance, the façade is embossed with the words "Dovre Hall," covered by a painted sign that reads "The Women's Building/Edificio de Mujeres" The entrance is sheltered by a large flat awning, supported by chains, which has a compound molded cornice and painted signage on all three sides. Left and right of the primary entrance are two-story pilasters.

The façade opens at the northeast corner of the building to create an entry alcove in the first bay, accessed via a single granite step. The alcove is paneled at its walls, supported by decorative brackets, and paved in marble opus tessellated tile. The alcove includes an angled facet with a fully glazed aluminum door with a sidelight, which leads to the building's community resource center. The angled facet of the alcove historically included double wood doors with small diamond windows that provided access to a saloon. The alcove is enclosed by metal security bars and door.

At the second level of the north façade, each bay includes an arched tripartite window group, each with a center double hung window flanked by narrow fixed one over one windows. At the center (fourth) bay, the window group is wider with the same configuration, and is flanked by engaged fluted Corinthian columns with decorative bases. The spandrel around the window is decorated by applied stucco ornament, in ribbon and wreath patterns, and the center (fourth) bay

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<sup>1</sup> City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, "City Within a City: Historic Context Statement for San Francisco's Mission District" (2007), 3.

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is topped by multiple bands of decorative moldings, the broadest of which includes a geometric weave pattern with button florets.

At the third level of the north façade, the center (fourth) bay includes three double hung windows, which are painted over as part of the building's mural, while all other bays include two double hung windows. The outermost (first and seventh) bays include balconets, which are each supported by four stepped brackets, and include decoratively paneled posts and thin, painted wrought iron balusters with a thick railing.

At the fourth level of the north façade, the center (fourth) bay includes three arched double hung windows, the center of which is taller than those flanking it. The windows are set within compound molded frames, and the area above the windows includes two circle moldings, each with a diamond-shaped ornament at its center. The rest of the bays include paired arched double hung windows set within compound molded frames with a circle molding with a diamond-shaped ornament at its center. There are ventilation grates in the spandrel panels of the third and fifth bays.

The north façade terminates with a large compound pent roof, composed of a double-band of drop molding, above which the paneled overhang is supported by stepped brackets, between which there are button moldings. The pent portion of the cornice is clad in red tile, above which there is a simple flat parapet with a metal coping. The large compound roof is broken at the center (fourth) bay, where a shaped and molded parapet rises above the rest of the roofline. Likewise, at the far right (seventh) bay, a shaped and molded parapet rises above the rest of the roofline. This area has a balconet, supported by three stepped brackets, with square corner posts with ball caps, painted wrought iron balusters, and a molded railing. There is an identical balconet at the far left (first) bay, which terminates with a flat parapet. This area used to include a large square cupola with double arched windows and a hipped roof clad in red tile. The cupola was removed at some point between 1956 and 1993, when HABS documentation was conducted.

#### East Façade

The east façade on Lapidge Street is divided into five visual bays, and is arranged symmetrically around the center (third) bay, which is slightly wider than the rest of the bays. The outermost (first and fifth) bays project slightly from the main volume of the building, and there is a slightly raised water table line. The façade is clad in painted stucco and all windows are double hung wood windows with ogee lugs unless otherwise noted.

At the first level, there is a slightly recessed pedestrian entrance at the far left (first) bay, accessed via two granite steps and composed of a metal door flanked by paneled sidelights and topped by a tripartite panel installed as part of alterations completed in 2000. At the far right (fifth) bay, the façade opens to create the entry alcove previously described at the north façade. At the second and third bays, slightly recessed tripartite window groups include a center double hung window flanked by casement windows, and at the fourth bay there is a slightly recessed tripartite window group with a central casement window flanked by double hung windows.

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At the second level of the east façade, each bay includes an arched tripartite window group, composed of a center double hung window flanked by narrow fixed two-lite windows. At the center (third) bay, the window group is wider, with the same configuration. At the far right (fifth) bay, there is a painted wrought iron fire escape landing in front of the window group.

At the third level of the east façade, the center (third) bay includes three double hung windows, while the remainder of the bays each have two double hung windows. All window groups include a heavy unifying sill. The far left (first) bay includes a balconet of similar configuration as those previously described at the north façade; here the balusters have been removed. At the far right (fifth) bay, there is a balconet of similar configuration as those previously described at the north façade, which has been modified to include the wrought iron fire escape and a wrought iron railing.

At the fourth level of the east façade, the window bays are configured the same way as those at the north façade. At the far right (fifth) bay, there is a wrought iron fire escape platform identical to the one at the second level, previously described.

The east façade terminates largely in the same configuration as the north façade, with a large compound pent roof composed of a double-band of drop molding, above which the paneled overhang is supported by stepped brackets, between which there are button moldings.

### West Façade

The west façade is utilitarian in nature with no ornament, and is organized into five visual bays. The far left (first) bay meets the lot line and includes no fenestration. At the first level, the first bay includes a pass-through from the pedestrian entrance at the north façade. The pass-through has an arched opening that leads to a paved walkway in front of the second through fifth bays of the west façade. Additional fenestration at the first level includes a metal pedestrian door at the second bay, set within a concrete surround, and a metal door with a sidelight at the fourth bay. An external metal staircase is located at the second bay and rises to the fourth level to provide access to emergency exit doors at the upper levels of the building. The south façade includes three brick buttresses, located between the second, third and fourth bays, which rise to a point slightly above the top of the second level.

At the second level, there is a metal entry door at the south-facing facet of the first bay, topped by a louvered ventilation panel. At the second bay there is an arched window opening infilled with cinderblock. At the third, fourth, and fifth (right) bays, there are large arched openings with tilted brick sills that have each been infilled. The third bay includes paired metal doors within brick infill, the fourth bay is infilled by brick at its lower half and a metal panel with a large ventilation duct at its upper half, and the fifth (right) bay is infilled with brick at its lower half and cinderblock at its upper half.

At the third level, the south-facing facet of the first bay is clad in rough cement, and includes a small recessed double hung wood window with ogee lugs. At the second bay, there is a metal pedestrian door, above which there is an arched opening infilled with cinderblock and a louvered

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ventilation panel. The third bay is blind. The fourth bay includes the large ventilation duct, which continues along the façade to the roofline. The fifth (right) bay includes an arched opening infilled with cinderblock.

At the fourth level, the south-facing facet of the first bay includes a metal door set within an arched recess. At the second bay, there are paired double hung windows with wood surrounds, recessed within an arched opening. At the fifth (right) bay, there is a double hung window with wood surrounds, set within an arched opening, with a broad brick sill which suggests that the area around this window has been infilled. The west façade terminates with a flat parapet.

Although the date of some of the alterations to the window openings on the west façade is unknown, alterations that were completed in 2000 include infilling three windows at the second level and unblocking and reconditioning the windows at the fourth level.

### South Façade

The south façade is also utilitarian in nature and includes no ornament. A small light well right of center, walled off with cinder blocks up to a point between the third and fourth levels, includes double hung arched windows at the second, third, and fourth levels. The light well also includes aluminum ventilation ducts and chimneys. The left (west) portion of the south façade terminates with a flat parapet, while the portion right (east) of the light well shows the stucco-clad profile of the stair penthouse. Both the cement blocks in the light well and the stair penthouse were constructed as part of the alterations completed in 2000.

### Roof

The roof of the building is flat and is covered by a built up roof. There is a stair penthouse at the southeast corner of the roof, a utilities penthouse at the southwest corner of the roof, and an elevator penthouse at the center of the roof towards the front (north) of the building. The shaped parapets at the north and east façades are braced at the roof with metal pipe brackets. There are four three-light skylights at the center of the building, aligned in a north-south axis. Four small, integrated chimneys are located at the north side of the west perimeter of the building, which are presumably related to a heating method no longer in use in the building.

## **Interior**

### Basement

The basement occupies slightly less than half of the full footprint of the building, and is accessed via an enclosed metal stair at the east side of the building. The basement has a concrete floor, and the walls are cement, concrete block, and brick. There are large brick structural piers along the north, east, and west walls, as well as drywall-clad posts and angled steel seismic braces through the center of the basement, and engaged concrete posts along the south wall. Along the north wall, there are remnant saunas, constructed of wood with paneled wood doors, as well as remnant sinks, and a utility room at the northwest corner. Along the east wall there are three large storage compartments, two that are open and one with a door. The base of the elevator enclosure is located at the center of the basement, and there is a large bracket-shaped low concrete remnant, also in the center of the basement, which appears to have served as the



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foundation of an earlier power-generating source for the building. Historic images of the basement are not available. The enclosed metal stair, concrete floor, concrete block wall, cement walls, drywall clad posts, steel seismic braces, engaged concrete posts, and utility room were all constructed as part of alterations that were completed in 2000.

### First Level

The first level includes the lobby, a community resource room, a childcare center, a double-height auditorium, rest rooms, circulation corridors, three stairwells, and several smaller service spaces. The lobby is located at the north side of the building and is accessed from the street by the primary entrance doors at the north facade. The lobby is generally oval in shape, and a freestanding single-carriage paneled elevator is located in the center of the lobby. There is an enclosed reception desk at the east side of the lobby, against the north wall of the building. The west side of the lobby includes mailboxes, and access to restrooms and a utility corridor. An elliptical staircase begins at the west side of the lobby, with wood treads and risers and a wrought iron railing and balustrade and simple decorative elements. This stair continues on to access the full height of the building.

On the east side of the lobby, double metal doors with small windows let on to the community resource room, which occupies the northeast corner of the first level of the building. The room has an open plan and includes restrooms at its south side. The community resource room is also accessed via the door at the northeast corner of the building. The east wall of the room is exposed brick.

At the southeast corner of the lobby are a small private office, a door that leads to the metal staircase to the basement, and a metal door that leads to the childcare center. The childcare center occupies the southeast portion of the first level, and has an open plan, with a small kitchen and storage rooms at its south side.

At the southeast corner of the building, there is a corridor, accessed via both the childcare center and the pedestrian entrance at the first bay of the east façade. The corridor includes a half-turn staircase, with wood steps, railing and balustrade, which continues on to access all levels of the building. The corridor is clad in vertical wood paneling and includes a restroom and storage closet. The west end of the corridor provides access to the auditorium.

The auditorium, which is primarily accessed via double metal doors with small windows at the south side of the lobby, is double-height, with a perimeter balcony at the north and west sides. The auditorium is open plan, and includes storage closets along its north side. There is a metal emergency exit door at the west wall. The south and west walls of the auditorium are clad in beadboard, above which the brick walls of the building are exposed. The balcony is accessed via two sets of quarter-turn wood stairs, one at the northeast corner of the room and one at the southwest corner of the room. The L-plan balcony includes wrought iron railings and balustrades, and the west side includes a metal emergency exit door that leads to the exterior stair at the west façade of the building.

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The first level of the building has undergone a series of alterations since the building was constructed in 1910. When constructed, the first level included a narrow entrance lobby at the center of the north side of the building, a large office in the northwest corner, a saloon in the northeast, a large hall in the southeast, and a gymnasium in the southwest, with a stage and scenery balcony along the west side of the gymnasium.<sup>2</sup> When the building was purchased in 1935, alterations made at the first level included removal of some stairs at the primary entrance and construction of curved tiled exterior walls flanking the entrance, construction of the elliptical staircase at the front of the building, and construction of the elevator. The gymnasium was converted into a dance hall with a small stage at the southeast corner of the room and an adjacent food-service area.<sup>3</sup>

After escrow closed in 1979,<sup>4</sup> alterations made at the first level included construction of wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, soundproofing in the auditorium (formerly the gymnasium and dance hall), and alterations to the lobby including construction of a reception desk, a security area, and a small office.<sup>5</sup> The first level was further modified by alterations that were begun during the period of significance and completed by 2000. These alterations include the removal of the saloon in the northeast corner and construction of the community resource center and the child development center. The primary entrance doors were reconfigured, including removal of the curved tiled walls flanking the primary entrance, and the lobby was reconfigured to include curved walls and publicly accessible circulation space around the elevator. Additional lobby alterations included construction of a new reception enclosure and a new mailbox area. Changes to the auditorium included removal of two sets of double doors, removal of the stage and the adjacent food-service area, and construction of new storage closets. Plasterboard was removed at portions of the east, south, and west walls to expose the building's brick walls. No further alterations have been made to the first level since the completion of alterations in 2000.

### Second Level

The second level of the building is accessed via the elliptical staircase, the elevator, the wood half-turn stair at the southeast corner of the building, and two emergency exits at the west wall of the building. The second level includes a small lobby at the center of the north side of the building, two classrooms in the northeast corner, the Audre Lorde Room at the east side of the building that includes a separate kitchen, the balcony level of the auditorium in the southwest, and an office and childcare overflow space in the northwest. The Audre Lorde Room and the classrooms are accessed via metal doors and include tall beadboard wainscoting with a scalloped upper molding, above which the north and east walls are exposed brick. The Audre Lorde Room has large soffits and globe pendant lights, and includes a bar at its southeast corner that is believed to be original to the building.<sup>6</sup> The office and the childcare overflow room are also

<sup>2</sup> Sanborn Insurance Map, Volume 7, Sheet 686, Published 1914.

<sup>3</sup> "Mission Turn Hall (The Women's Building), HABS No. CA-2348."

<sup>4</sup> A deposit was made in June 1978 with a six-month escrow period, so full ownership began January 1979. The period of significance begins in 1978 when TWB began programming the space.

<sup>5</sup> Robb, 223.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, footnote.

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accessed from the second level lobby via metal doors. The walls in these spaces are drywall except for the west wall, which is exposed brick.

The second level of the building has undergone alterations since the building was constructed in 1910. When constructed, there was a dining hall in the east portion of the building and a stage and scenery balcony on the west side of the gymnasium. Alterations completed after the building changed ownership in 1935 include the construction of the elliptical stair and the elevator. Alterations completed after the building was purchased in 1978 include the circa 1988 remodel of the building's dining hall into the Audre Lorde Room and classrooms. The office and childcare overflow space in the northwest were reconfigured as part of alterations completed in 2000. The only alterations on the second level since 2000 include upgrades to the kitchen located within the Audre Lorde Room.

### Third Level

The third level of the building is accessed via the elliptical staircase, the elevator, the half-turn stair at the southeast corner of the building, metal at the third level and above, and an emergency exit door at the west wall of the building. The third level includes a vestibule around the elliptical stair and elevator, restrooms and storage closets, a large centrally located double-height hall, and approximately fifteen private offices of varying size arranged along the east and west sides of the building.

The east wall of the double-height hall includes two long benches, a throne, and a raised continuous step, all of which were originally used ceremoniously by the Sons and Daughters of Norway. Above the benches, the east wall includes two strips of fixed windows with metal sills. The west wall of the double-height hall is angled and includes three metal doors and two strips of fixed windows with metal sills. The east and west walls of the double-height hall terminate at the top of the third level, above which there are half-walls and metal pipe railings at the fourth level. The south wall of the hall is brick and two full levels in height, and the hall is lit by four skylights, between which there are slim extended soffits.

The offices along the east and west sides of the building include metal doors, fixed interior metal windows, and painted drywall. Some offices at the east side of the building include beadboard wainscoting with scalloped molding. Portions of the building's brick walls are exposed at the south, east, and west facades.

The third level has undergone alterations since the building was constructed in 1910. Although the original configuration of the third level is not known, it appears that the double-height hall originally spanned the entire southwest section of the third and fourth levels. Alterations completed after the building changed ownership in 1935 include the construction of the elliptical stair and the elevator, and likely the construction of the bench and throne along the east wall of the double-height hall. Alterations completed after the building changed ownership in 1979 included the construction of wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, soundproofing the double-height hall, called the Harriet Tubman Room, and creating office space at the east side of the building, all circa 1988.

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The third level was further modified by alterations completed in 2000. Removals included platforms and benches along the west wall of the double-height hall, plaster and acoustic wall panels from the east, south, and west walls to expose brick walls, all office partitions on the east side of the building, two flights of straight stairs that formerly accessed fourth level balconies, and a bar in the northeast portion of the building. New construction included office spaces at the east and west sides of the building, skylights, and a metal half-return stair at the southeast corner of the building. The only known alterations at the third level since 2000 include tenant improvements in the offices at the northeast corner of the building. Some older materials in these offices, including the beadboard wainscoting with scalloped molding and wood floors, have been retained in these tenant improvements.

#### Fourth Level

The fourth level of the building is accessed via the elliptical staircase, the elevator, the metal half-turn stair at the southeast corner of the building, and an emergency exit door at the west wall of the building. The fourth level includes a small vestibule around the elliptical stair and elevator, restrooms, kitchenette, storage closets, walkways alongside and across the upper portion of the double-height hall, and approximately fifteen private offices of varying size, arranged along the east and west sides of the building.

The walkways alongside the double-height hall have solid half-walls with irregularly shaped areas of metal pipe railing, anchored with exposed triangle-shaped metal braces. A curved bridge passage across the central space of the hall and an overlook at the north side of the hall both have horizontal pipe balustrades and rails.

The east wall of the east walkway includes two metal doors, one at the north and one at the south facing onto the building's light well, as well as a bench niche, an arched niche, and several fixed windows with metal sills. The west wall of the west walkway includes two metal doors, as well as two large trapezoidal six-light windows in metal sills and a bench niche with a fixed window with metal sills.

The offices along the east and west sides of the building include metal doors, fixed interior metal windows, and painted drywall. Portions of the building's brick walls are exposed at the south, east, and west facades.

The fourth level has undergone alterations since the building was constructed in 1910. Although the original configuration of the fourth level is not known, it appears that the double-height hall originally spanned the entire southwest section of the third and fourth levels. Alterations completed after the building changed ownership in 1935 include the construction of the elliptical stair and the elevator. Alterations completed after the building changed ownership in 1979 include the construction of office spaces along the north and east walls of the fourth level,

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including a kitchen, a large meeting room, and storage areas, circa 1988 and alterations to the double-height Harriet Tubman Room.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth level was further modified by alterations completed in 2000. Removals included the upper portion of the east wall of the double-height hall, plaster and acoustic wall panels from the east, south, and west walls to expose brick walls, two mechanical rooms and two small offices at the east and west side, two straight staircases, the old kitchenette, and a floor that capped the top of the elliptical stair. Construction included a new kitchenette, restrooms, and storage closets, office spaces at the east and west sides of the building, the upper walkways, bridge, and overlook at the double-height hall, and a metal half-return stair at the southeast corner of the building. Two windows at the west wall were unblocked and reconditioned. The only known alterations at the fourth level since 2000 include tenant improvements in the offices at the southwest corner of the building.

#### Mural (Contributing Object)

The north and east façades of The Women's Building are covered by a mural titled *Maestrapeace*. The painting was completed in 1994 by a group of prominent Bay Area muralists comprised of Juana Alicia, Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Perez. *Maestrapeace* illustrates the contributions of women across time and around the globe and is notable for its size and richly vibrant color.

Four two-story heads representing mythic female ancestors of Native American and African origin (north façade) and Asian and European origin (east façade) frame the building, gazing at each other from the southwest, northwest, and northeast corners. The shaped parapets atop the north and east walls hold additional over-scale figures, the north side features a pregnant goddess, and the east side holds a portrait of 1993 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchu.

Flowing water and plants across the remainder of the façades connect additional figures that depict goddesses from a variety of international spiritual traditions and larger-than-life mortal women including artist Georgia O'Keeffe, U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, poet Audre Lorde, United Farm Worker founder Jessica Govea, Puerto Rican nationalist Lolita Lebron, and South African anti-apartheid activist Lillian Ngoya. Other figures represent a Warsaw Ghetto resister, a dancing lesbian couple, a grandmother bathing a toddler, and a sari-clad mother nursing an infant while painting.

Colored bands hold gold calligraphy spelling out hundreds of women's names—historical, everyday, and divine, including sponsors. Cloth patterns painted predominantly by volunteers represent a traditional form of women's labor and creativity from many different cultures.

In 2009, the mural project extended to the inside of the building through patterns and names painted in the foyer and on the walls of the staircase. The mural was fully cleaned and restored in

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<sup>7</sup> Robb, 242.

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2012-13 by the original muralists in a process designed to gather a new generation of young woman artists who will carry on the *Maestrapeace* tradition.<sup>8</sup>

### Alterations

The building has undergone a series of alterations since it was constructed in 1910. Circa 1935-36 when the Sons and Daughters of Norway purchased the building, the following were undertaken: changes to the primary entrance at the north façade, construction of a four-level elliptical staircase close to the primary entrance of the building necessitating the enclosure of several windows at the north façade, construction of a lobby elevator, brick infill of some openings on the west façade, and the reconfiguration of the auditorium at the first and second levels. Sometime between 1956 and 1993, a large square cupola at the northeast corner of the building was removed.

Since the San Francisco Women's Centers purchased the building in 1978, a number of interior alterations have been undertaken to further TWB's mission, as described in the narrative specific to each level. All of these changes have been guided by, and are consistent with, TWB's mission. Although changes to the third and fourth floors postdate the period of significance, the public spaces on the first two floors are generally consistent with the period of significance. Circulation within the building, the stairwell, and the elevator dates from the period of significance. Some of the original fixtures, such as the bar in the second floor Audre Lorde Room, and finishes such as original hardwood floors, window surrounds, and molding, have been retained and reinforce the historic feeling of TWB.

### **Integrity**

The building has not changed substantially since the period of significance and strongly conveys the history of The Women's Building. TWB remains at its original *location* of 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The *setting* on 18<sup>th</sup> and Lapidge Streets has remained consistent. Although the demographics of the Mission District population have changed, the blocks surrounding The Women's Building are still a mix of early twentieth century residential and commercial buildings and continue to comprise a lively area within the larger neighborhood. *Feeling* is retained: The Women's Building is still an active public space welcoming a broad cross-section of the Bay Area. The property itself continues to be a visual landmark for the neighborhood. Its height and massing creates a distinctive edifice that rise above the primarily two-story buildings that surround it. The *association* is intact; The Women's Building continues to own and program the facility. Integrity of *design, materials, and workmanship* associated with the mural *Maestrapeace* is very high. Although there is reduced integrity of design, materials, and workmanship in the architecture itself, especially in the interior, this is consistent with the history of tenant improvements to the building throughout the course of its use to fulfill its utilitarian mission as a social hall.

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<sup>8</sup> Molly Oleson, "'Maestrapeace' Muralists Celebrate Restoration and Pass On Legacy," *Mission Local* 10 March 2013 <https://missionlocal.org/2013/03/maestrapeace-muralists-celebrate-renovation-and-pass-on-legacy/> accessed January 10, 2017.

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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.)

SOCIAL HISTORY: WOMEN'S HISTORY

SOCIAL HISTORY: LGBTQ HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Asian

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Hispanic

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Native American

**Period of Significance**

1978-1994

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

**Significant Dates**

1978

1994

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

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

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

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

**Architect/Builder**

Denke, August Reinhold

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



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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 Women's Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Social History: Women's History and LGBTQ History, and Ethnic Heritage: Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American, for its association with second wave feminism, one of the late twentieth century's most consequential social movements. The Women's Building is one of "the first women-owned and women-operated community center[s] in the U.S."<sup>9</sup> Women's centers, which appeared in various forms and occupied a variety of building types across the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, were especially important manifestations of this grassroots movement for gender equality and social transformation. The property meets Criterion Consideration G: Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years for its association with the nationally significant second wave feminist movement and as a location where the struggle for women's rights was linked to additional community struggles, including those of marginalized racial/ethnic communities, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and others. A sufficient body of scholarship has developed to establish second wave feminism as a social movement critical to U.S. history. The Women's Building is exceptional in this history for the scale of its ambitions, which match the large social hall it purchased in 1978 when it was founded, and for the breadth of social issues it has addressed. The period of significance for the resource is 1978 to 1994. The period of significance captures the beginnings, formation, and consolidation of TWB, culminating with the creation of the major mural project, *Maestrapeace*, which visually communicates the organization's mission of supporting and celebrating women across time and around the world.

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

*Brief Chronological History of 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street: Mission Turn Hall and Dovre Hall, 1910-1978*

The Mission Turn Hall was initiated in June 1910 with a ceremony conducted in German and English to lay the corner stone of the new edifice, the first building erected by San Francisco's German American community after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. German American architect August Reinhold Denke was selected to design the building in his first year as a registered architect.<sup>10</sup>

Turnverein societies were German American organizations dedicated to physical education as well as space for social, cultural, and political activities, and were common across the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Bay Area reportedly had six active Turnvereins at the time the Mission Turn Hall opened.<sup>11</sup> The Mission Turn Hall's multiple rooms became

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<sup>9</sup> The Women's Building, <https://womensbuilding.org> accessed May 16, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Turners Will Lay Corner Stone Today," *San Francisco Chronicle* 26 June 1910, 55.

<sup>11</sup> The Women's Building Application for San Francisco Landmark Designation, 1984, in collection of The Women's Building.

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home to groups like the German American Spartan Club, which held meetings, classes, gymnastic exhibitions, and dances there.<sup>12</sup> The Mission Turn Hall was not exclusively used by German Americans and brought many residents of the multi-ethnic Mission District neighborhood together in dances, theater performances, political rallies, and even funerals.

Local chapters of the Sons and Daughters of Norway purchased 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street in the fall of 1935. The Henrik Ibsen Lodge No. 7 and Anna Kolbjørnson Lodge No. 4 were growing in membership and sought more space. The consolidated lodges renamed the building Dovre Hall for a Norwegian mountain range, and completed renovations in time for a grand opening on June 1936. The gymnasium was converted to an auditorium/dance hall with a stage and a refreshment area. Other rooms were transformed into ceremonial lodge spaces. New stairwells and an elevator made circulation easier and more accessible. Dovre Hall served as a community space for dances, fundraising events, wedding receptions, club meetings, and other gatherings.<sup>13</sup>

During the post-WWII decades, clubs affiliated by European immigrant identity such as the Sons and Daughters of Norway experienced dwindling membership. As the elder generation passed away, and younger members moved to the suburbs, the hall lost its role as a vital community center. In those same years, the Mission District neighborhood was undergoing large-scale socio-economic change. White, middle-class residents were increasingly replaced by Latinos (native-born and immigrant) as well as “artists, bohemians, students and other counter-culture types.”<sup>14</sup>

The Women's Building was designated San Francisco Landmark #178 in 1985 for its significance as a community facility during the tenure of the German American and Norwegian American communities.

### **The Women's Building, 1978-1994**

#### *National Significance of The Women's Building*

The Women's Building is an important resource associated with San Francisco's twentieth century social history and especially significant in association with the national movement known as second wave feminism, circa 1960s-1980s. Although most studies have overlooked spatial aspects of this history, two books by prominent scholars Anne Enke (2007) and Daphne Spain (2016) explore this important dimension of second wave feminism. Both scholars document how women's engagement with the cityscape inspired and shaped second wave feminism.<sup>15</sup> Even without a national theme study on second wave feminism, research shows that

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<sup>12</sup> Spartan Club ephemera held in the collection of The Women's Building.

<sup>13</sup> Sons and Daughters of Norway, “Dovre Hall: Grand Opening Souvenir Program” (1936) in collection of The Women's Building. A small, independently run bar at the northeast corner of the building continued operation from the 1910s to 1998.

<sup>14</sup> City and County of San Francisco, “City Within a City,” 84.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) and Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016). Their work relies on case studies of selected cities, primarily on the East Coast and in the Midwest. Enke studied feminist activism in Detroit, Chicago, and

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tangible remains of this movement endure, from sites with ephemeral associations such as places of protest to buildings that housed feminist organizations, activities, and businesses.<sup>16</sup> This emerging scholarship demonstrates that women's centers, which appeared in various forms and occupied a variety of building types across the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, were especially important manifestations of this grassroots movement for gender equality and social transformation.

Since its earliest days, leaders of The Women's Building have described it as "the only woman-owned, woman-operated facility of its kind in the United States."<sup>17</sup> While there is at least one other women-owned and operated center in the U.S. that dates from this era,<sup>18</sup> it is certainly true that there is not another "facility of its kind." TWB's import and influence have been acknowledged since shortly after it opened its doors. Anthropologist Deborah Wolf recognized TWB's national significance in 1980 when she described it "as the first of its size in the country to be bought by women's political and cultural groups."<sup>19</sup> That same year, the American Planning Association recognized the building with an award as part of a national competition on "Planning to Meet the Changing Needs of Women."<sup>20</sup> Three years later renowned feminist activist Gloria Steinem spoke at a TWB event honoring women's leadership and noted, "There are very few buildings like this. It is a very precious symbol to women in other cities and other countries...."<sup>21</sup>

By the mid-1980s, women from other U.S. cities were turning to The Women's Building for advice and guidance on forming their own similar institutions. Womens Way [*sic*], a fundraising coalition in Philadelphia, contacted TWB in February 1984 seeking help as they tried to establish a women's building in the city, which did not yet have a women's center. Sally-ann Hard, Development Coordinator for Womens Way wrote:

I would be pleased to receive any information you can forward to me regarding your Women's Building. In particular, I am interested in knowing about your organizational structure, whether you are a membership organization, your criteria for "tenants," your

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Minneapolis/St. Paul; Spain's study focuses on Boston and Los Angeles. As is common, the Western U.S. has received less attention from historians of this subject to date.

<sup>16</sup> Springate, Megan E. *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 2016). Many chapters in this national theme study demonstrate the links between LGBTQ history and second wave feminism.

<sup>17</sup> Program for Third Anniversary Luncheon "Celebrating Women's Leadership." Communications, Flyers, Events at Building folder, The Women's Building Collection, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup> Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and discussed under *Comparison of TWB to Associated Properties*.

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Goleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 178.

<sup>20</sup> American Planning Association Award Certificate, October 1980, Communications, General, Testimonials & Awards 1979-2000 folder, The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>21</sup> Program Insert, Communications, General, Testimonials & Awards 1979-2000 folder, The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

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sources of finance. We are very excited by the concept and any information you can give, we would be most appreciative.<sup>22</sup>

In 1986, The Ventura County Commission for Women began to consider starting a women's center in the county. Commissioner Ginny Connell wrote to TWB in June of that year to collect information about how a women's center might be initiated, methods for financial support, and what range of services to offer.<sup>23</sup> The city of Chicago was a crucial place for the beginnings of what was known as "women's liberation" in the late 1960s, yet it did not have a dedicated women's center in 1986 when the Midwest Women's Center began a feasibility study for a center. They turned to TWB while exploring the potential of purchasing a building and expanding their staff to support a "Chicago Women's Building." The following year they proposed profiling TWB in articles they planned to write to increase the "visibility of this phenomenon."<sup>24</sup> TWB viewed itself as part of an international movement for social justice and gender equality and some women outside the U.S. looked to TWB as an example. The London-based National Council for Voluntary Organisations sent a researcher to TWB in preparation for the 1988 publication *Sisters Across the Atlantic: A Guide to Networking in the U.S.*<sup>25</sup>

TWB is a powerful example of the spaces second wave feminists created to establish women's rights and to envision a more equitable society. The variety of women-centered spaces established during this period include domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, feminist presses and bookstores, coffee houses, financial institutions that served women, women's health clinics, and arts/performance spaces. Women's centers provide the most appropriate place to mark this movement; no other property type reflects the many manifestations of second wave feminism so fully. Scholar Daphne Spain describes women's centers as "incubators of autonomy" and positions them as the most important manifestation of second wave feminism in the built environment.<sup>26</sup> The building itself, with its scale of activity and scope of programming, was a centralizing force for feminist organizing in the region. One major focus for TWB was in "sponsored projects," which found in TWB affordable, accessible space to develop their work, a nonprofit umbrella under which to fundraise, and colleagues to cheer them on and to challenge them. Several of these efforts were able to launch from their status as sponsored project to becoming their own nonprofit entities (**Appendix**). Without TWB, many of these programs likely would not have been able to survive and thrive.

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<sup>22</sup> Letter from Womens Way, 7 February 1984. Communications International and National Women's Centers 1984-1988. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Ventura County Commission for Women, 24 June 1986. . Communications International and National Women's Centers 1984-1988. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Midwest Women's Center, 17 June 1987. Communications International and National Women's Centers 1984-1988. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Jane Grant, Women's Organisations Interest Group, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2 March 1988. Communications International and National Women's Centers 1984-1988. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup> Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 51.

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An argument for national significance can be also made based on the central role The Women's Building played at the intersection of multiple political and social movements that were happening around the U.S. as they played out in Northern California. TWB is one of the anchors of the history of women, feminists, LGBTQ, and progressive groups more generally in the Bay Area and has proved to be of national significance as an early laboratory for exploring and enacting what is termed "intersectionality" in the U.S.<sup>27</sup> TWB sought to explore and articulate how the organization could be a place for contact and coalition to fight sexism, racism, homophobia, imperialism, and other oppressive forces. TWB is referred to in eight essays compiled in the National Park Service's *LGBTQ Heritage Theme Study*.<sup>28</sup>

Women's history, and specifically, the history of second wave feminism, has not yet received the level of site-based documentation that has emerged in the last decade for other under-represented histories. No local, regional, or national surveys or theme studies have yet been conducted to situate this history in the built environment. Because properties associated with second wave feminism have just begun to reach the fifty-year mark, few resources on the National Register of Historic Places are designated for their association with second wave feminism, yet it is clear that this social movement was of national significance and contributed to broad national patterns of U.S. history.

As eminent historians Rosalynn Baxandall and Linda Gordon write, "The largest grassroots part of the women's movement is difficult to study precisely because it was so big, so decentralized, [and] so varied, and often left few records."<sup>29</sup> Historian Sara Evans states that the "intentionally decentralized structure" from which second wave feminism grew was one of the attributes that allowed the women's liberation movement "to grow so fast and with such intensity" creating a "wildfire of change."<sup>30</sup> Because manifestations of second wave feminism were dispersed across the U.S. and occurred primarily at the grassroots level, very few could be described as having a singular influence on national history. Yet it is evident that TWB is a powerful embodiment of second wave feminism that shaped, and was shaped by, the national movement of second wave feminism. TWB is uniquely significant for its longevity and for the breadth of its vision and inclusive definition of its constituencies. Securing a building with the location and scale of 3548 18<sup>th</sup> Street allowed TWB founders to create a new type of social, cultural, and political space for feminists and other progressive activists.

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<sup>27</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw is widely credited with first outlining this perspective in her article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul., 1991), 1241-1299

<sup>28</sup> Springate ed. *LGBTQ America*. TWB is specifically mentioned in chapters contributed by Gail Dubrow, Donna Graves & Shayne Watson, Christina Hanhardt, Gerard Kosovich, Megan Springate, Deena J. Gonzales & Ellie D. Hernandez, Susan Stryker, and Amy Sueyoshi.

<sup>29</sup> Rosalynn Baxandall and Linda Gordon eds. *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 2. The Women's Building History Project began gathering and organizing materials related to its history in the 1990s and the subsequent archives were deposited as The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco.

<sup>30</sup> Sara M. Evans, "Women's Liberation: Seeing the Revolution Clearly." *Feminist Studies* Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015) 139.

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## The Women's Building History

### *Finding a "Room of Our Own"*

The idea for a Bay Area Women's Center emerged initially in a 1970 meeting of the Bay Area Women's Coalition, which envisioned a meeting site, and referral and communication center.<sup>31</sup> The Women's Building emerged several years later from activities of the San Francisco Women's Centers (SFWC), which was founded in 1970 by a coalition of women's groups.<sup>32</sup> SFWC was formed to serve as a catalyst for a broad range of women's rights organizations and projects. It also provided some direct services such as a referral hotline. As a registered nonprofit, SFWC could sponsor a variety of projects and incubate new organizations. One important focus for SFWC was the issue of violence against women. In 1973, SFWC sponsored the new organization, San Francisco Women Against Rape, and in 1976, SFWC helped form La Casa de las Madres, one of the nation's first shelters for women and children escaping violence, and the first established by women of color.<sup>33</sup>

In 1975, SFWC and five other local organizations began planning a Conference on Violence Against Women. The partner groups included the Golden Gate Chapter of the National Organization for Women, Lesbians Organized, Black Women Organized for Action, La Casa de las Madres, the Chicana Rights Project of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and San Francisco State University, which would provide meeting spaces. Women who planned the event defined violence broadly to include physical, social, political, economic, and cultural acts directed against women.<sup>34</sup>

Conference organizers debated who should be welcomed at the event and finally settled on a stance that only women and girls would be admitted, prompting the University to pull its sponsorship within weeks of the gathering. The ensuing rush for a site resulted in moving the program to Grace Cathedral (1100 California Street) and Cogswell College (600 Stockton Street), a trade school a few blocks away. In spite of the last-minute relocation, 1,300 people attended the groundbreaking conference.<sup>35</sup>

The experience of scrambling for meeting space led a core group of women in the SFWC to begin looking into purchasing a building in 1978. The organization had outgrown its small,

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<sup>31</sup>Report of the Second Bay Area Women's Coalition (untitled) 9 February 1970, SF Now Papers cited in Stephanie Gilmore, *Groundswell: Grassroots Feminist Activism in Postwar United States* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 102.

<sup>32</sup>"Herstory of San Francisco's Women's Centers" Box 5, The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>33</sup>Sushawn Robb, *Mothering the Movement: The Story of the San Francisco Women's Building* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2012) 27. U.S. Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women, "The History of the Violence Against Women Act." [http://www.ncdsv.org/images/OVW\\_HistoryVAWA.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/OVW_HistoryVAWA.pdf). November 15, 2016 accessed. That same year, lesbian activist and early SFWC board member Del Martin published *Battered Wives*, the first book on the subject of domestic violence in the U.S. "Guide to the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers," Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>34</sup>Robb, 28.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, 28-30.

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three-room rented office at 63 Brady Street (extant). Like many initial manifestations of second wave feminism, such as consciousness raising groups that met in private homes, SFWC occupied private space that was not readily visible or accessible to women who did not already know of it. As historian Anne Enke found in studying feminist spaces of the 1970s, “many women did not know how to identify and access feminist activism.”<sup>36</sup> A women’s building for the Bay Area would make the movement visible to all.

In the summer of 1978, SFWC released a ten-page proposal describing why a Women’s Building of the Bay Area was needed. They argued that centers on college campuses and in small spaces in Berkeley and San Francisco were inadequate to demand for places where women could obtain support and “opportunities to connect with other women who are going through the same struggles and changes.”<sup>37</sup> A centrally located building that offered affordable space to house various women’s groups and hosted cultural and political events would “lend more legitimacy” to struggling organizations, and moral support to those who felt isolated. Desperately needed performance space would support dancers, musicians, poets, composers, writers, and theater groups who were creating an “emerging women’s culture.”<sup>38</sup>

The location of a variety of diverse groups in one building will increase their accessibility to women in the community, since the Building will lend a higher visibility to participating groups. More women will know about the availability of services and will find the services, when centralized, to be infinitely more convenient and accessible.<sup>39</sup>

A sympathetic realtor had pointed the women towards Dovre Hall and negotiations with the Sons and Daughters of Norway moved forward. The building’s location at the southwest corner of 18<sup>th</sup> and Lapidge Streets was attractive, in part, because it was near the collection of lesbian-feminist identified cafes, bookstores, bars, clubs, and collective households that emerged in the early-to-mid 1970s along and around Valencia Street.<sup>40</sup> The proposal for a Women’s Building of the Bay Area described Dovre Hall’s “feeling of age, tradition, and beauty” and spaces such as a large theater, dining hall with institutional kitchen, and multiple meeting rooms.<sup>41</sup> Its location afforded reasonable rents for tenants and a spot outside the congested downtown area, still accessible by BART and bus.

SFWC argued for the historic nature of their endeavor. If purchased and developed as planned, they stated, “the WOMEN’S BUILDING OF THE BAY AREA [*sic*] will be the only large women-owned and -operated women’s building in the country.” The only other similar enterprise, the Los Angeles Women’s Building, had been forced to move several times because

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<sup>36</sup> Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham and the London: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> San Francisco Women’s Centers. “Women’s Building of the Bay Area: A Proposal,” 1978. The Women’s Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, “Citywide Historic Context Statement for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History in San Francisco” (San Francisco Planning Department, 2015) 151-54.

<sup>41</sup> San Francisco Women’s Centers. “Women’s Building of the Bay Area: A Proposal,” 1978.

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they rented their space. SFWC noted that LA's facility was a cultural arts center, whereas the Women's Building of the Bay Area would provide "space for social change community organizing projects and educational programs, as well as an information and referral center serving a spectrum of women's needs." The proposal described the "uniqueness of the project as a whole, combined with the unusual and history qualities of the physical building itself and the broad community support, make the WOMEN'S BUILDING OF THE BAY AREA an historic and significant effort."<sup>42</sup>

Purchasing the large building presented a significant challenge for a grassroots women's organization. Prior to the 1974 passage of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, women had to have a man cosign any credit applications, regardless of their own income. Discrimination against women in bank loans was standard practice until 1988, when Congress passed the Women's Business Ownership Act (H.R. 5050). One of the first major projects SFWC had taken on was partnering to charter and establish a women's credit union to increase women's economic power. The resulting Bay Area Feminist Federal Credit Union (944 Market Street) was active from 1975 to 1979.<sup>43</sup>

The purchase of 3548 18<sup>th</sup> Street called for new or expanded skills in fundraising, financial planning, contract negotiations, publicity, tenant recruitment, and property management. Some members of SFWC argued that becoming property owners would institutionalize their radical goals and was in conflict with their grassroots nature. Roma Guy, one of the key leaders behind the founding of TWB, recalled women asking, "Why raise money for a building rather than for programs or to change the law?"<sup>44</sup> Others worried that dedication of financial and human resources needed to support a large building would diminish their capacity to nimbly sponsor community needs as they arose. Their concerns were reinforced when a consultant hired to conduct a feasibility assessment predicted a high risk of failure in fundraising and concluded that the building posed a grave risk to SFWC's future.<sup>45</sup> The idea of a prominent woman-centered community space captured the imagination of people across the Bay Area and the project went forward. SFWC committed to purchase the building for \$535,000 with a down payment of \$125,000.

TWB gained endorsements from dozens of organizations and from prominent politicians such as Mayor Dianne Feinstein and California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, which helped the Building Fund Committee secure donations from local foundations and philanthropists.<sup>46</sup> Support from multiple grassroots fundraising events was equally important and helped to reinforce connections to the broader progressive women's movement. For example, half the funds raised by the annual Mile-a-thon run, which drew over 700 participants, were donated to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The SFWC worked in partnership with the Daughters of Bilitis, Black Women Organized for Action, and the Golden Gate Chapter of the National Organization for Women to create the Bay Area Feminist Federal Credit Union. Robb, *Mothering the Movement*, 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Roma Guy, 11 August 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Robb, 43.

<sup>46</sup> San Francisco Women's Centers. "Women's Building of the Bay Area: A Proposal," 1978. Robb, 57.



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other women's projects designated by the participant.<sup>47</sup> Other fundraisers highlighted new expressions of feminist culture, including a dance celebrating artist Judy Chicago's ambitious artwork, "The Dinner Party," and a performance by avant-garde composer Pauline Oliveros.<sup>48</sup> In the nine months before TWB opened in June 1979, the group had raised over \$160,000 toward their goal, and the Sons and Daughters of Norway agreed to carry the rest of the note.<sup>49</sup>

Fundraising for the building purchase led to cash flow issues for SFWC and difficulty finding monies necessary for ongoing operations and to bring the building up to code. One resource TWB had access to in the early years was activists' energy and time. TWB relied on volunteer or discounted labor from dozens of women to refurbish the building, including demolition, carpentry, and painting. Electrical upgrades were provided by Wonder Women Electric, a women's electrician collective.<sup>50</sup> Learning to become proficient at work that had been previously deemed only for men was one facet of the liberatory promise second wave feminism offered. In San Francisco, women learned at the Women's Skills Center (51 Waller Street), which taught mechanics and carpentry, as well as music and self-defense.<sup>51</sup>

### *Establishing The Women's Building*

TWB founders envisioned their purpose and constituencies broadly as evidenced by their carefully crafted goal statement of 1979, "The Women's Building will actively work to further people's struggles against oppression through race, minority, culture, disability, sexual orientation, age, life style, and class differences."<sup>52</sup> As Roma Guy, one of The Women's Building's founders, recalled "We understood that we can't have real social change for women unless we connect with all people's issues, because women are everywhere."<sup>53</sup> Like many Bay Area feminists, most of these women did not identify with the more mainstream strand of feminism in the U.S. that sought to create expanded opportunities for women within the existing system. Even the local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), an organization often viewed as the epitome of mainstream feminism, saw its efforts as part of a "world-wide revolution of human rights."<sup>54</sup> Radical feminists like those behind TWB envisioned a new system that abolished all forms of oppression, including patriarchy.

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<sup>47</sup> Robb, 57. Wolf, *The Lesbian Community*, 178. "A Potpourri of Programs for the Public," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 October 1979, 18.

<sup>48</sup> "Opening Today," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 March 1979, 41. "Sonic Meditation," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 November 1979, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Robb, 57-58.

<sup>50</sup> Canyon Sam, interviewed by Donna Graves, 14 November 2013.

<sup>51</sup> "San Francisco Survival Manual" c. 1975, in Gay Health Project Papers, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>52</sup> "Women's Building Goal Statement," 4 December 1979, in The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication with Roma Guy, 11 August 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Stephanie Gilmore. *Groundswell: Grassroots Feminist Activism in Postwar America*. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 98.

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Horizontal power structures and collective decision-making were hallmarks of radical second wave feminism, and served as the organizational foundation for SFWC and TWB in its early years. Volunteers motivated by passion for TWB's vision donated hours and hours of time to meetings of the collective and to numerous committees. This was made possible by relatively reasonable rents and low cost of living in the Bay Area of the 1960s and 1970s. Residents who dedicated their time to social movements or projects like TWB also benefitted from work subsidies such as the federally funded VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) programs, which employed many young, low-income people in the 1960s and 1970s.

By 1980, anthropologist Deborah Goleman Wolf wrote that TWB "has become both an actual and a symbolic center for women's ideas and activities. By its existence it has intensified and legitimized the political and cultural women's community in San Francisco."<sup>55</sup> Even as TWB's vision began to take form, the building itself created challenges and opportunities. The building suffered from inadequate lighting, poor acoustics, worn or broken fixtures, and uncomfortable seating in the auditorium, all of which took years to address.<sup>56</sup> One aspect of the building proved to have an unanticipated benefit. The property did not have a typical office configuration of separate doors off a central hallway, which meant that organizations housed in TWB often shared space or needed to pass through one another's offices to reach their own. Such adjacencies created familiarity and opportunities for cross-fertilization, collaboration, and deeper understanding across the range of communities represented by TWB's tenants.

TWB faced challenges from without. The fervor of social movements from the 1960s and 1970s began to wane as some progressive goals were being institutionalized. During the late 1970s, grassroots energy from the political right shaped campaigns such as the battle over the 1978 Briggs Initiative, a statewide measure to remove all gay and lesbian teachers from California's public schools.<sup>57</sup> Backlash against feminism was a significant part of the "New Right," which fought passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA passed both houses of Congress and failed to be ratified by the states. The 1980 election of Ronald Reagan as U.S. President promised that the next decade would witness a sea change in American politics. The new administration defunded numerous federal programs that assisted women and women's organizations. Even so, TWB sought to continue the tradition of progressive organizing of the 1960s and '70s. As Sushawn Robb, activist and chronicler of TWB, recalled, "the purchase of The Women's Building turned out to be one of the last major collective efforts by radical elements of the San Francisco women's movement."<sup>58</sup>

The larger political backlash against feminism and other progressive movements that emerged during TWB's first year of operation appeared to inspire repeated threats or acts of violence against the building and its occupants. An arson fire in February 1980 caused approximately

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<sup>55</sup> Wolf, 178.

<sup>56</sup> Robb, 248.

<sup>57</sup> Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (Oxford University Press, 2009) 155. Robb, 123.

<sup>58</sup> Robb, 134.

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\$60,000 in damage, increasing the financial and psychological strain on the new organization.<sup>59</sup> TWB was the target of a bomb threat in September 1980 and the following month a pipe bomb blew up at the building's entrance, demolishing the marquee signs, shattering windows, and strewing shrapnel across the street.<sup>60</sup> Carmen Vasquez spoke on behalf of TWB in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "I think we're targeted because we're a self-avowed feminist organization."<sup>61</sup> More bomb threats to the building were called in to a reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle* and to the San Francisco Police Department in December 1980, prompting TWB to call for a community gathering to focus on violence directed at women, African Americans, and Latinos throughout the Bay Area. Vasquez said the meeting was "designed to talk about our outrage at the violence that was being directed at us and connect it to other violence that we saw going on around us."<sup>62</sup> The sources of these threats and assaults on TWB were never established and speculation varied as to whether the target was one of the tenants or TWB itself "as a symbol of women's independence."<sup>63</sup>

Despite organizational growing pains and hostile, external political forces, TWB provided rental space to over 300 community organizations during its initial year and drew thousands of people each month.<sup>64</sup> A childcare center for women working at TWB or attending events there operated on the second floor. An open door policy toward rentals translated to a remarkable range of activities in TWB's first year from continued meetings of lodges that traditionally gathered at Dovre Hall, to the annual Mr. Golden West Body-Building Championship, the wedding of a young Latino couple, and a reading by African American poet Gwendolyn Brooks.<sup>65</sup>

Initial tenants reflected the founders' efforts to bring in organizations reflecting diverse constituencies, from the local chapter of NOW, which represented more mainstream feminism, to Concilio Mujeres, which worked to advance recognition of Chicano culture and history, to the local chapter of the Third World Women's Alliance (renamed the Alliance Against Women's Oppression in 1980), a multi-racial organization that espoused a socialist analysis of class and

<sup>59</sup> Press Release, "Fire at the Women's Building of the Bay Area," 22 February 1980. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society. Robb, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Press Release, San Francisco Women's Centers/Women's Building of the Bay Area, October 8, 1980. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>61</sup> H. G. Reza, "Pipe Bomb Damages S.F. Women's Building," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 October 1980, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Press Release SF Women's Centers/Women's Building of the Bay Area, 8 December 1980. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society. "Majority Report, May 6, 1982," KPFA Radio show archived at [https://archive.org/details/pacifica\\_radio\\_archives-AZ0642.06](https://archive.org/details/pacifica_radio_archives-AZ0642.06), accessed June 15, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Robb, 147.

<sup>64</sup> Guide to the San Francisco Women's Building/Women's Centers Records, 15. Online Archive of California <http://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt696nb1jq>, accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Robb, 132. Mildred Hamilton, "The Women's Building: An Update," *San Francisco Examiner* 2 March 1980, Scene section, 1. Yet some debates about rental policy reflected schisms within the coalition of progressive women who formed TWB's collective governance. In 1980-81 debates about renting to two organizations, one of female police officers, and the other a group of lesbian who explored sadomasochism, brought tensions to a head. When TWB ultimately decided that hosting police officers, of whatever gender, would undercut their relationship with the neighborhood, iconic activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon publicly broke with TWB, Robb, 150-156. In November 1981, a one-woman touring play sponsored by Union W.A.G.E. was advertised as "for women only" and drew cries of discrimination from theater critic Bernard Weiner, "Lawyers, Women and Vacuum Cleaners," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 November 1981, 34.

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gender oppression.<sup>66</sup> Other early tenants included the San Francisco Women's Switchboard, Coalition for the Medical Rights of Women, Options for Women Over 40, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Mothertongue Theater, Women Against Rape, and the Women's Speakers' Network.

In addition to providing space for community organizations, gatherings, and performances, The Women's Building continued the mission of SFWC to be a catalyst and incubator for new efforts. The organization sponsored a wide range of important projects that evolved and sometimes went on to form their own nonprofits, such as The Women's Foundation, the San Francisco Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women, Lesbian Visual Artists, Lilith Lesbian Theatre Collective, Women's Cancer Resource Center, Older Lesbian Organizing Committee, Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center, and more.<sup>67</sup>

Ongoing tasks of daily organization, management, and maintenance of a four-story public space was a monumental endeavor for a primarily volunteer organization. Although new economic and political realities diminished the tide of unpaid workers who helped launch the building, a core group who attended weekly meetings and donated ten to twelve hours per week, other volunteers, and a small paid staff kept TWB going. As the building's operations took shape, underlying tensions surfaced. SFWC, which owned the building, was primarily made up of white lesbians, while TWB staff were primarily women of color. TWB's dynamic echoed conflicts in the larger feminist movement, which was increasingly called upon to examine its own racism and classism.

Roma Guy, a member of the SFWC and leader of the campaign to establish TWB, and Carmen Vazquez, a Puerto Rican-born transplant from New York who worked on TWB staff, realized, according to Vazquez, that "the only way this is going to work is if you merge" the Women's Centers and The Women's Building. In 1980, the two collectives become one and occupied a single space within the building. Vazquez, who served as TWB's first director and later on the board of the organization, remembered that "the decision to merge meant that the collective of Women's Centers would then expand and that the women working at the Building, that we were all owners." That decision, according to Vazquez, "completely diversified the Board and changed the direction and history of the Women's Building completely."<sup>68</sup> After the merger, the board and staff of the Women's Building were required to be 75 percent women of color.<sup>69</sup>

TWB continued to run with a collective, cooperative work style that took enormous commitments of time and energy from members.<sup>70</sup> A lengthy strategic planning process in 1982 led to a more detailed mission statement, organizational structure, and work plan that solidified

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<sup>66</sup> Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2004) 44, 93.

<sup>67</sup> Robb, 315-317.

<sup>68</sup> Carmen Vazquez interview by Kelly Anderson. Transcript of video recording, May 12 and 13 and August 25, 2005, 46. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>69</sup> Vazquez (2005) 48.

<sup>70</sup> By the end of the decade, the organization still ran collectively. Paid staff grew in number and included an Executive Director. Robb, 219-22.

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and stabilized TWB throughout the following decade.<sup>71</sup> Although conflict over goals and process continued, participants realized that stewarding a space that could serve as a haven for progressive organizations and events meant that owning a building could be a radical act in and of itself.

### *Expanding the Women's Movement: Building Coalitions Across Difference*

From the beginning, TWB eschewed the singular focus, and sometimes separatism, that characterized some feminist organizations at the time. The relatively homogenous group of women who had occupied SFWC's small, overstuffed office space on Brady Street moved into a public, highly visible building of 25,000 square feet. The scale of the new building meant that broadening their constituencies was a necessity, as well as a profound reflection of their expanded commitment to engagement across differences of race/ethnicity, disability, gender orientation, and more. Tenants of TWB occupied varying ideological positions within the feminist movement and found that being in the building structured an unusual overlap of organizations in newfound proximities that fostered debates, conflicts, and alliances.

While this inclusive approach is generally viewed as characteristic of later, third wave feminism, the Bay Area and TWB can be seen as in the vanguard of this approach to feminist organizing. Scholar Stephanie Gilmore describes "the early history of second-wave feminism in San Francisco [as] fundamentally a lesson in coalition building." In her study of grassroots feminist activism, Gilmore documents how "coalitions were essential to the political landscape of San Francisco." She details how the local chapter of NOW reflected a "left coast" feminism that embraced differences of race, class, and sexual orientation. "They did not set aside such differences; instead, they worked through them, using them as a source of strength."<sup>72</sup> TWB is a reflection of the leadership of women on the West Coast in the evolution of U.S. feminism.

Supporting the lesbian and gay rights movement was a naturally important function for TWB given that so many of its founders were lesbian. While some U.S. feminist organizations were overtly hostile to lesbians, and early leaders such as Betty Friedan deemed lesbians a "lavender menace" to the goals of the National Organization for Women, lesbians were an integral and visible part of the Bay Area women's movement from the beginning.<sup>73</sup> The Bay Area Women's Coalition, formed in 1969, included representatives of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the nation's first lesbian rights organization, which was founded in San Francisco in 1955.<sup>74</sup> DOB co-founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were early supporters of TWB, and active in its initial years. Many of the organizations housed at TWB were strongly lesbian-identified and a remarkable number and range of events, meetings, and performances important to LGBTQ history were held there. The sponsored projects included a significant portion that were

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<sup>71</sup> Robb, 209.

<sup>72</sup> Gilmore, *Groundswell*, 121, 126.

<sup>73</sup> Friedan used the term "lavender menace" in 1969. "1969: The Year of Gay Liberation." New York Public Library website <http://web-static.nypl.org/exhibitions/1969/radicalesbians.html> accessed 12 September 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 5.

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developed by lesbians to serve lesbians including the San Francisco Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women, Lesbian Visual Artists, Lilith Lesbian Theatre Collective, Older Lesbian Organizing Committee, and Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center.<sup>75</sup>

In its first year of use the building was the location for a Jewish memorial service for slain gay rights leader Harvey Milk, organized by a new congregation of gay and lesbian Jews.<sup>76</sup> TWB also hosted "Third World Gay Day," a full day of workshops and a dance organized by the Gay Latino Alliance and the Third World Gay Caucus.<sup>77</sup> In July 1983, one of the first public forums in the U.S. on AIDS was held at TWB. Sponsored by an advisory committee of the San Francisco Human Rights Committee, the meeting was designed to clarify information about the disease and the gay community's response to the growing epidemic.<sup>78</sup> Beginning circa 1988, meetings of the local chapter of national AIDS activist group, ACT/UP San Francisco, were held at TWB.<sup>79</sup> San Francisco-based Project Inform was one of the pioneering AIDS activist and citizen science organizations in the U.S. In 1989, Project Inform held a community-wide meeting at TWB to share their findings from a research project they had undertaken with doctors in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.<sup>80</sup>

Organizing among people who identified as bisexual and transgendered, and incorporation of their issues into the more visible gay rights movement, took time and struggle. San Francisco was home to the first bisexual political organization in the U.S., BiPol, founded in 1983. In 1990, BiPol organized the first national Bisexual Conference. TWB hosted an associated benefit dance organized by the conference's People of Color Caucus along with other LGBTQ organizations.<sup>81</sup> In 1986, San Francisco-based Lou Sullivan founded the first FTM (female to male) educational and support organization in the United States. In 1995, the first FTM conference of the Americas was held at The Women's Building.<sup>82</sup>

Creating dialogues and alliances across race was an ongoing priority and challenge for TWB. Many women of color viewed the women's movement as primarily by and for white, middle-class women. "Third World Women," the term then used for women of color, had less interest in separating their gender status from their race, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity. They were reluctant to work with white women who often had a single focus on issues of gender oppression. Lesbians of color, who made up a portion of TWB staff, stood in complex relation to both the women's movement and gay and lesbian rights organizations.

Bay Area lesbian writers Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa captured and helped shape discussion of these issues with an influential 1981 anthology they edited, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. TWB celebrated the forthcoming book at an event

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<sup>75</sup> Robb, 315-317.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Tat interviewed by Donna Graves, 18 October 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Wolf, *The Lesbian Community*, 186-87.

<sup>78</sup> "S.F. Forum Set on AIDS," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 July 1983, p.6.

<sup>79</sup> Former ACT/UP member Gerard Koskovich, personal communication with Donna Graves, June 20, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Flyer, Project Inform File, Groups Ephemera Collection, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

<sup>81</sup> Graves and Watson, "Citywide Historic Context Statement," 184-85.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

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marking International Women's Day in 1981; another influential publication celebrated that day was *Unbound Feet*, a groundbreaking collection by Chinese American women writers.<sup>83</sup> The Latina, African American, Asian American, and Native American writers represented by these books—many of them from San Francisco—challenged claims of sisterhood made by white feminists and explored the links between race, class, feminism, and sexuality.<sup>84</sup> Contributors such as Pat Parker, Audre Lord, Nellie Wong, and Mitsue Yamada were part of readings and programs at TWB. Moraga recalled the Bay Area as a focal point for the articulation of race and feminism in the 1970s. After moving from Los Angeles to study at San Francisco State, she found new connections among and activities by women of color in the “various sorts of collaborations we were doing, conferences, readings, and political forums. And so it was a San Francisco base of women of color through which we were able to then emerge the idea for the book.”<sup>85</sup> As Moraga described it, feminism needed to be defined by “the multi-issued perspective first offered by women of color.”<sup>86</sup>

TWB was birthed at the time that many women were seriously grappling with what a feminism centered outside of heterosexual, white, middle-class experience would look like. Sociologist Benita Roth views this tension as “fundamental to understanding the historical development of second-wave feminism as shaped at its core by the dynamics of race/ethnicity and class among feminists.”<sup>87</sup> These issues also fundamentally shaped TWB. As Vasquez recalled, “the race and class conversations at the building, they were continuous, they really were. They imbued just about everything we did.”<sup>88</sup>

From its founding, TWB hosted or organized a myriad of events that reflected the concerns and cultures of diverse communities across the Bay Area. Archival material from the San Francisco Women's Building/San Francisco Women's Centers Collection demonstrates a remarkably broad range of programs, forums, performances, conferences, and courses held at TWB. A review of flyers and programs held in TWB's archives reflects a dizzying menu of cultural, political and social events. A small sampling of events are illustrated by flyers (**Figures**).

Extending the original role of the SFWC, TWB offered sponsored project status to hundreds of groups, offering their nonprofit umbrella for grant applications, sharing their bulk mailing permit, and providing advice and training. The organizations exemplified TWB's broad reach and included Action Committee for Abortion Rights, Bay Area Women's Philharmonic, California Women of Color, Children's Rights Advocates, National Asian Women's Health

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<sup>83</sup> Flyer for International Women's Day benefit reading at TWB, 8 March 1981. The Women's Building Collection, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>84</sup> Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua ed. *Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981).

<sup>85</sup> Cherríe Moraga interviewed by Kelly Anderson, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith College (2005) 53.

<sup>86</sup> Moraga (2005) 75.

<sup>87</sup> Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, xi-xii.

<sup>88</sup> Vasquez (2005) 45.

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Project, Remember Our Sisters Inside (supporting women prisoners), the local chapter of Women of All Red Nations, and Women's Cancer Resource Center.<sup>89</sup>

*Embodying a Politics of Place: Grounding TWB in the Mission*

While developing ways to embrace a broad and inclusive vision for a progressive women's movement, TWB also worked to develop an authentic partnership with organizations and residents in their new neighborhood. TWB's founders were conscious that they were situated in a predominately Latino neighborhood that had a thriving activist community. Owning a building in the Mission gave them a stake in the neighborhood's well-being and future. The 1978 proposal for a Women's Building of the Bay Area described a goal of providing "residents of the surrounding Mission neighborhood with a space for community activities—political, cultural and social."<sup>90</sup> Shortly before moving into the new building, staff summarized their internal process of reflecting on racism. Among their conclusions was their own "ignorance of Mission community issues" and the "need to change our approach i.e. P.R., visibility and outreach in the Mission."<sup>91</sup>

TWB opened during a time of fiery debate over who owned San Francisco neighborhoods such as the Castro and the Mission, which one historian described as "a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood where Latino, immigrant, lesbian and gay communities both overlapped and diverged."<sup>92</sup> As the cost of living in the Castro increased, gay men became a more visible presence in the Mission District and increasingly became targets of anti-gay violence and accusations of gentrifying the neighborhood. Lesbians who moved into the neighborhood experienced relatively little hostility from existing straight and/or Latino residents. Historian Josh Sides attributes this to the fact that, unlike many gay men, most lesbians did not own homes during this period—so there was little fear of lesbians pushing out existing owners. Many women saw themselves as part of a larger struggle for social change that included ethnic and racial minorities, and people with fewer resources—so the new lesbian residents became part of the neighborhood's existing activist fabric.

Women associated with TWB knew that they were engaged in a complex politics of place as they settled into their new home. In 1979, self-identified Latina lesbian Monica Lozano wrote a cautionary letter to the popular local magazine *Plexus*, calling the increasingly visible white lesbian community (though not specifically TWB) to acknowledge their role as intruders in the neighborhood.

You're being watched—how you act, how much of a conscious effort you make to reach

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<sup>89</sup> Anna Carastathis. *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) 179. Guide to the San Francisco Women's Building/Women's Centers Records, 26-31. Online Archive of California <http://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt696nb1jq>, accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>90</sup> San Francisco Women's Centers, "Women's Building of the Bay Area: A Proposal," 1978. The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society.

<sup>91</sup> San Francisco Women's Centers, "Notes from Final Racism Meeting," May 30, 1979, The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society. Quoted in Mayer, 60.

<sup>92</sup> Emily K. Hobson, "'Si Nicaragua Venció: Lesbian and Gay Solidarity with the Revolution'" *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4:2 (2012) 2.



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out to the Latino community. If you speak of the mutual struggles of oppressed peoples, then do something about it. Be respectful to the people in the Mission and the traditions and culture that exist here. Do work around gay oppression, but do it in a progressive and sensitive way. Learn Spanish! Try to communicate in a way that is non-alienating.<sup>93</sup>

TWB explicitly broadened its feminist and lesbian roots to encompass the activism of their working-class and immigrant Latino neighbors. From its earliest days the building was announced by a bilingual sign for The Women's Building and *El Edificio de Mujeres*, pointed recognition of where their building occupied space and who was welcome there. One of the complex issues TWB sought to find common ground on with their Mission District neighbors was anti-police violence campaigns. The bombing, threats, and arson TWB suffered made them more dependent on police. It also reinforced vulnerabilities they shared with other marginalized communities who suffered from being targets for police violence and also felt lack of police protection. In 1979, over 100 women met at TWB to formulate a response to recent incidents of police violence at lesbian bars, which led to the founding of Lesbians Against Police Violence (LAPV), an organization housed at TWB.<sup>94</sup> LAPV and TWB pointed out the unevenness of law enforcement and the heavy-handedness with which the San Francisco Police Department treated Latinos and other people of color, as well as lesbians and gay men.<sup>95</sup>

One important expression of TWB's alliances with Mission activists was through *Somos Hermanas*—a sponsored project of The Women's Building that was an integral part of the Bay Area's contribution to the Central American Solidarity movement of the 1980s. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Mission District was home to many immigrants who fled civil war and political oppression in Latin America. The neighborhood became a focal point for the U.S. Central American Solidarity movement that worked to reject political, economic, and military intervention in Central America and to support Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans who were fighting for human rights, economic justice, and democratic freedoms.

*Somos Hermanas* ("we are sisters") put into practice TWB's overlapping commitments to struggles against sexism, racism, and state violence. Carmen Vazquez, a leader in both organizations, reflected that the "Women's Building was the reason for *Somos Hermanas*."<sup>96</sup> *Somos Hermanas* organized demonstrations, conferences, reports, film screenings, popular education, material aid campaigns, dances, and house meetings.<sup>97</sup> They sponsored a solidarity delegation to Nicaragua in 1984 and a major conference on the Sandanista Revolution in San Francisco the following year.

Like TWB, *Somos Hermanas* set out to bridge campaigns against "interlocking systems of

<sup>93</sup> Monica Lozano, "Mission Solidarity" (letter to the editor) *Plexus*, (July 1979) 2.

<sup>94</sup> Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham and London, Duke University press 2013) 117.

<sup>95</sup> Flyer, "Stop Police Harassment in the Mission," 1979, The Women's Building Collection, Gay Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society. Hanhardt, 130.

<sup>96</sup> Vazquez (2005) 47.

<sup>97</sup> Anna Carastathis, "Identity Categories as Potential Coalitions," *Signs* 38:4 (Summer 2013) 954-55.

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oppression which they conceptualized in transnational terms.”<sup>98</sup> The organization consciously drew connections between women in the U.S. and “the women of Central America because we share the burdens of militarism and war, of poverty, sexism and racism” and links “between the U.S. military budget and role in Central America and poverty and deterioration of social services, housing, medical care, employment and education in the U.S.”<sup>99</sup> Active until the early 1990s, Somos Hermanas counted chapters in New York, Boston, Louisville, and Santa Cruz/Watsonville.<sup>100</sup>

### *Maestrapeace and Reinforcing TWB as a Community Space*

As the organization approached a decade of existence, TWB looked to consolidate its place as a haven for progressive energies during the Reagan era. One aspect of this work was attending to the state of the building itself. Renovations to the hard-worn facility had been undertaken on an as-needed and piecemeal basis. As real estate prices in San Francisco and the Mission District climbed, TWB’s assets increased with the rising value of the building and the land it sat on.<sup>101</sup> Rental income from tenants and events continued to be a source of income, though rates were kept well below market to ensure that TWB’s spaces were affordable to community groups. Between 1985 and 1988, the Mayor’s Office of Community Development granted almost \$350,000 to cover renovations focused on safety and accessibility, and included the division of a second-floor dining hall into two meetings rooms, and reconfiguration of most of the building’s third and fourth levels.<sup>102</sup>

In 1988, the organization undertook a marketing survey to understand how TWB could better serve its constituencies. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake interrupted this facility evaluation and a resulting comprehensive renovation plan. As an unreinforced masonry building, TWB was clearly vulnerable to future quakes and fell under City requirements for new seismic retrofit standards. Staff and board began to plan for an ambitious multi-year capital campaign of approximately \$6 million for needed renovation and retrofitting. In the meantime, founder Roma Guy led a successful 1993 campaign called “A Room of Our Own,” which raised funds to pay off TWB’s mortgage.<sup>103</sup> It also set up a History Committee to develop an archival collection on the building that was ultimately deposited at the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) Historical Society.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>99</sup> “Somos Hermanas Needs You,” c. 1989, Somos Hermanas archive, c. 1984–90, box 50/11.

<sup>100</sup> Hobson, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Demand for housing in the Mission increased as residents forced out of redevelopment areas in the Western Addition and South of Market neighborhoods looked to areas like the Mission for replacement housing. In 1972, two BART stations opened in the Mission, connecting the neighborhood directly to downtown. “The Mission: Then and Now,” *San Francisco Beacon*, 4 January 1980, pp. 2-4.

<sup>102</sup> Robb, 223-224

<sup>103</sup> SFWC and TWB often used variations on the phrase “a room of one’s own,” from Virginia Woolf’s 1929 book stating that women need money and space to actualize their visions for fundraising and publicity.

<sup>104</sup> Robb, 284-85.

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A mural project provided the centerpiece of public events of the early 1990s designed to draw attention to TWB's history and its future. This remarkable series of paintings is titled *Maestrapeace*—a semantic play on the term “masterpiece.” *Maestra* is Spanish for woman teacher or master. Completed in 1994, *Maestrapeace* is widely recognized as a major example of the mural arts movement. Mural historian Timothy Drescher pronounces *Maestrapeace* as “easily one of the most significant mural projects in the history of the city.”<sup>105</sup> Scholar Guisela Latorre describes it as “the most ambitious collectively produced women’s muralist project ever.”<sup>106</sup> The Library of Congress states that The Women’s Building is “internationally recognized for its mural, *Maestrapeace*, which honors women’s contributions around the world.”<sup>107</sup>

Embellishing TWB with murals was another way for the building to reinforce its place in the Mission District, which is internationally known for its rich collection of murals. Beginning in the early 1970s, the neighborhood became a focus for mural artists who embraced the legacy of the giants of the Mexican mural movement. They created works that reflect Chicano/Latino heritage and culture, campaigns against political oppression, and fights for environmental justice, among other topics. The 18<sup>th</sup> Street façade of TWB previously had a modest mural painted by Patricia Rodriguez sometime in the early 1980s, among the many gestures and actions the organization undertook to show its alignment with the surrounding neighborhood.<sup>108</sup> One of the neighborhood’s first major mural efforts is the block-long concentration of paintings along Balmy Alley (approximately one mile south of TWB), which began with a few murals in the 1970s and blossomed in the 1980s as over thirty artists painted more than two dozen murals with a focus on events in Central America.<sup>109</sup> Balmy Alley and *Maestrapeace* are two of the most studied and visited mural sites in San Francisco, and offer instructive contrasts. Balmy Alley’s murals reflect the individual styles and varied themes of each artist or collective and are painted on modest rear walls, fences, and garage doors. In contrast, *Maestrapeace* is unique in the Mission District and in San Francisco for its grand scale and unified style.

Planned to commemorate the building’s fifteenth anniversary, *Maestrapeace* was collaboratively created by a multiracial collective of seven artists: Juana Alicia, Miranda Bergman, Edythe Boone, Susan Kelk Cervantes, Meera Desai, Yvonne Littleton, and Irene Perez. Bergman described the artists as “two African-Americans, two Latinas, one East Indian, and two Caucasians, one Jewish; lesbian, straight, and bisexual.”<sup>110</sup> They ranged in age from their

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<sup>105</sup> Diana Scott, “Unfurling a *Maestrapeace*: Mythic and Mortal Female Ancestors Grace This San Francisco Landmark,” *On the Issues* (Winter 1995) [http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1995winter/win95\\_scott.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1995winter/win95_scott.php)

<sup>106</sup> Guisela Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

<sup>107</sup> Library of Congress Website, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013632353/>, accessed March 1, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> The Rodriguez mural was covered by *Maestrapeace*. A large neighborhood turnout at the mural’s dedication reinforced the mural’s goal of “bridging the Women’s Building and the community” according to an article “Second Story Women” *San Francisco Examiner*, n.d. in collection of The Women’s Building. Rodriguez, one of the founders of Mujeres Muralistas, painted five larger-than-life figures in a strip fifteen feet above ground that was twelve feet high and one hundred feet wide.

<sup>109</sup> Latorre, 164-65.

<sup>110</sup> Latorre, 226

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twenties to their fifties and together had over one hundred years of experience. Several of the women were prominent figures in the Bay Area mural movement. Perez and Alicia were members of the well-known collective Mujeres Muralistas, Cervantes was founder of the Mission District arts organization Precita Eyes, and Bergman was an active link between the Bay Area arts scene and political movements in Nicaragua and Palestine.<sup>111</sup>

*Maestrapeace* took almost eighteen months' time and required donated labor from dozens of volunteers.<sup>112</sup> In its initial phase, TWB staff distributed a survey to building users asking for input on the mural's themes. Their responses informed the work of the principal artists, who further solicited community engagement by encouraging members of the public to visit and help them paint.<sup>113</sup> The resulting imagery reflects a feminist vision that is transnational and transhistorical, depicting real and mythical women around the world and across time. Beyond the wide range of female figures featured, another dimension of symbolic inclusiveness is achieved through incorporating textile patterns from many cultures and hundreds of women's names culled from suggestions from the community.

As Latorre observes "perhaps no mural in California better exemplifies the heterogeneity and multicultural feminist spirit on the West Coast than *Maestrapeace*."<sup>114</sup> It functions as a visual history and celebration of women activists, scientists, artists, anonymous heroines, and deities from around the world. Crowning the main northern façade on 18<sup>th</sup> Street is a figure described by Susan Kelk Cervantes as the "Goddess of Light and Creativity" whose hands hold the sun and whose womb embraces a tiny girl while releasing a cascade of life-giving water. As it falls, the water transforms into streams of fabric representing women's global labor and creativity in textile production. These ribbons of fabric feature dozens of patterns drawn from Celtic, Guatemalan, Samoan, Chinese, and other traditions.<sup>115</sup>

The eastern façade takes advantage of lighter traffic on Lapidge Street allowing viewers time to study its denser iconography featuring multiple female figures. Women's role as healers is represented by disparate figures such as former U.S. Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders and Mexican curandera María Sabrina.<sup>116</sup> Women's creative force is captured by poet Audre Lorde and painter Georgia O'Keefe, who appear with political activists such as Puerto Rican Lolita Lebron and Palestinian Hanan Ashrawi.

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<sup>111</sup> Juana Alicia, "Remembering the Mission: A Reflection," 20 September 2007 <http://www.juanaalicia.com/content/remembering-the-mission-a-reflection/>, accessed March 1, 2017. Jannelle Garcia, "The Last Mural Standing," *Xpress* (Fall 2014) <http://xpressmagazine.org/2014/12/11/the-last-mural-standing/>, accessed March 1, 2017.

<sup>112</sup> Scott, "Unfurling a *Maestrapeace*."

<sup>113</sup> Robb, 285.

<sup>114</sup> Latorre, 225.

<sup>115</sup> Latorre, 227.

<sup>116</sup> Latorre, 228.

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An enormous portrait of Guatemalan activist Rigoberto Menchu, reinforcing TWB's active connections with the Central American Solidarity movement, tops this façade.<sup>117</sup> Menchu, who had won the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her work advocating for indigenous and women's rights, is dressed in a traditional *huipil*, expanding the textile imagery. From her ear hangs a Nobel Peace Prize with the central figures transformed from male to female. Her large hands form the mural's center and hold two goddess figures, the Yoruban Yemayá, who became a central figure in African diasporan religious traditions such as santería, and Coyolxauhqui, Aztec deity of the moon.

*Maestrapeace's* themes and the process by which it came to grace the building's exterior eloquently reinforce TWB's purpose.

### Historic Context: Second Wave Feminism and Women's Centers

#### *Second Wave Feminism in the United States*

As historians Rosalynn Baxandall and Linda Gordon write, "Women's liberation was the largest social movement in the history of the U.S.... The women's liberation movement, as it was called in the 1960s and 1970s, or feminism, as it is known today, reached into every home, school, and business, into every form of entertainment and sport. Like a river overflowing its banks and seeking a new course, it permanently altered the landscape...."<sup>118</sup>

The work of multiple generations of women's rights activists in the U.S. is beyond the scope of this nomination and can't be simplified into a neat narrative, yet the wave metaphor that has been used to frame this history, while debated, has some purchase and utility.<sup>119</sup> In this telling, earlier generations of women's rights activists formed a first wave, which focused on suffrage and, to a lesser extent, property rights and the Equal Rights Amendment to establish constitutional equality for women. Beginning in the 1960s, second wave feminists revived the battle to bring legal equality and added the fundamental contribution of the concept that "the personal is political." This organizing principle became a lens to bring a broad range of issues and inequalities that had been deemed outside the arena of politics to light including sexuality, intimate and public gender power dynamics, reproductive rights, and domestic violence.

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<sup>117</sup> Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016) 105.

<sup>118</sup> Baxandall and Gordon eds. *Dear Sisters*, 1. Other standard references for the history of post-WWII feminism include Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking 2000) and Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Scholars who have challenged the wave metaphor as ignoring activism between the 1930s and 1960s, and by poor women, and women of color include Stephanie Gilmore, *Groundswell* (2013) Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement* (2007) and Anne Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington DC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

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The term “second wave feminism” was coined in 1968 by *New York Times* writer Martha Lear, although the movement had already taken several forms by that point.<sup>120</sup> The 1961 Women’s Strike for Peace against nuclear weapon testing, and the first President’s Commission on the Status of Women pointed to two of the primary directions that the women’s movement pursued—one grassroots and confrontational, the other dedicated to working within existing systems to carve out more space for women to thrive. Just two years later, Betty Friedan’s influential book *The Feminine Mystique* brought the claustrophobia many white, middle-class women felt in their domestic roles to millions of Americans.<sup>121</sup>

The National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966 in part to pressure the federal government to follow through on enforcing protections codified by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to fight gender discrimination. At the same time, younger women activists in the civil rights, antiwar, and student movements drew connections between their commitment to radical social transformation and the second-class status to which they were relegated. By the 1970s, the range of organizations, activities, and campaigns under the women’s movement umbrella touched nearly every aspect of American life, from employment and reproductive rights to access to childcare and equal education, women’s political and media representation, religious ordination of women, and much more.<sup>122</sup>

The women’s movement has often been stereotyped as primarily by and for middle-class, white women. This limited perspective is, in part, due to inadequate scope in understanding what constitutes women’s activism that often left out poor women and women of color. Beginning in the late 1960s, feminist organizations developed more nuanced and multi-vocal approaches to social change that encompassed anti-racism and class analysis. African American feminists were at the vanguard of acting and theorizing on and at the intersections of race, class, and gender.<sup>123</sup>

The arena of feminist theory and activism termed “intersectionality” evolved as activists and others increasingly questioned the idea of “woman” as a singular political, social, and even experiential category. In a 1981 talk given by singer/activist/scholar Bernice Johnson Reagon at the West Coast Women’s Festival held in Yosemite National Park, she proclaimed to the all-woman gathering that they had reached “the end of a time when you can have a space that is yours only.” She described the hard, dangerous, and necessary work of coalition building. “That’s why we have to have coalitions. Cause I ain’t gonna let you live unless you let me live. Now there’s danger in that but there’s also the possibility that we can both live—if you can stand it.”<sup>124</sup> As Carmen Vazquez, one of TWB’s early leaders, states, the organization and its space were dedicated to fostering such coalitions and was “a critical site for the development of the

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<sup>120</sup> Martha Lear, “The Second Feminist Wave,” *New York Times Magazine* 10 March 1968, 24 quoted in Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 85.

<sup>121</sup> Rosen, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Rosen, xx-xxiii.

<sup>123</sup> Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1969-1980* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005) 2.

<sup>124</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” in Barbara Smith, ed. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) 365.

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women's movement in San Francisco that had a strong foundation in a progressive race-class analysis."

Conflict and fragmentation within the broad feminist movement received the most attention from social scientists and historians. The stereotype of "women's libbers" as only white and middle class was refuted by lived evidence that feminists of the 1970s formed many coalitions across race, class, and political lines. Subsequent scholarship by Benita Roth, Stephanie Gilmore, and others has challenged the standard narrative by documenting how "building coalitions across differences is a hallmark of feminist activism in communities across the country."<sup>125</sup> As poet Audre Lord, for whom a meeting room at TWB is named, wrote, survival meant "learning how to take our differences and make them strengths."<sup>126</sup> TWB reflects this evolution of second wave feminism, which made the case that individuals and communities embody multiple and complex sources of identity.

### *Women's Centers as Expressions of Second Wave Feminism*

Second wave feminists in the United States took on the important project of creating spaces that allowed women to envision a more equitable society and to establish their rights. While some feminists worked to gain entry for women into previously all-male or male-dominated spaces, others created women-centered spaces to nurture women's cultural, social, economic, and political expression and autonomy. These material manifestations of second wave feminism were nearly always in existing buildings that were usually rented, not owned. Depending on needs and the resources available, these spaces were retrofitted to meet the requirements of new users.

Second wave feminists created a variety of women-centered spaces including domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, feminist presses and bookstores, coffee houses, financial institutions that served women, women's health clinics, and arts/performance spaces. TWB is best compared to places known as "Women's Centers" that were created in the 1970s and '80s across the country. A 1980 study sponsored by the Women's Educational Equity Act Program of the federal Office of Education stated, "Women's Centers take many forms. Some are campus-based; some community-based. A Woman's Center may be a room for reading, relaxation and group meetings, or it may be an entire building in the community, housing many women's projects. San Francisco and Los Angeles have such buildings."<sup>127</sup>

According to scholar Daphne Spain, over one hundred women's centers had been independently established across the U.S. by the mid-1970s. California, New York, and Massachusetts had the largest number, while thirty-nine states held at least one. Spain claims that women's centers

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<sup>125</sup> Stephanie Gilmore, "Thinking About Feminist Coalitions" in Stephanie Gilmore ed. *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>126</sup> Audre Lord, "The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle the Masters House" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984), 112.

<sup>127</sup> Doris Smith and Suzanne Pingree, "Directory of Organizations Working for Women's Educational Equity." Office of Education (DHEW), Washington D.C.: Women's Educational Equity Act Program (1980), 9.

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were especially important as “incubators of autonomy that strengthened women’s resolve to demand political and social change.” She writes, “Of all feminist places, women’s centers were the most important for both the women and the movement. A completely new use of space, they nurtured the formation of yet more places.”<sup>128</sup> Centers often provided visible nodes for the myriad activities of second wave feminism and umbrellas under which feminist projects and new nonprofit organizations were born and grew. As such, they are an especially robust place to represent this nationally significant movement because their activities encompassed multiple threads in the weave of social change that feminists sought and created.

### *Comparison of TWB to Associated Properties*

In assessing national level of significance to second wave feminism, TWB is best compared to other “Women’s Centers” that were created in the 1970s and ‘80s across the country.<sup>129</sup> Few, if any, women centers that date their origins to the period of second wave feminism are still operating, which reinforces TWB’s significance. Examples of other important women’s centers include:

New York, NY—The Women’s Liberation Center of New York, opened at 36 W. 22<sup>nd</sup> Street (extant) in 1970, distributed feminist literature and newspapers, and sponsored or hosted classes on women’s health, political forums, consciousness raising sessions, pot luck dinners. In Spring 1971, the Center announced a Feminist School coordinated by the Center that would offer classes on any topic women wished to propose including Radical Feminism, Reclaiming the Occult Sciences, Karate, “Herstory,” and more with classes at the Center, in women’s homes and “in the streets.” The Center operated out of rented space in the Chelsea neighborhood until it moved to a city-owned firehouse at 243 W. 20<sup>th</sup> Street in 1972, which also houses the group Lesbian Feminist Liberation, and the Lesbian Switchboard. The NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project records that the Women’s Liberation Center “appears [to have been] located in this building until 1987.”<sup>130</sup>

Cambridge, MA—The Women’s Educational Center began in 1970 when a group of socialist-feminist women occupied a Harvard-owned building and offered free public classes for several days. By January 1972, the Center opened in a building at 46 Pleasant Street (extant) purchased for \$5,000. The Center offers an interesting comparison to TWB in that it shares organizational longevity and has inspired the formation of other nonprofits serving women, particularly in the area of sexual abuse. However, it has operated in a much smaller footprint, literally and figuratively. It is housed in a two-story residential building whose scale would not allow the breadth of activities and tenants afforded by TWB’s facility. The Center also appears to have

<sup>128</sup> Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 51.

<sup>129</sup> The building might also be compared to historic precedents such as women’s clubs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Progressive-era YWCAs or settlement houses also hold parallels in their woman-centric organization and focus on issues related to social justice. Another category of congregant building that could be a basis for comparison is early LGBT community centers, such as the SIR Community Center in San Francisco and the NYC LGBT Center.

<sup>130</sup> The New York Women’s Center Newsletter, May 1971 (shared by Dr. Gail Dubrow). “Women’s Liberation center,” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project <http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/womens-liberation-center/>, accessed 27 September 2017.



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maintained a primary focus on activities and organizations that fight violence against women.<sup>131</sup> Like many women's centers, The Women's Educational Center focused on offering direct services, while TWB retained SFWC's vision of transforming the larger social and political landscape.

Detroit, MI—The Detroit Feminist Women's City Club opened in 1976 as a national, for-profit women's center with early leadership that included women from the Bay Area. Founders used a loan from the Feminist Federal Credit Union to purchase the grand, historic Detroit Women's City Club built in 1924 (2110 Park Avenue, extant). Their vision did not sustain the high cost of running the facility, and the Feminist Women's City Club closed five months after it opened.<sup>132</sup>

Los Angeles' Woman's Building opened in 1973 and initially occupied rented space at the site of the old Chouinard Art Institute (743 S. Grandview Street, extant) near MacArthur Park. The organization grew from the Feminist Studio Workshop founded by artist Judy Chicago, graphic designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, and art historian Arlene Raven. Art classes drew women from across the US, and the facility also housed galleries, theater companies, Sisterhood Bookstore, Womantours Travel Agency, a coffeehouse, and the offices of the National Organization for Women. When the original building was sold in 1975, the LA Woman's Building moved to an existing building at 1727 North Spring Street (extant), near Chinatown. The organization went through significant changes in the 1980s while it continued to offer art space and classes for women. It closed in 1991.<sup>133</sup>

In comparison to these examples, TWB is exceptional for its longevity and the scale of its ambitions, which match the size of the social hall feminists purchased as a home. It is also significant for the breadth of social issues TWB encompassed, which made it a place where the struggle for women's rights was explicitly linked to other community struggles, including those of marginalized ethnic/racial communities, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and others.

## APPENDIX

### Groups Formed at TWB that Evolved into Separate Nonprofits<sup>134</sup>

Lavender Youth Recreation Center (LYRIC)

Lesbian Visual Artists

Maestrapeace Mural Project

Options for Women Over Forty

The Women's Foundation

The Women's Philharmonic

<sup>131</sup> Finding Aid for Women's Educational Center (Cambridge, MA). Northwestern University Libraries <http://www.lib.neu.edu/archives/collect/findaids/m47find.htm>. September 7, 2016 accessed.

<sup>132</sup> Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 237-247.

<sup>133</sup> Finding Aid to the Woman's Building Records, 1970-1992, in the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/womans-building-records-6347/more>. September 7, 2016 accessed. Terry Wolverton, "The Women's Building, L.A. 1973-1991." <http://www.womansbuilding.org/photoessay.htm> September 7, 2016 accessed.

<sup>134</sup> Based on data from Sushawn Robb's *Mothering the Movement*, 315-317 and passim.

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Women's Alcoholism Center  
Women's Cancer Resource Center

*Projects Sponsored by TWB*

*Arts*

Fat Lip Readers Theater  
Mothertongue Feminist Theatre Collective  
Sistah Boom (drumming collective)  
Women's Art Project  
WRY CRIPS Disabled Women's Theater Arts

*Education*

A Miner Miracle (work clothes for poor/homeless women)  
Creating Political Fire Through Cultural Diversity  
Generation Five (education to end child sexual abuse)  
Promoterías Latinas Comunitarias de Salud

*Health/Physical Welfare*

Bay Area Coalition for Our Reproductive Rights  
Berkeley Clearinghouse on FEMICIDE  
Coalition on Prostitution  
Date Marital Rape Education Project  
Disabled Women's Alliance  
Prison Integrated Health Project  
S.F. Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women  
Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Diseases (AIDS)

*Organizing*

Bay Area Teen Voices  
Beijing 95 and Beyond: Women of Color Strategic Planning Project  
Dynamics of Color  
Ellas en Acción  
Epicenter Switchboard  
Exotic Dancers Alliance  
Lesbians Against Police Violence  
Lesbian Uprising  
Older Lesbian Organizing Committee  
Somos Hermanas  
Venceremos Brigade  
Women's Action to Gain Economic Security

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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 # CA-2348
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBT),  
San Francisco

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

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

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

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.454236 Longitude: -122.251799

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

The property is San Francisco Assessor's Block 3588, Lot 082 (**Site Map**). It is located at the southwest intersection of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Lapidge Street. The generally square lot has 93.729 feet of frontage on 18<sup>th</sup> Street and 95 feet of frontage on Lapidge Street.

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

The boundary includes the footprint of the property historically associated with The Women's Building.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Donna Graves  
organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number: 1204 Carleton Street  
city or town: Berkeley state: CA zip code: 94702  
e-mail [donnagraves01@gmail.com](mailto:donnagraves01@gmail.com)  
telephone: (510) 282-3608  
date: June 2017, Revised November 2017

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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.)

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### 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.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Women's Building, The  
City or Vicinity: San Francisco  
County: San Francisco  
State: California  
Photographers: Stacy Farr and Donna Graves  
Dates Photographed: March 14, 2016 and October 4, 2017

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

### Exterior

- 1 of 22 North (primary) facade, looking southeast.
- 2 of 22 East facade, looking southwest.
- 3 of 22 North facade, detail of the third and fourth levels of the fourth through seventh bays, looking southwest.
- 4 of 22 East facade, detail of the second through fourth levels at first bay, looking south.
- 5 of 22 North facade, detail of the primary entrance, awning, and center bays, looking southwest.
- 6 of 22 North facade, detail of the primary entrance, looking south.
- 7 of 22 North and East facades, detail of corner at second level, looking southwest.
- 8 of 22 East facade, detail of the third and fourth levels of the center bays, with portrait of Rigoberto Menchu, looking west.
- 9 of 22 East facade, detail of first level, portrait.
- 10 of 22 South facade, facing northwest.

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### Interior

- 11 of 22 First level interior, lobby detail, showing the enclosed reception desk, looking east.
- 12 of 22 First level interior, lobby detail, showing elliptical staircase, looking north.
- 13 of 22 First level interior, lobby detail, stairwell base with ironwork, looking north.
- 14 of 22 Second level interior, stairwell, looking down.
- 15 of 22 First level interior, auditorium looking north.
- 16 of 22 First level interior, auditorium, looking south.
- 17 of 22 Second level interior, auditorium balcony detail, showing west portion of the balcony, looking west.
- 18 of 22 Second level interior, classroom detail, showing typical arched tripartite windows, beadboard, scalloped molding and exposed brick, looking northwest.
- 19 of 22 Second level interior, classroom detail, showing typical arched tripartite window, beadboard, scalloped molding, and exposed brick, looking east.
- 20 of 22 Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing typical arched tripartite windows, beadboard, scalloped molding, looking north.
- 21 of 22 Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing typical beadboard, original floors, looking west.
- 22 of 22 Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing bar dating to Dovre Hall period, looking east.

**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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Site Map

San Francisco Assessor's Map Showing 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street

© COPYRIGHT SAN FRANCISCO  
 CITY & COUNTY ASSESSOR 1995

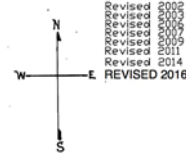
LOTS MERGED  
 INTO LOT / A 1945

11	10
12/15	12
22	22
22	22
21	9 1125
90	948

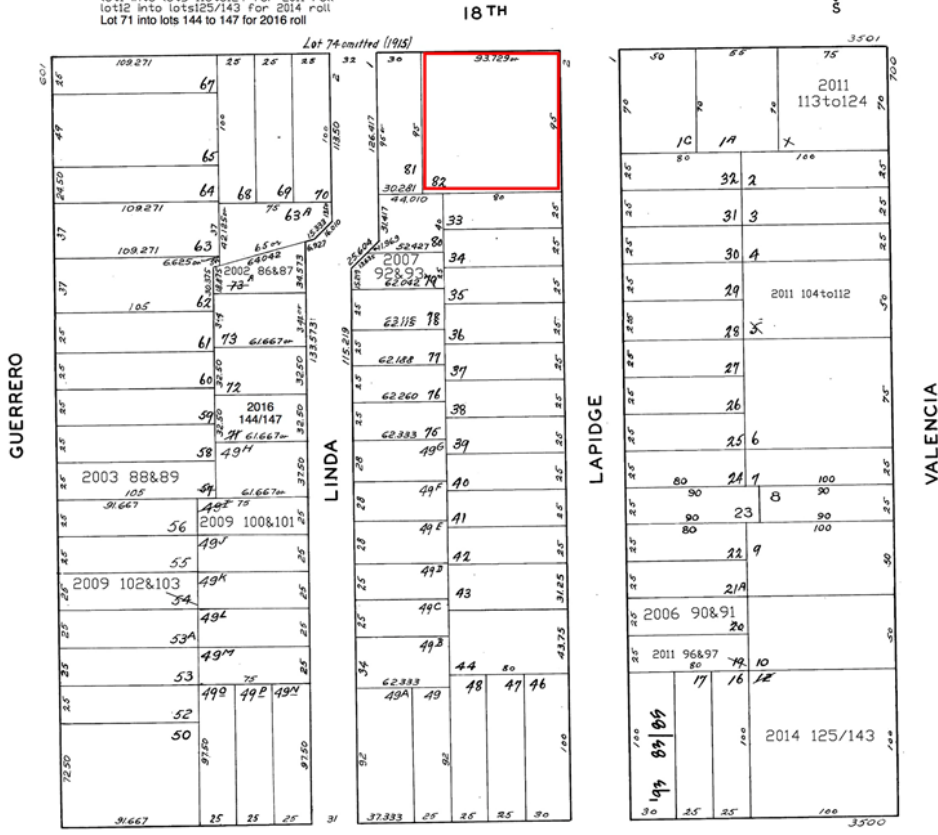
lot72A into lots86&87 for 2002 roll  
 lot57 into lots88&89 for 2003 roll  
 lot20 into lots90&91 for 2006 roll  
 lot79 into lots92&93 for 2007 roll  
 lot49 into lots100&101 for 2009 roll  
 lot54 into lots102&103 for 2009 roll  
 lot19 into lots96&97 for 2011 roll  
 lot15 into lots 104to112 for 2011 roll  
 lot1 into lots 113to124 for 2011 roll  
 lot12 into lots125/143 for 2014 roll  
 Lot 71 into lots 144 to 147 for 2016 roll

3588  
 MISSION BLK. 71

REVISED 1993



Revised 2005  
 Revised 2005  
 Revised 2005  
 Revised 2005  
 Revised 2009  
 Revised 2011  
 Revised 2014  
 REVISED 2016



19TH

20-22 LINDA ST.  
 A CONDOMINIUM

LOT	UNIT	% COMM. AREA
86	20	48.50
87	22	51.50

653-655 GUERRERO ST.  
 A CONDOMINIUM

LOT	UNIT	% COMM. AREA
88	653	53.35
89	655	46.65

3528-3532 19TH ST.

A CONDOMINIUM

LOT	UNIT	% COMM. AREA
83	1	31
84	2	34
85	3	35

35-37 LINDA ST.  
 A CONDOMINIUM

LOT	UNIT	% COMM. AREA
92	35	46
93	37	54

75-77 LAPIDGE ST.  
 A CONDOMINIUM

LOT	UNIT	% COMM. AREA
90	77	46
91	75	54

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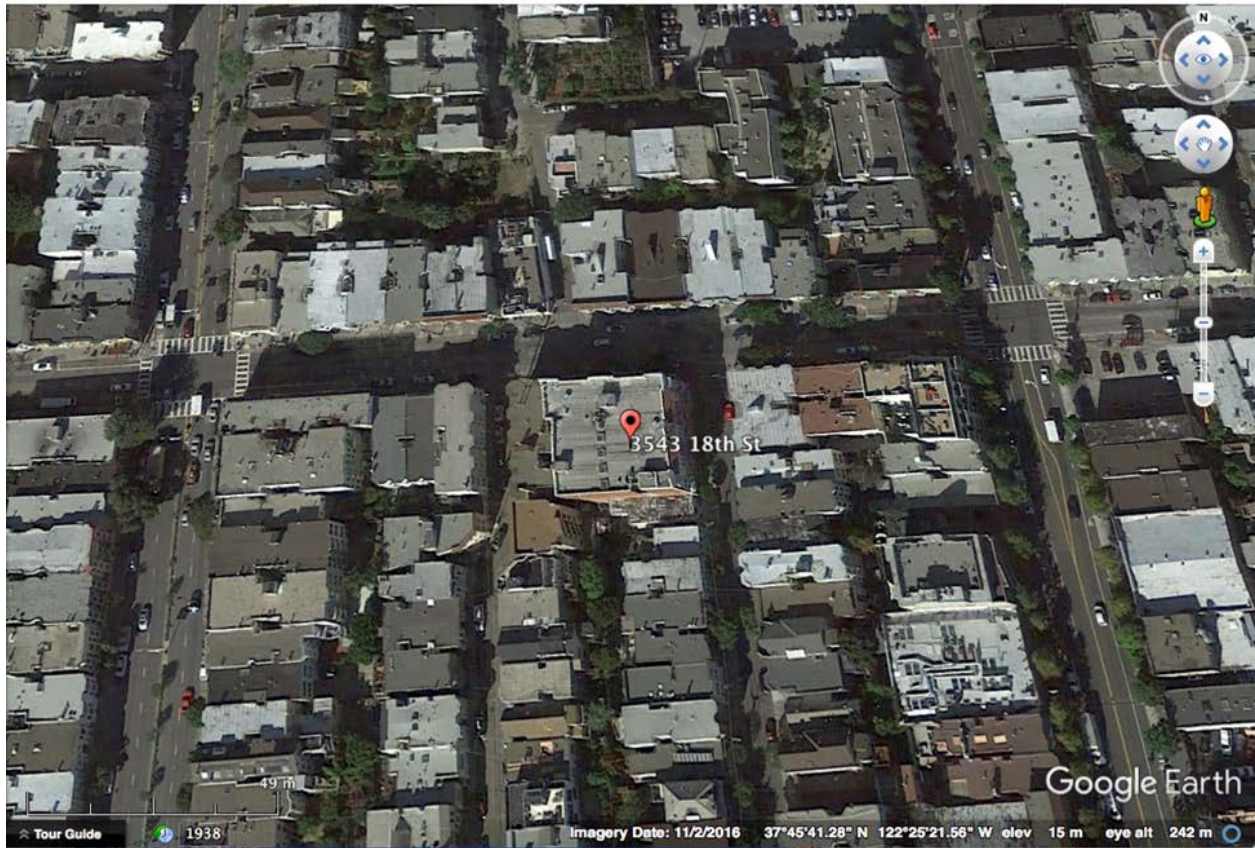
San Francisco, California  
County and State

### Location Map

Google Earth Aerial of 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street

Latitude: 37.454236

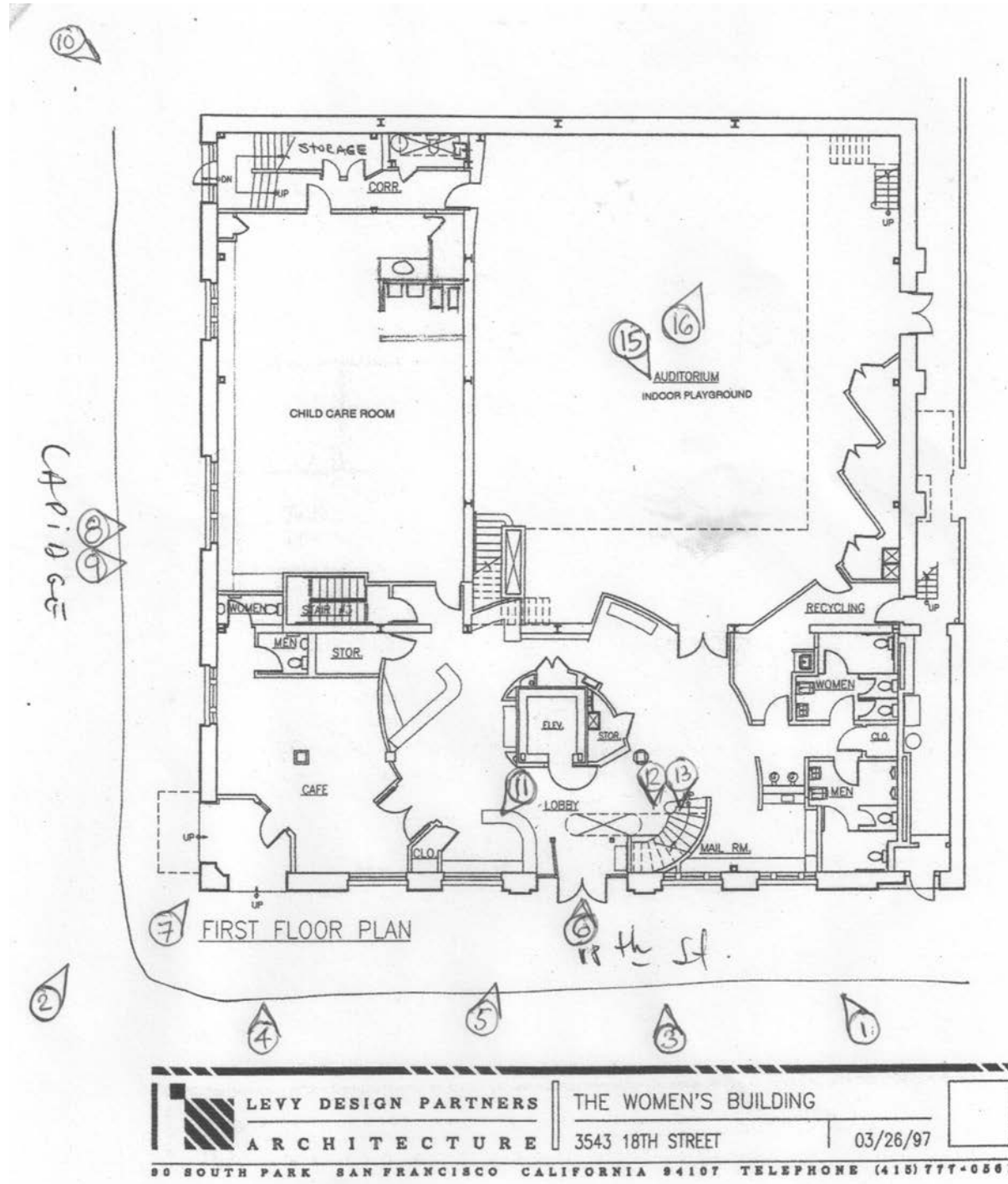
Longitude: -122.251799



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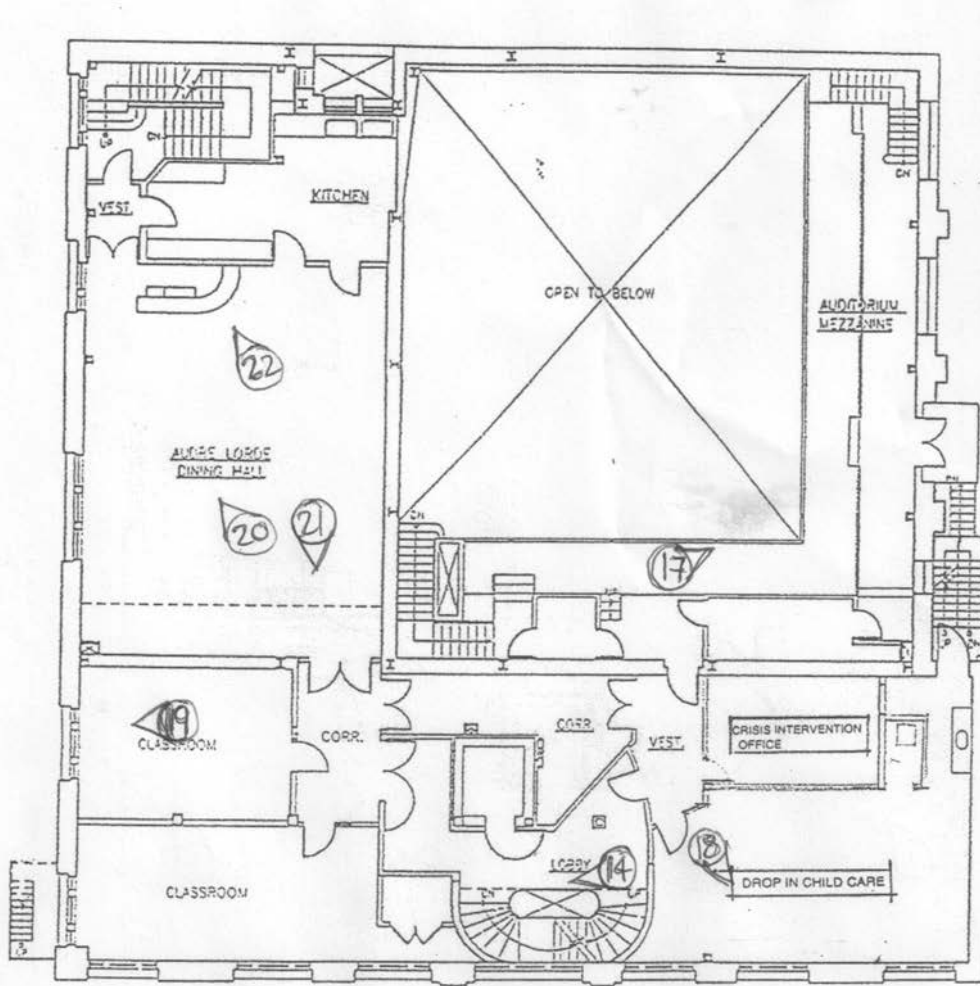
Photo Key 1 of 2



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Photo Key 2 of 2



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

	LEVY DESIGN PARTNERS	THE WOMEN'S BUILDING	
	ARCHITECTURE	3543 18TH STREET	
80 SOUTH PARK SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94107 TELEPHONE (415) 777-0561			

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**Figure 1.** HABS documentation of North façade, circa 1993. Photographer Douglas Sandburg, The Women's Building files.





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**Figure 2.** HABS documentation of entry, circa 1993. Photographer Douglas Sandburg, The Women's Building files.



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**Figure 3.** Flyer for “Becoming Visible” conference, 1980. San Francisco Women’s Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society.



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**Figure 4.** San Francisco Lesbian Chorus performing in TWB auditorium, circa 1980. Photographer unknown. San Francisco Women's Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society.

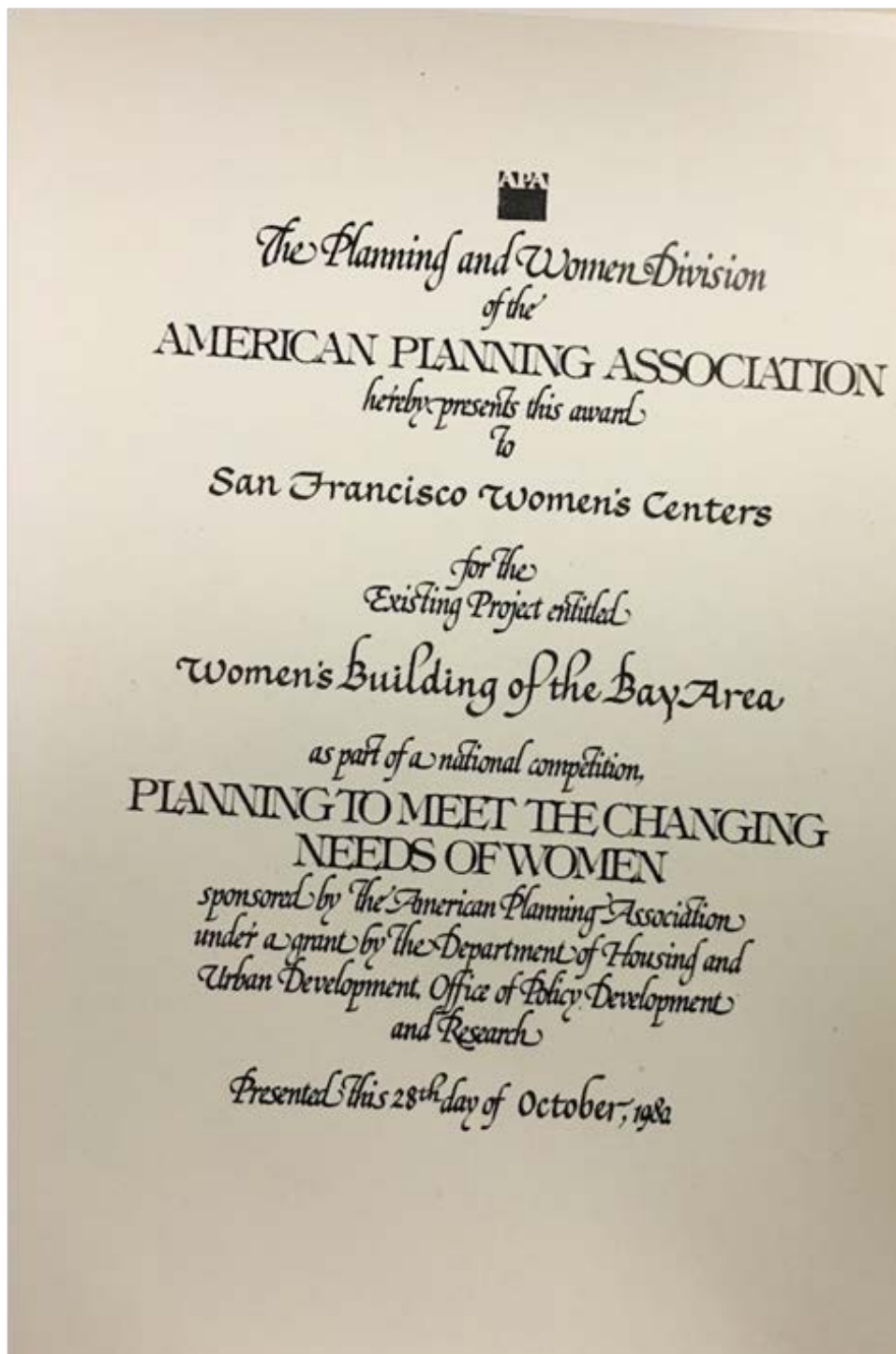




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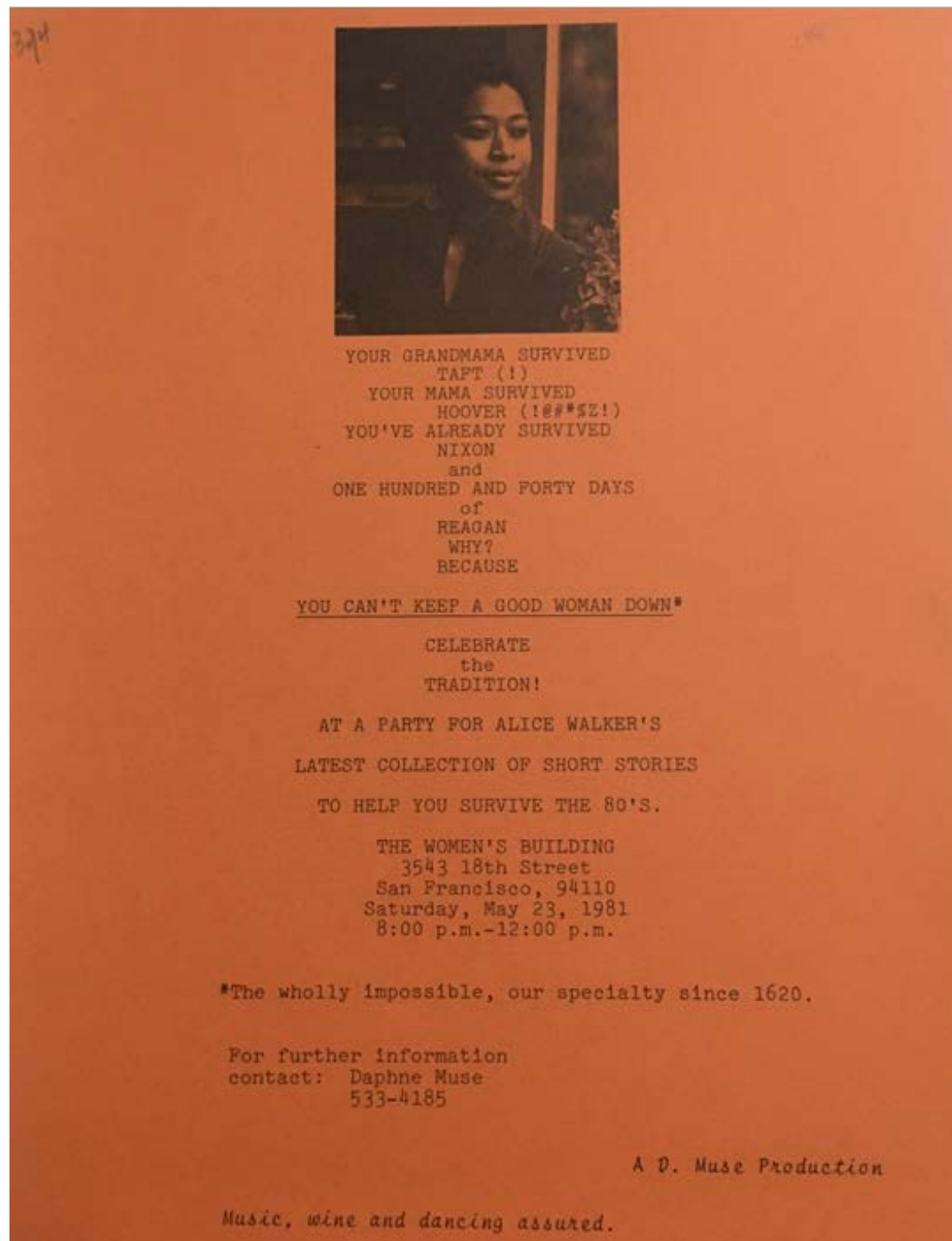
**Figure 5.** Award from American Planning Association, Planning and Women's Division, 1980.  
San Francisco Women's Building Collection, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender  
Historical Society.



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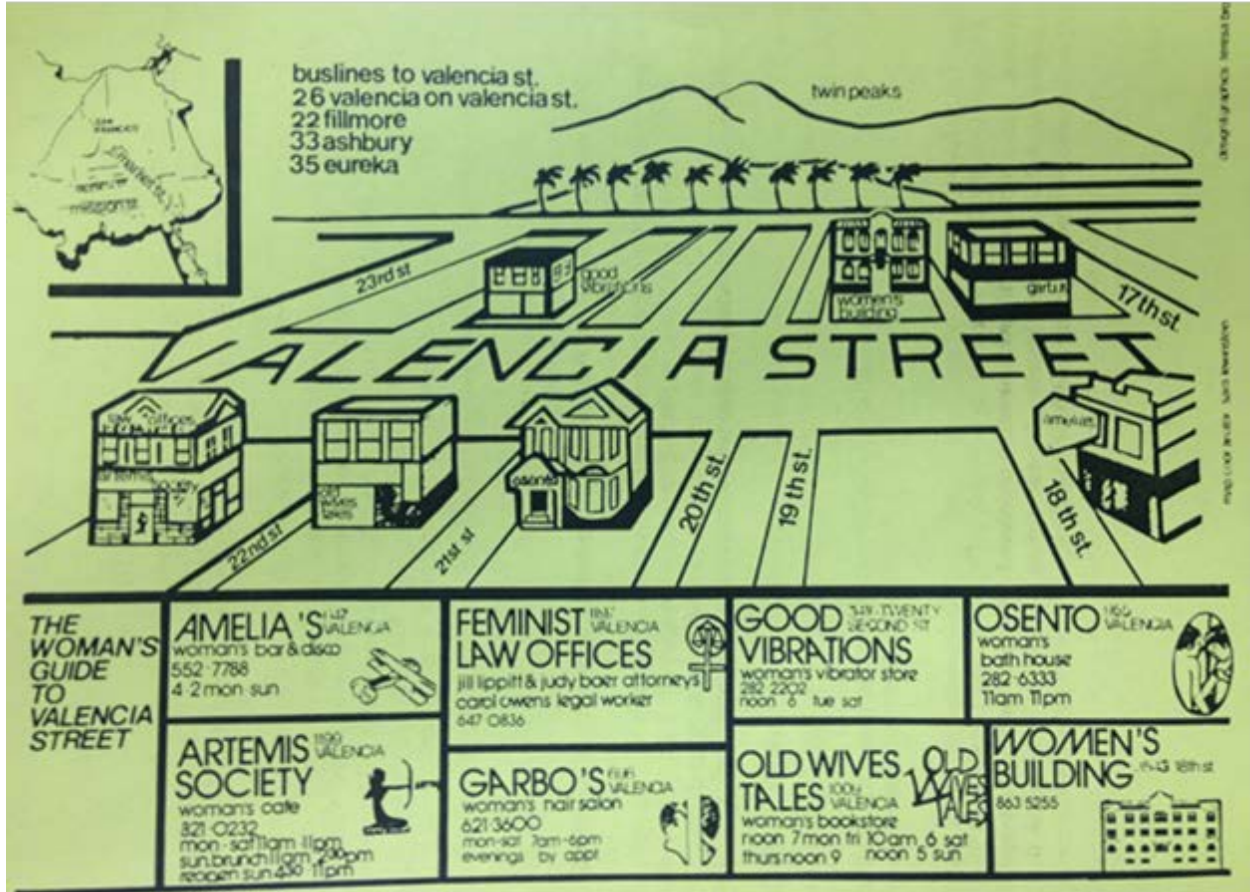
**Figure 6.** Flyer for event celebrating new book by Alice Walker, May 1981. Cultural events at TWB ranged from author readings to performances and dance classes. San Francisco Women's Building Collection, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.



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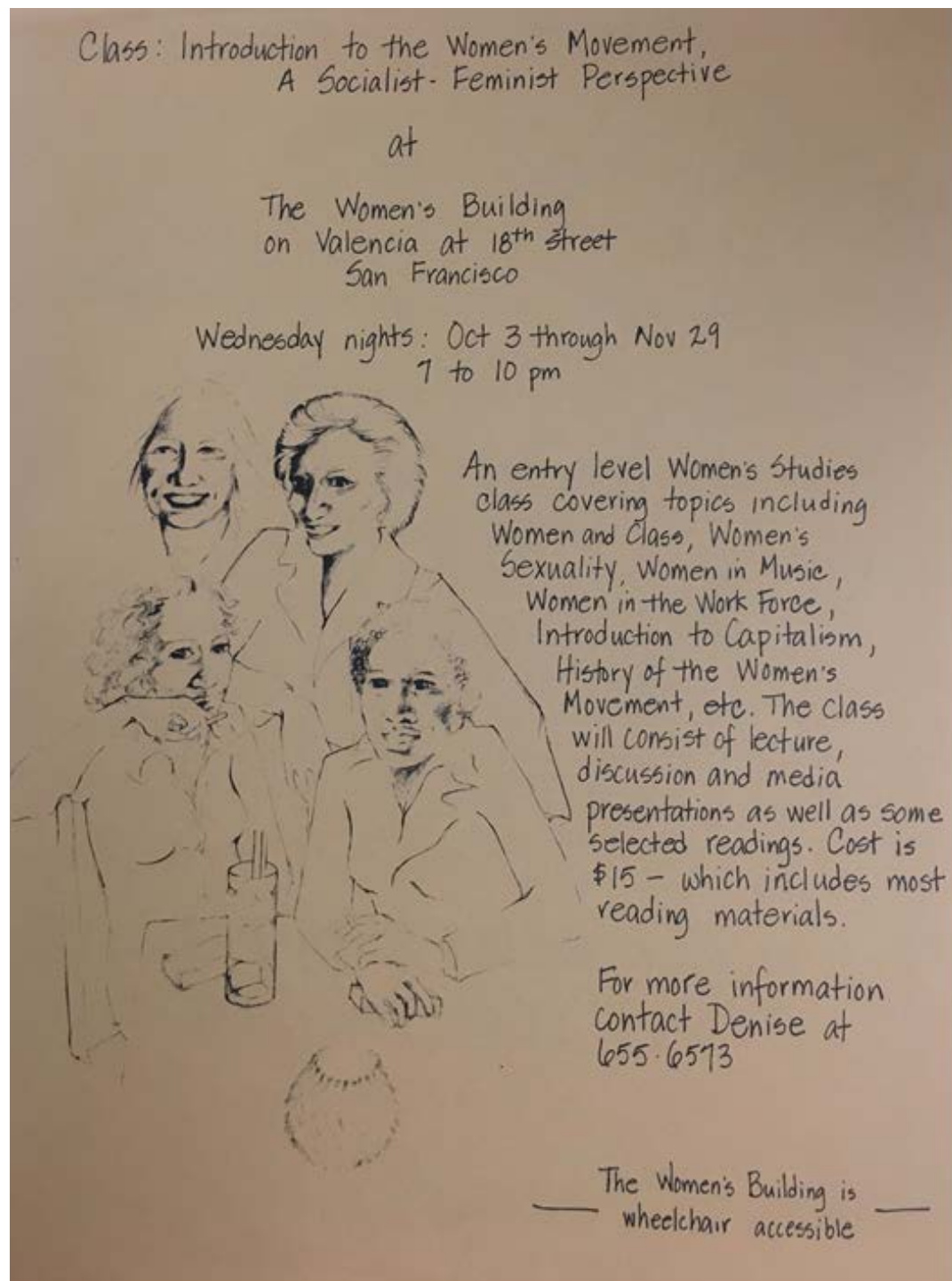
**Figure 7.** Map of women-centered organizations and businesses on or near Valencia Street, 1980s. Collection of GLBT Historical Society.



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**Figure 8.** Flyer for Course on "Introduction to the Women's Movement, A Socialist Feminist Perspective, 1984. San Francisco Women's Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society.

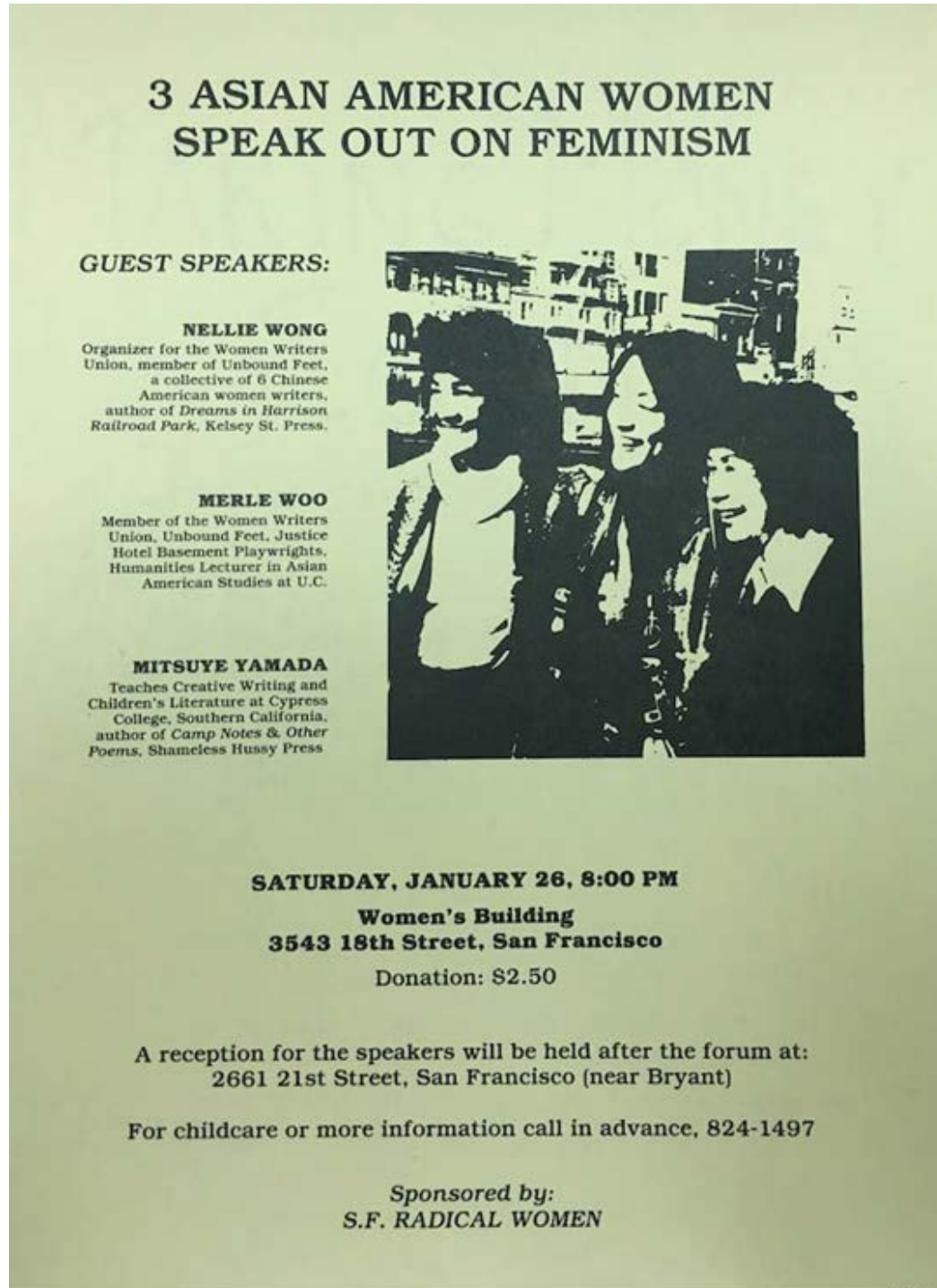




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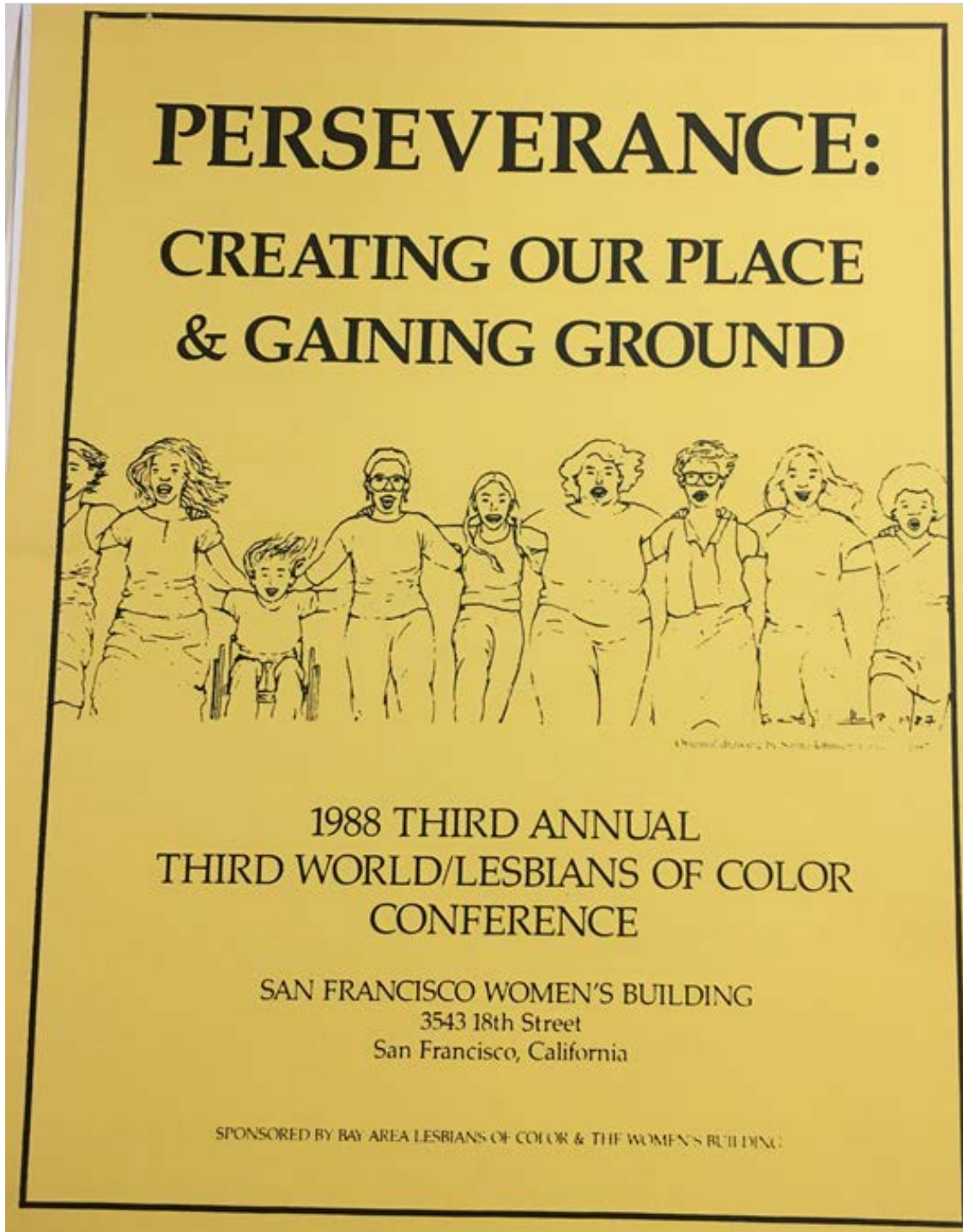
**Figure 9.** Flyer for “3 Asian American Women Speak Out on Feminism,” 1985. San Francisco Women’s Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society



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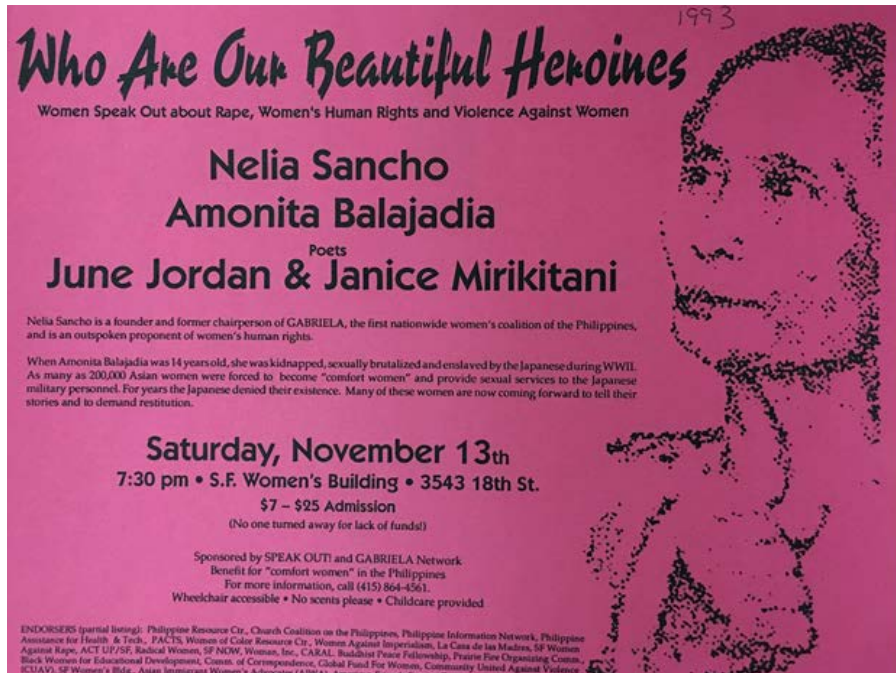
**Figure 10.** Flyer for 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Third World Lesbians of Color Conference, 1988. San Francisco Women's Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society



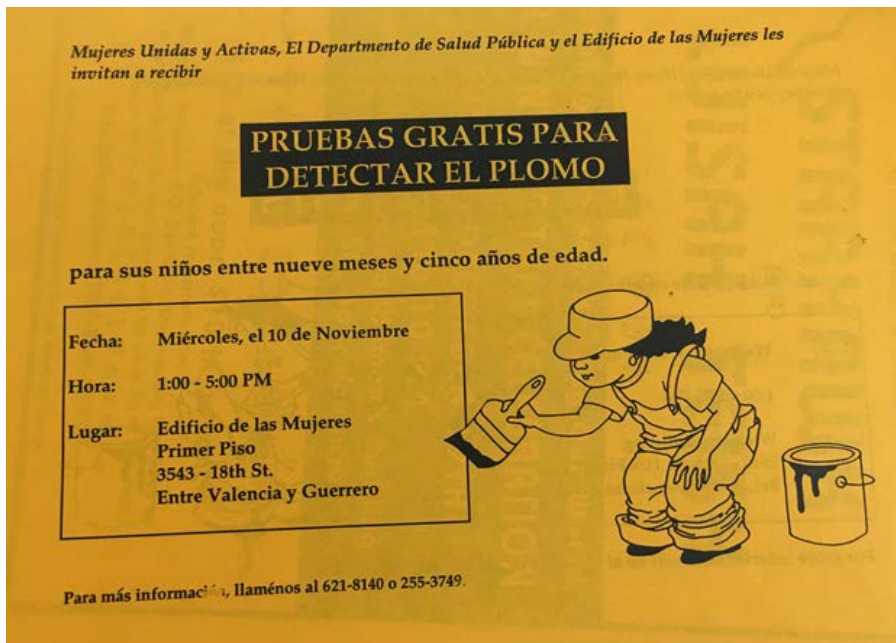
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**Figure 11.** Flyer for “Who Are Our Beautiful Heroines: Women Speak Out About Rape, Women’s Human Rights and Violence Against Women.” 1993. San Francisco Women’s Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society.



**Figure 12.** Flyer for lead testing event, 1994. Distributed in Spanish and English. San Francisco Women’s Building Collection, GLBT Historical Society.





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**Photo 1.** North (primary) façade, looking southeast.





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**Photo 2.** East façade, looking southwest.



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**Photo 3.** North façade, detail of the third and fourth levels of the fourth through seventh bays, looking southwest.





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**Photo 4.** East façade, detail of the second through fourth levels at first bay, looking south.



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**Photo 5.** North façade, detail of the primary entrance, awning, and center bays, looking southwest.



**Photo 6.** North façade, detail of the primary entrance, looking south.





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**Photo 7.** North and east façades, detail of corner at second level, looking southwest.



**Photo 8.** East façade, detail of the third and fourth levels of the center bays, with portrait of Rigoberto Menchu, looking west.



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**Photo 9.** East façade, detail of first level, portrait.





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**Photo 10.** South façade, facing northwest.



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**Photo 11.** First level interior, lobby detail, showing the enclosed reception desk, looking east.



**Photo 12.** First level interior, lobby detail, showing elliptical staircase, looking north.





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**Photo 13.** First level interior, lobby detail, stairwell base with ironwork, looking north.



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**Photo 14.** Second level interior, stairwell, looking down.



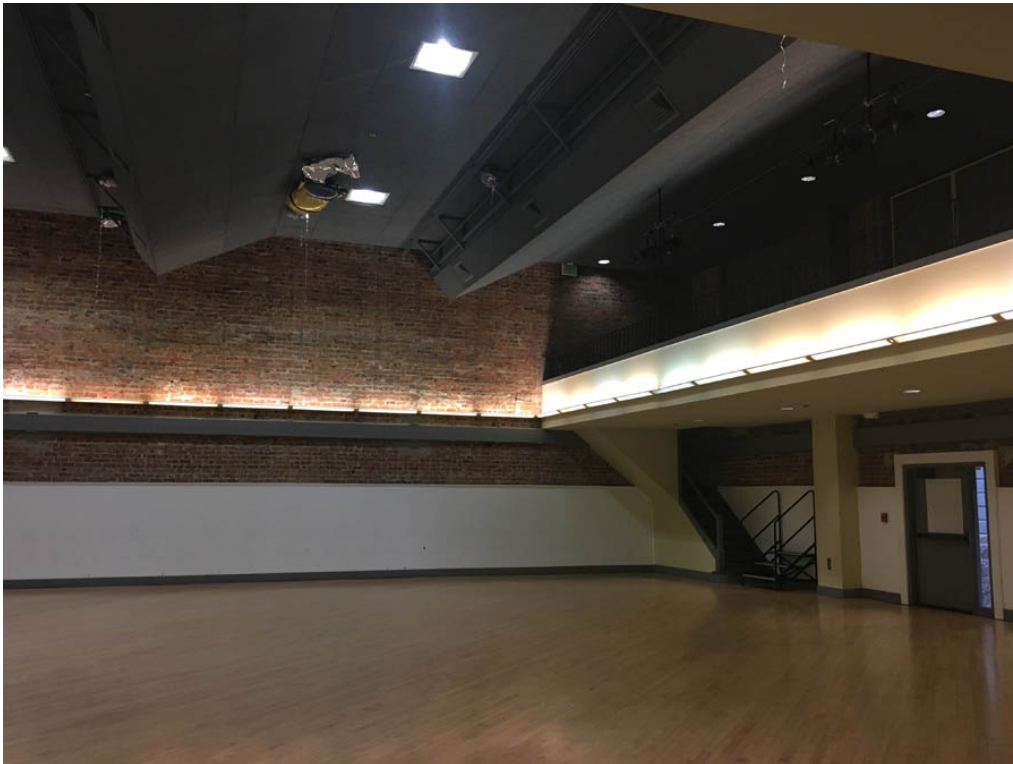
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**Photo 15.** First level interior, auditorium, looking north.



**Photo 16.** First level interior, auditorium, looking south.





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**Photo 17.** Second level interior, auditorium balcony detail, showing west portion of the balcony, looking west.



**Photo 18.** Second level interior, classroom detail, showing typical arched tripartite windows, beadboard, scalloped molding and exposed brick, looking northwest.



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**Photo 19.** Second level interior, classroom detail, showing typical arched tripartite window, beadboard, scalloped molding, and exposed brick, looking east.



**Photo 20.** Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing typical arched tripartite windows, beadboard, scalloped molding, looking north.



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**Photo 21.** Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing typical beadboard, original floors, looking west.



**Photo 22.** Second level interior, meeting room (Audre Lorde Room) showing bar dating to Dovre Hall period, looking east.

