

PH0065943

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	California
COUNTY:	San Francisco
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE	SEP 6 1974

**1. NAME**

COMMON: Jessie Street Substation, Substation "C"

AND/OR HISTORIC: Pacific Gas and Electric Company: Stevenson Street Substation, Central Station, Substation "A"

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: 222-226 Jessie Street

CITY OR TOWN: San Francisco CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 5th

STATE: California CODE: 06 COUNTY: San Francisco CODE: 075

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) Empty
Comments: Scheduled for demolition for Yerba Buena Center			

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME: Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco

STREET AND NUMBER: 820 Howard Street

CITY OR TOWN: San Francisco STATE: California CODE: 06

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Recorder's Office

STREET AND NUMBER: Room 167, City Hall

CITY OR TOWN: San Francisco STATE: California CODE: 06

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

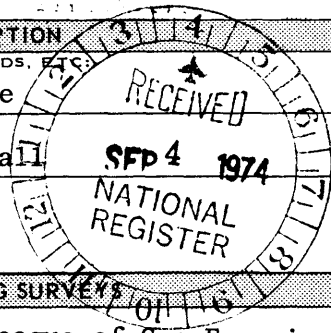
TITLE OF SURVEY: Junior League of San Francisco, Inc.

DATE OF SURVEY: 1968 S.F. Bay Area  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Special Collections Room, Main Library

STREET AND NUMBER: Civic Center

CITY OR TOWN: San Francisco STATE: California CODE: 06



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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Jessie Street Substation is a rectangular industrial building constructed of reinforced concrete on a granite base. Its exterior walls are brick and the appearance is of a brick building. A high false front on the main facade and false gables on the rear obscure industrial roof structures and contribute to this impression. Three of the exterior walls are rough and unfinished while the fourth, facing on Jessie Street, exhibits a highly refined arrangement of classical elements on a brick wall.

The ornaments on the main facade are of cream colored, matt glazed terra cotta. They are finely executed and arranged in a highly inventive way so as to enhance the tension between carefully wrought, sometimes delicate terra cotta and vast expanses of rough, industrial brick. Plain terra cotta trim borders the top of the main wall. A larger and very regular classical dentilated cornice runs below it a couple of feet. In the center of the facade, rising almost to the cornice is a very tall round arch divided about half way up by a pronounced lintel. Inscribed on the lintel is: "Central Station, The San Francisco Gas and Electric Company MCMV". The numerals "MCMV" refer to the date of the plans for this portion of the building. Above it is a window area on a grid of cast iron mullions; below it is a metal door. To the west of this main entrance is another smaller entrance way ornamenting another metal door of equal size. Above the door is a statuary group which consists of four cherubs with garlands of fruit and gourds beneath a torch. The date "1907" inscribed with them refers to the year in which that part of the building was completed. The group is very well-modeled in a late Renaissance or Baroque style. The use of terra cotta here is especially fine.

To the east of the central arch are seven identical rectangular vertical windows evenly spaced across the wall to the end of the building. Each window is heavily trimmed in terra cotta with a double lower sill. Beneath five of these windows are undecorated square windows of equal size but less emphasis. Beneath the second and sixth windows there are doors. Between the horizontal lines described by the tops and bottoms of these lower windows are four striations created by indentations in the brick, which run the entire length of the facade. There is a counterpoint between the decorative terra cotta elements and the brick wall, expressed in the refinement of texture, color, design and verticality of the ornaments, and the horizontal expanse of rough red brick. The condition of this facade is generally excellent except for some chipping of the terra cotta, particularly around the windows.

The side and rear walls are of undifferentiated brick except for discoloration and protruding remnants of previous structures which indicate where the building was expanded and where other buildings had once stood adjacent. There is still an attached concrete shed at its west end. The only distinguishing features of design are at the skyline. The east and west walls step up in five stages to meet the higher false front of the main south facade. The north wall, facing Stevenson Street contains four false gables corresponding to the termination of skylights which cross the building from north to south. As the skylights are of different heights and sizes, the

(Con't)

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gabled sections are of different sizes and step up and down as they cross the building in order to hide the lights from the view of passers by.

The interior consists almost completely of three large main rooms which are open from floor to roof except for balconies on some walls. Steel truss work and skylights at the top of these rooms give a very light and spacious feeling to the building making it seem larger than it looks from the outside. There is a small area of concrete compartments between the central and easternmost large rooms which was probably added later. The larger rooms contained electrical generating and switching equipment. Walls and columns are of heavy reinforced concrete to support attachments to the equipment. Where they were exposed, they were sheathed in a white tile. Now that the equipment is gone, large areas of rough brick and concrete are exposed.

When it was first built, the structure fronted on Stevenson Street and backed up toward Jessie. It was enlarged in 1883 and again in 1892. There is a drawing of the building at this stage showing a brick building of the same general size and shape as the present edifice and with some similar features, but without the terra cotta trim. Its main facade had four large arches of the approximate size and type of the present central arch, but its embellishments were only in a generally Romanesque rustication of the brickwork, without any terra cotta or strictly classical details. A brick smokestack rose 175 feet above the building. In 1905, Willis Polk, then working for the firm Wright and Polk, finished designs for alterations and additions to the building. These plans incorporated a large rounded arch which was possibly inspired by the old structure. Nevertheless, the new building was thoroughly redesigned. It is not clear whether the front shifted to Jessie Street at this stage or if it had already done so. The 1905 plans included the main room, and the central arch and first three windows on the facade. An undetermined amount of work had been done when it burned badly in February of 1906. Rebuilding according to those plans had begun again when the great earthquake and fire destroyed it once more two months later. In 1906, Polk (by then of D.H. Burnham and Co.) drew up new plans, expanding on those of 1905. The 1906 plans included the west end of the building with the other large skylit room. Aside from extensions of linear motifs, the only additional facade ornament was the small entrance with cherubs. In 1909 Polk planned still another addition at the far east end of the building. It consisted of another large skylit room and the last four windows on the facade. From the rear, this section has no gables. The building was planned so that each additional segment was part of an integral whole. Despite the three stages of Polk's design, the building was effectively built in two stages, one following the earthquake and the other following annex plans in 1909. The annex is marked by the four easternmost windows on the facade and a slight change in brick color on both front and back.



**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1905, 1906, 1909

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry    | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Jessie Street Substation is an industrial building situated between two alleys within a large block at the edge of downtown San Francisco. Because Jessie Street is a blind alley, and because until recent demolition for the Yerba Buena Center the building was surrounded and dwarfed by offices and other large buildings, the substation has been both fairly inaccessible and hidden from view until now. In such a context its monumental main facade is the subject of unresolved curiosity. The building served as an electrical generating and switching station for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company and its predecessor, the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company from the time it was first built in 1881 until the late 1960's. Since that time its electrical equipment has been removed and the building has been empty.

The substation is a fine example of early twentieth century classical architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area and is one of the most interesting buildings of its type in the state. It represents an initial effort in what was to become a long-term project by its owners to transform their utilitarian structures into handsome civic ornaments, a commendable offshoot of the City Beautiful Movement.

Designer Willis Polk was one of the most important architects in the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is perhaps best known for his glass walled Hallidie Building of 1917. Polk designed several of the company's stations which in turn served as models for subsequent work.

The facade of the building is the main feature of interest (although the interior provides a shell for what could become an extremely fine series of spaces). It displays a dignified and imaginative handling of classical elements not often found in buildings of the period.

Polk's treatment brought the praise of one of the most noted and respected architectural critics of the period, C. Matlack Price who commended the attention he had long given in designing "every-day" architecture. Other work for the company later was illustrated in Talbot Hamlin's The American Spirit in Architecture (1926) as exemplary for buildings of its type.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

"Building Gutted and Dynamos Reduced to Scrap Iron," San Francisco Call, February 23, 1906, p. 1,2.

Coleman, Charles M. P.G. & E. of California: The Centennial Story of Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 1852-1952. New York: McGraw Hill, 1952.

Frickstad, Ivan C. "Some Sub-Stations of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company," Architect and Engineer, XLII:2 (Nov. 1915), 54-68.

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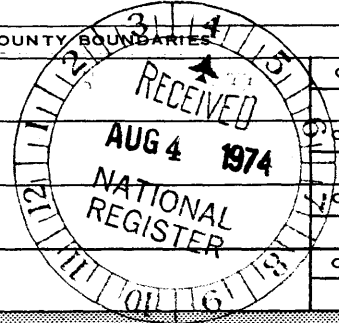
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		37	47	10
SE	° ' "	° ' "		122	24	9
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **0.40 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



UTM  
10/55230  
4182040

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Michael R. Corbett, Consultant**

ORGANIZATION: **The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage**      DATE: **May 2, 1974**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**2007 Franklin Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **San Francisco**      STATE: **California**      CODE: **06**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: *[Signature]*

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: August 26, 1974

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

*[Signature]*  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 9/6/74

ATTEST:  
*[Signature]*  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: 8-6-74

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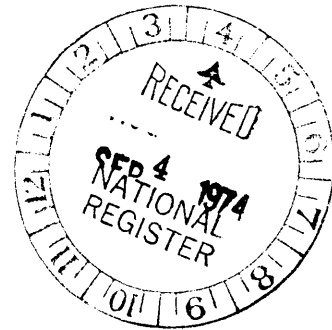
Frickstad, Ivan C. "The Development of 'Pacific Service' Architecture as Exemplified in its Modern Powerhouses and Substations," Pacific Service Magazine, VIII:6, (Nov. 1916), 204-216.

Hamilton, Frederick, "The Work of Willis Polk and Company," Architect and Engineer, XXIV:3 (April 1911), 35-73.

Hamlin, Talbot, The American Spirit in Architecture, 1926.

Junior League of San Francisco, Inc. Here Today - San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1968.

Price, C. Matlack. "Ideals in Every-day Architecture and a Passing Tribute to Mr. Willis Polk," Architect and Engineer, LI:1 (Oct. 1917), 53-55.





WORKING AREA LAND USE STUDY

DOWNTOWN

WORKING AREA W · PLANNING AREA 2

PG&E Substation  
 Jessie Street - San Francisco