

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 13 1989

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Kahn's Department Store

other names/site number The Rotunda; Liberty House Department Store

2. Location

street & number 1501-39 Broadway

N/A not for publication

city, town Oakland

N/A vicinity

state California

code CA

county Alameda

code 001

zip code 94612

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

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

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously

listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Kathryn Huebner
Signature of certifying official

2/9/89
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Bruce J. Noble, Jr.

3/30/89

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE, department store

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Work in progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Beaux Arts

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls brick w/terra cotta

roof other: tar and gravelother dome: glass and sheet metal

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY

Kahn's Department Store, a.k.a. Liberty House Department Store, now known as the Rotunda Building, is a large commercial building located on a prominent downtown Oakland site. Today, after a number of additions to the original structure, it is a seven-story plus basement building organized around a six-story skylit rotunda. The structural frame is part steel and part reinforced concrete. The plan is an irregular shape with frontages on three major streets. Its dome and classical ornamentation are derived from Beaux Arts sources.

ORIGINAL APPEARANCE (1912-1936)**EXTERIOR**

The original 1912 plan was "Y" shaped with the dome crowning the intersection of the three legs. The building was steel frame, with four stories plus basement and mezzanine. A 1923 six-story reinforced concrete addition filled in the northeast corner of the site, transforming the "Y" floor plan into an irregular "L" shape (see plan, page 7). The original structure occupied 167,000 square feet. The 1923 addition brought its square footage to 385,000.

The original building was a two-part vertical block with differentiated end bays. Monumental terra cotta entry arches at the ground level of the end bays were framed by large

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1912-1923

Significant Dates

1912
1923

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dickey, Charles W.
Cannon, E. W.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Kahn's is significant as a fine example of early twentieth century Beaux Arts commercial architecture. The interior rotunda is a rare local example of a large scale publicly accessible Beaux Arts space. The exterior contributes significantly to the historic fabric of downtown Oakland.

The building's period of significance extends from 1912, when the main portion of the structure was built, to 1937, when significant alterations were made to its exterior. When it was first built, the store was the third largest department store in California and the largest and most elaborate in Oakland. The elliptical dome was said to be the largest in the world.¹

The building was originally designed for the Kahn Department Store in 1912. The business originated in 1879 as a dry goods store at Twelfth and Broadway in Oakland. Israel Kahn, the founder, was originally from Germany. He moved to New York City and then to San Francisco in 1877. Shortly after he relocated in Oakland. Upon his death in 1883, the

¹ Oakland Tribune. June 9, 1919. p. 10-A.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

State Historic Resources Inventory
Oakland Dept. of City Planning

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The site covers an irregular, L-shaped lot bordered by Broadway, 16th Street, San Pablo Avenue and Kahn Alley.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot (parcel #8-619-4) that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Hardy and Alice Carey
organization Alice Carey Architects date June 8, 1988
street & number 25 South Park telephone (415) 957-0100
city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94107

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rusticated piers. The ground level also had large display windows with prismatic glass transoms. A terra cotta belt entablature with foliated cresting above the doorways separated the base from the upper floors that were arranged in six window bays.

The exterior was clad in light brown brick with a marble and terra cotta ornamental frieze. There was a large projecting galvanized sheet metal cornice with mutules. Upper-floor Chicago Windows were wooden sash. Recessed decorative pressed metal spandrel panels separated the upper floors on the center four bays. The frieze of the main entablature and the spandrels of the upper floors on the end bays had inlaid marble panels.

Crowning the building was a thirty-six-foot-high elliptical dome and eighteen-foot-high lantern. The glass dome sat directly on the flat roof and was divided into twelve main sections by sheet metal ribs. The converging ribs terminated in over-scaled volutes buttressing the base of the lantern that was capped by a hemispherical sheet metal dome.

The 1923 addition was a two-part vertical composition with an attic. The skeletal frame was articulated on the facade. Vertical piers framed six window bays and culminated in a restrained terra cotta cornice at the sixth story. This was surmounted by an attic crowned with antifixae.

The facade treatment was similar to but simpler than that of the original building. Materials were the same, but the

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upper floor spandrel panels were brick, and the end bays were not articulated. Upper floor windows were divided into two divisions rather than three. The decorative marble and terra cotta frieze was a continuation of that of the 1912 building. A large terra cotta cartouche supported a corner-mounted flagpole at Broadway/Telegraph and Sixteenth Street.

INTERIOR

Beneath the skylit dome stood a ninety-five-foot by seventy-five-foot elliptical rotunda. At the ground level twelve square columns with indented corners supported a classical entablature with a dentiled cornice topped by a classical balustrade. A ring of incandescent light bulbs illuminated the rotunda at this level. Between the third and fifth floors twelve two-story fluted Corinthian columns supported a second entablature with modillioned cornice and an alternating inverted shell and cartouche cresting. A decorative wrought iron rail encircled the fourth floor. Above the fifth floor twelve sheet metal ribs decorated with rosettes sprang from plaster cartouches and converged in concentric rings of ornamental sheet metal surrounding an open-work metal plate.

The rest of the building was simple loft space organized around the light-filled rotunda and main stairway, located at the northwest end of the rotunda. The stairway had marble treads and decorative iron risers. The intricate wrought iron railing terminated in a large fluted cylindrical cast iron newel post. Four cartouches containing a "K" (for Kahn's) ringed the top of the post.

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The ground floor had coffered ceilings and column capitals decorated with lions heads, festoons, and egg and dart molding.

MODIFICATIONS (1937-1983)

Several alterations were made to the exterior in the 1930's and 1940's. In 1937 the base of the building at Broadway and Sixteenth Street was remodeled. The prismatic glass transoms were removed, and flat tile covered the large display windows (see photograph #2). The San Pablo Avenue facade retained its original appearance, except that the prismatic glass was painted. In 1947 the original arched entries at the end bays were filled in with glass, and a new entrance was cut into the original display windows on San Pablo Avenue (see photograph #1). In 1949 two partial levels were added.

The interior was remodeled extensively. Two floors at the rotunda shaft were filled-in in 1949. Ornamental plaster coffered ceilings were removed. The ornamental plaster was left intact only at some column capitals, the two upper levels and dome, and a small area around the main staircase.

REHABILITATION (1984-1988)

With few exceptions, the 1930's and 1940's storefront alterations were reversed in the recent (1984-1988) rehabilitation. Existing historic fabric was cleaned. The sheet metal dome, cornice and panels; and the brick, terra cotta, marble and prismatic glass were repaired. The cast iron storefront and terra cotta arch on San Pablo Avenue are

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presently being repaired.

The 1937 storefront alterations on Broadway and Sixteenth Street were removed. The 1912 storefront was restored to its original appearance. A contemporary glass storefront was installed on the 1923 addition (see photograph #5). The Kahn Alley elevation was somewhat modified to accommodate shear walls and mechanical equipment ventilation.

Concrete was repaired and window openings enlarged on the 1949 rooftop addition (see photograph #6).

On the interior the original ornamental sheet metal and plaster which remained on the dome was restored. The two floors which were in-filled in 1949 were removed from the rotunda shaft. This portion of the rotunda including ornamental plaster, metal railings and wood balustrades was reconstructed based on photographs and original drawings.

Modifications to the original included the extension of the mezzanine to the rotunda edge, creating a new second story. A section of the ground floor was removed, extending the rotunda for the first time into the basement, where a simple arcade was constructed. (See drawing, page 8).

The major part of the interior was of no historic significance and has been rehabilitated. The few remaining areas of historic significance are being restored. These include an ornamental metal, marble and tile stair; tile remaining at the San Pablo Avenue entrances; and ornamental

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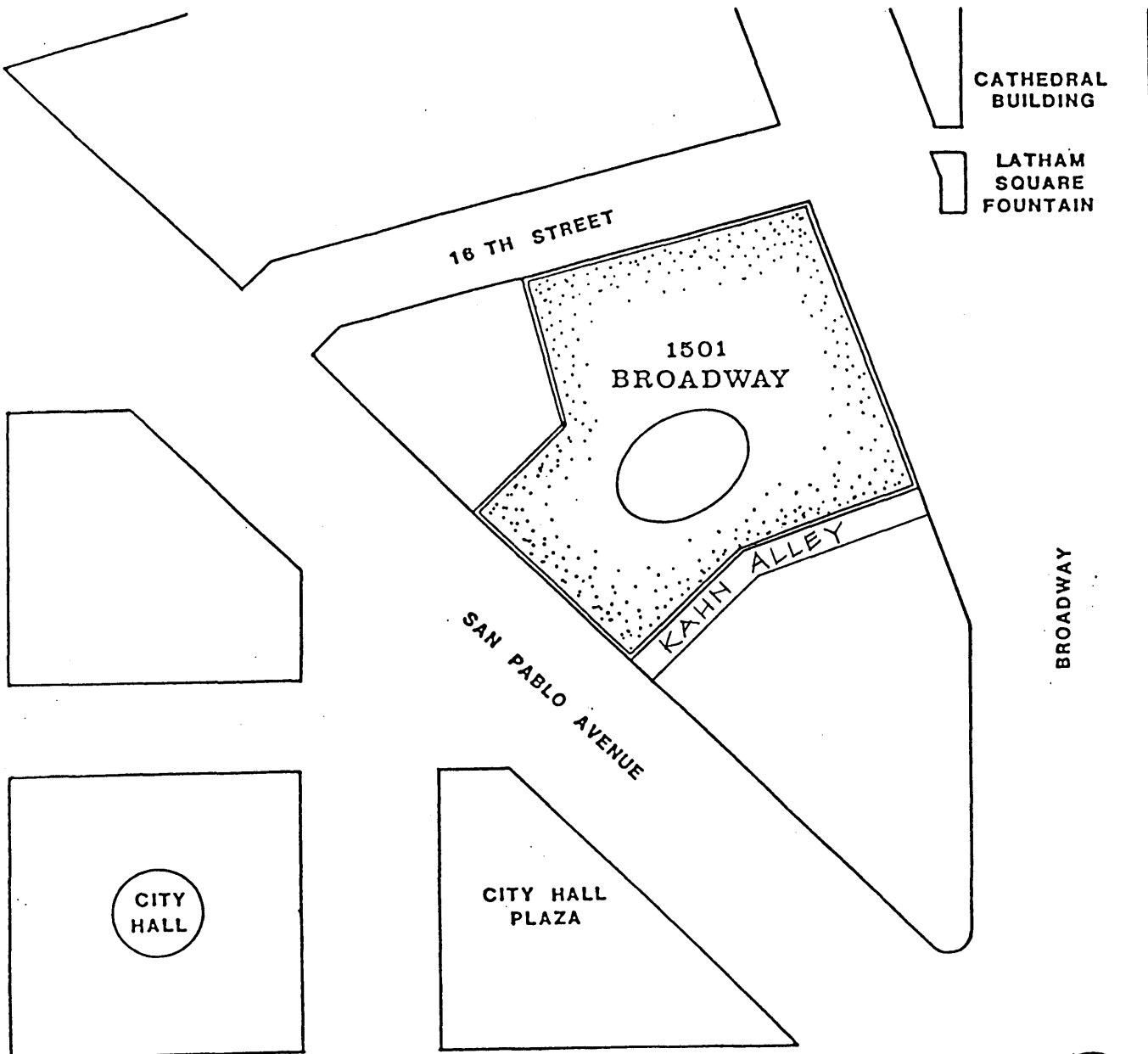
column capitals throughout the building.

The use has been converted from a department store to an office building.

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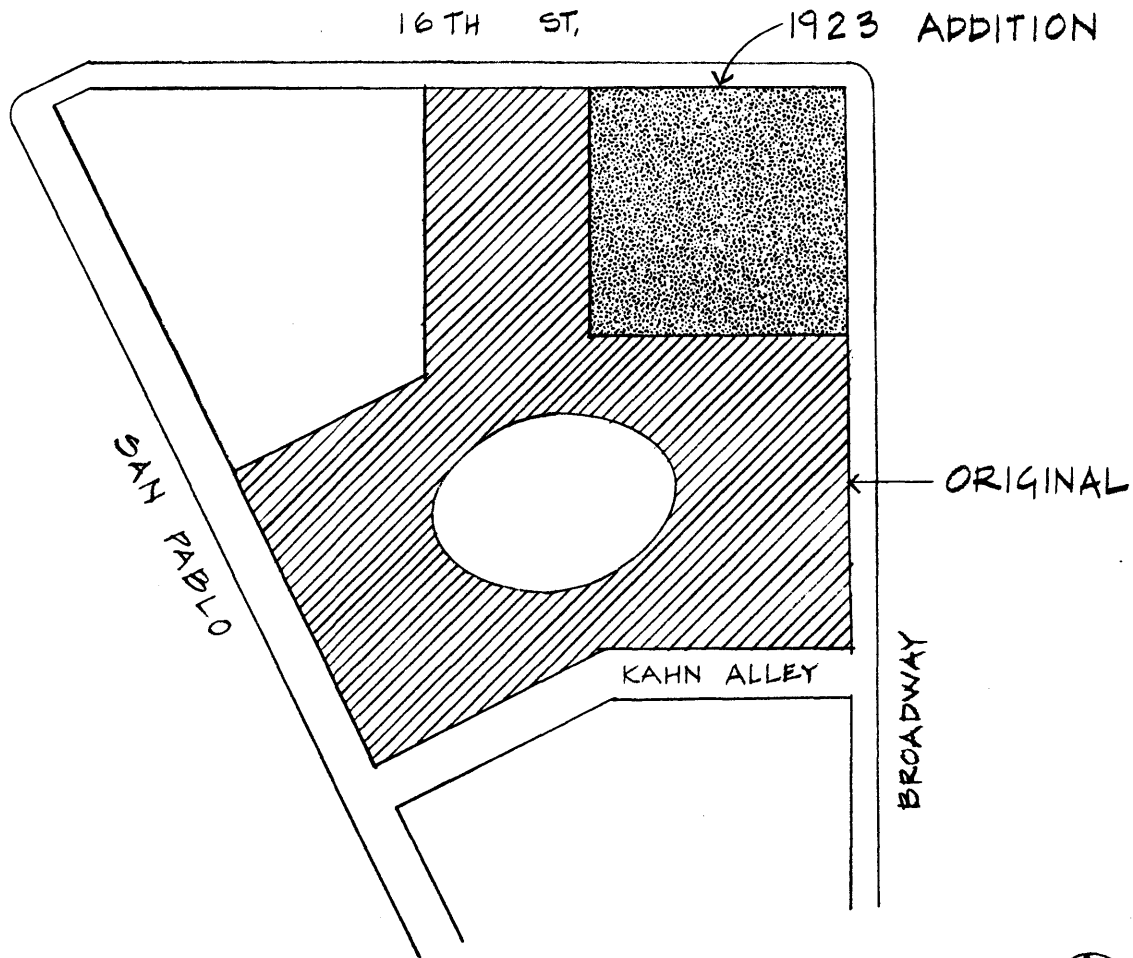
SITE PLAN

APPROX. SCALE 1" = 100'

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APPROX. SCALE: 1"=100'

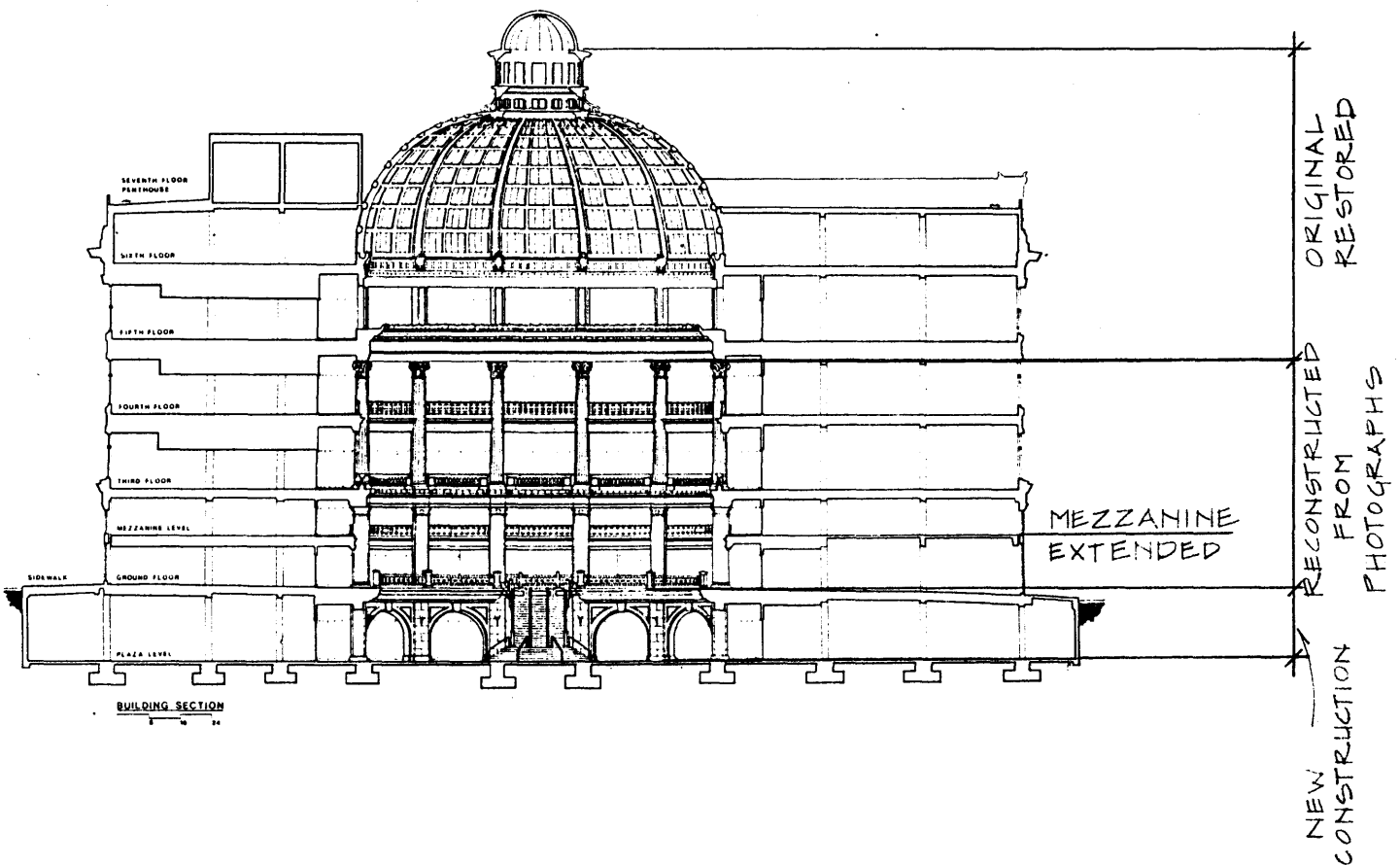


GROUND FLOOR PLAN SHOWING ORIGINAL (1912)
FOOTPRINT AND 1923 ADDITION

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SECTION OF ROTUNDA SHOWING 1984-1988
REHABILITATION WORK WITHIN THE ROTUNDA

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business was left to his sons, Henry, Solomon, and Frederick. In 1909 Solomon's son, Irving, entered the business. The store was first known as Kahn and Son, later becoming Kahn Bros. and finally Kahn's. The company claimed in 1890 to "buy nothing from the East that can be made here, thus fostering home industry and contributing very largely to the prosperity of the community in which we transact business."² Kahn's kept pace with Oakland's rapid development at that time. The store expanded and moved twice before building the Sixteenth and Broadway facility. The first move was to another Broadway location and the second, in 1893, to Twelfth and Washington. Along with the new City Hall and Lake Merritt plan Kahn's new building contributed to Oakland's new status as a major city of the progressive era.

The original architect of the Kahn Department Store was Charles W. Dickey. He was well-known both in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Hawaii. Other major Oakland buildings for which he was responsible include the Claremont Hotel, Pacific Gas & Electric Building, and the Oakland Bank of Savings. The 1923 six-story addition to Kahn's was designed by architect E.W. Cannon and built by McDonald and Kahn Co. Cannon designed other more modest buildings in downtown Oakland including 666 Seventeenth Street, 1705 Grove, 1106 Madison and 101 Third Street/221 Oak.

The development of Kahn's Department Store coincided with the spectacular growth of American department store business that

². Ellis A. Davis. Commercial Encyclopedia of the Pacific Southwest, 1914.

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occurred from 1870-1910. As in every major city, Oakland's department stores prospered, numbering among the city's largest commercial establishments. Their owners constructed buildings that overshadowed the smaller shops in scale and grandeur. This new building type served practical functions and provided a visual image conducive to sales. Richly ornamented spacious courts and stairs conveyed a sense of luxury and material wealth. Broadly spaced interior columns provided maximum light, easy circulation and spatial freedom for large merchandise displays. Large glazed inner courts provided drama and lighting to an otherwise simple loft building. Siting maximized exposure of the large display windows to pedestrian traffic and provided conspicuous public entrances from several streets.

After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake the population of Oakland mushroomed. Kahn's supplied the growing middle class of Oakland with the diversity of goods it demanded. Its success prompted the erection of a large department store that followed the above model.

Kahn's can be compared to five other department stores from the same period in Oakland and San Francisco. Few of these exist unaltered. Oakland boasted three other large Beaux Arts department stores. One of these, Capwell's, at 1400-98 Clay Street, built in 1921, no longer exists; it was replaced by a parking garage in 1960.

The Taft and Pennoyer Department Store of 1907-08 still stands, but now serves as the City Hall Annex. In its

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original form, the exterior was similar to Kahn's, but it was significantly altered in 1957. The ground floor had large display windows, awnings, and a small-paned transom. Above an entablature, colossal pilasters extended to a cornice. The building had Chicago Windows, as did Kahn's.

The only Oakland store that survives intact is the Emporium-Capwell Department Store of 1928-29, a seven story structure with a mezzanine. Each of three street facades was treated in a three part vertical composition with articulated entrance and end bays. Like Kahn's, the primary cladding materials were brick and terra cotta and the ornamentation was derived from Renaissance and Baroque sources. Unlike Kahn's, there was no grand interior space, although marble floors, detailed square column capitals and beamed ceiling provided a luxurious backdrop for the commercial operations.

Two San Francisco department stores also bear comparison to Kahn's: The City of Paris and the Emporium, now Emporium-Capwell.

The City of Paris, originally constructed in 1896, was reconstructed in 1908-1909 following partial destruction in the 1906 earthquake. Its elliptical domed rotunda was smaller but more elaborate than Kahn's. The dome was supported on colossal order columns and rimmed with wooden balustrades and ornamental wrought iron railings. Stylistically the two domes were similar, but differed in construction. The City of Paris was a double dome, with a decorative leaded-glass inner dome. Kahn's was a single dome

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with decorative interest added by the ornate plaster and sheet metal work. The City of Paris dome was recently dismantled and completely reconstructed within the new Nieman Marcus building, whereas the dome at Kahn's has remained in its original location.

The Emporium, rebuilt in 1908 behind its 1896 facade, is another contemporaneous department store with a domed rotunda. While not as high as Kahn's, the dome had a similar rib-and-glass composition. The Emporium's dome, however, was round rather than elliptical and rested on arched supports rather than a straight entablature. Both domes had classical Beaux Arts detailing.

In the early 1950's Kahn's became part of the Western Department Stores. The name was changed to Rhodes in 1960 and Liberty House in 1975. The 1984-1988 restoration has altered the use from a department store to an office building with retail space at the ground floor.

To this day the dome creates a distinctive profile on the Oakland skyline. Along with Latham Square, Latham Fountain and the Cathedral Building on Broadway and the City Hall Plaza and City Hall, it forms a cohesive piece of the historic fabric of downtown Oakland. The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey has rated the building "A", the highest designation of the Oakland Planning Department.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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City of Oakland. "Downtown District Contingency Contributor," The Taft & Pennoyer Department Store Building, #175-8A, 1401 Clay St, 4/84; May 31, 1984.

City of Oakland. "Downtown District Non-Contributor," The Clay Street Garage, #170-19, 1400-98 Clay St., 1/84; May 31, 1984.

Clausen, Meredith L. "The Department Store -- Development of the Type". Journal of Architectural Education. Vol. 39, 1985. pp. 20-29.

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"Kahn's Growth City Barometer," Oakland Tribune, 9 June 1919, p. 10.

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Oakland Tribune. 3 May 1954, p. 18.

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The Observer. 21 December 1921, p. 14.

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San Francisco Department of City Planning. Final Environmental Impact Report, Neiman-Marcus Department Store, December 1978.

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State of California Historic Resources Inventory Form for
Kahn's Department Store, 1501-39 Broadway, Oakland; prepared
by Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, Oakland City Planning
Department, May 31, 1981.

Daniel Warner, AIA. Historical Statement of the City of Paris
Department Store, San Francisco, CA. Whisler-Patri
Restoration Consultants, January 1979.

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Section number _____ Photographs _____ Page 1

The following items remain the same for all photographs.

1. Name of property: Kahn's Department Store
2. City and State: Oakland, California
5. Location of original negative: Alice Carey Architects, 25 South Park, San Francisco, CA.

Photograph #1

- Items
- 1-2. see above
 3. Photographer: Alice Carey
 4. Date of photograph: March, 1984.
 5. see above
 6. Description: San Pablo elevation showing roof top addition and alterations at the ground floor in 1947. Original entry arches were glazed and an off-center entrance cut through the original display windows. Prismatic glass transom has been painted but is intact.
Direction of camera: Looking east.
 7. Key to map: Map A, photograph # 1.

Photograph #2

- Items
- 1-2. see above
 3. Photographer: Alice Carey
 4. Date of photograph: March, 1984
 5. see above
 6. Description: Corner of Sixteenth Street and Broadway/Telegraph showing tile added at the ground floor as part of a 1937 remodel.
Direction of camera: Looking Southwest.
 7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #2.

Photograph #3

- Items
- 1-2. see above
 3. Photographer: unknown.
 4. Date of photograph: ca. 1930
 5. see above
 6. Description: Interior of Rotunda ca. 1930.
Direction of camera: N/A.
 7. Key to map: Photograph #3, not keyed to map.

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The following items remain the same for photographs #4 - #14:
3. Photographer: Mary Hardy
4. Date of photograph: April, 1988

Photograph # 4

Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Broadway elevation showing the original 1912 building on the left with three part Chicago Windows and the 1923 addition to the right with two part Chicago Windows on the upper floors. Note pressed metal cornice with mutules on the original building.
Direction of camera: Looking Northwest.
7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #4.

Photograph # 5

Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Corner of Sixteenth Street and Broadway/Telegraph with 1923 addition in foreground. Note the storefront on the 1923 building is contemporary, the storefront on the 1912 building is a restoration.
Direction on camera: Looking South/Southwest.
7. Key to map: photograph #5.

Photograph # 6

Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: San Pablo elevation showing restoration of pressed metal spandrel panels in the central bays and inlaid marble on the end bays and in the frieze, and prismatic glass at the ground floor.
Direction of camera: Looking East.
7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #6.

Photograph # 7

Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Kahn Alley elevation showing dome and lantern.
Direction of camera: Looking North.
7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #7.

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Photograph # 8

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Original terra cotta entry arch on San Pablo Avenue with glazing from 1947 remodel removed.
Direction of camera: Looking East.
7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #8.

Photograph # 9

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Original terra cotta arch on Broadway elevation reconstructed in precast concrete. Replaced prismatic glass transom on the left.
Direction of camera: Looking West.
7. Key to map: Map A, photograph #9.

Photograph # 10

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Main staircase with decorative wrought iron railing and cast iron newel post under construction. "K" (for Kahn's) are within the cartouches around the top of the post.
Direction of camera: N/A.
7. Key to map: Photograph #10, not keyed to map.

Photograph # 11

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Interior of elliptical rotunda showing shaft from the third floor to top of the dome. The original plaster ornament was reconstructed from photographs. Original ornament above was restored.
Direction of camera: N/A.
7. Key to map: Map B, photograph #11.

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Photograph # 12

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Detail of decorative plaster replaced at fifth floor. The Corinthian column capitals were reconstructed from photographs.
Direction of camera: N/A.
7. Key to map: Map B, photograph #12.

Photograph # 13

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Reconstructed wrought iron railing at the fourth floor, reconstructed column below fifth floor, and original decorative plaster and sheet metal above.
Direction of camera: N/A.
7. Key to map: Map B, photograph #13.

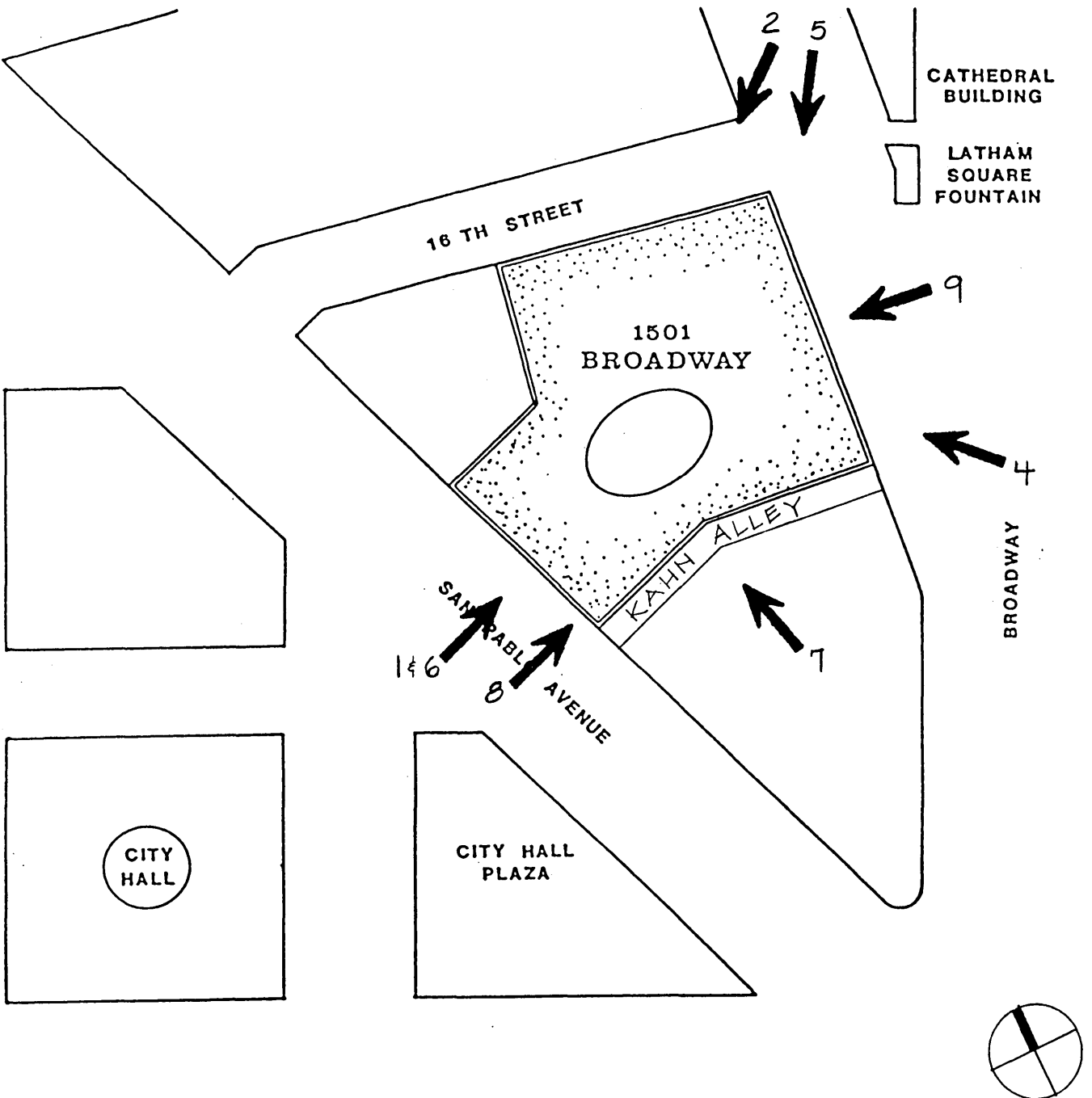
Photograph # 14

- Items 1-5. see above
6. Description: Detail at mezzanine. Photograph shows reconstructed wood balustrade, ring of incandescent light bulbs, and decorative plaster capital of first floor pier.
Direction of camera: N/A.
7. Key to map: Map B, photograph #14.

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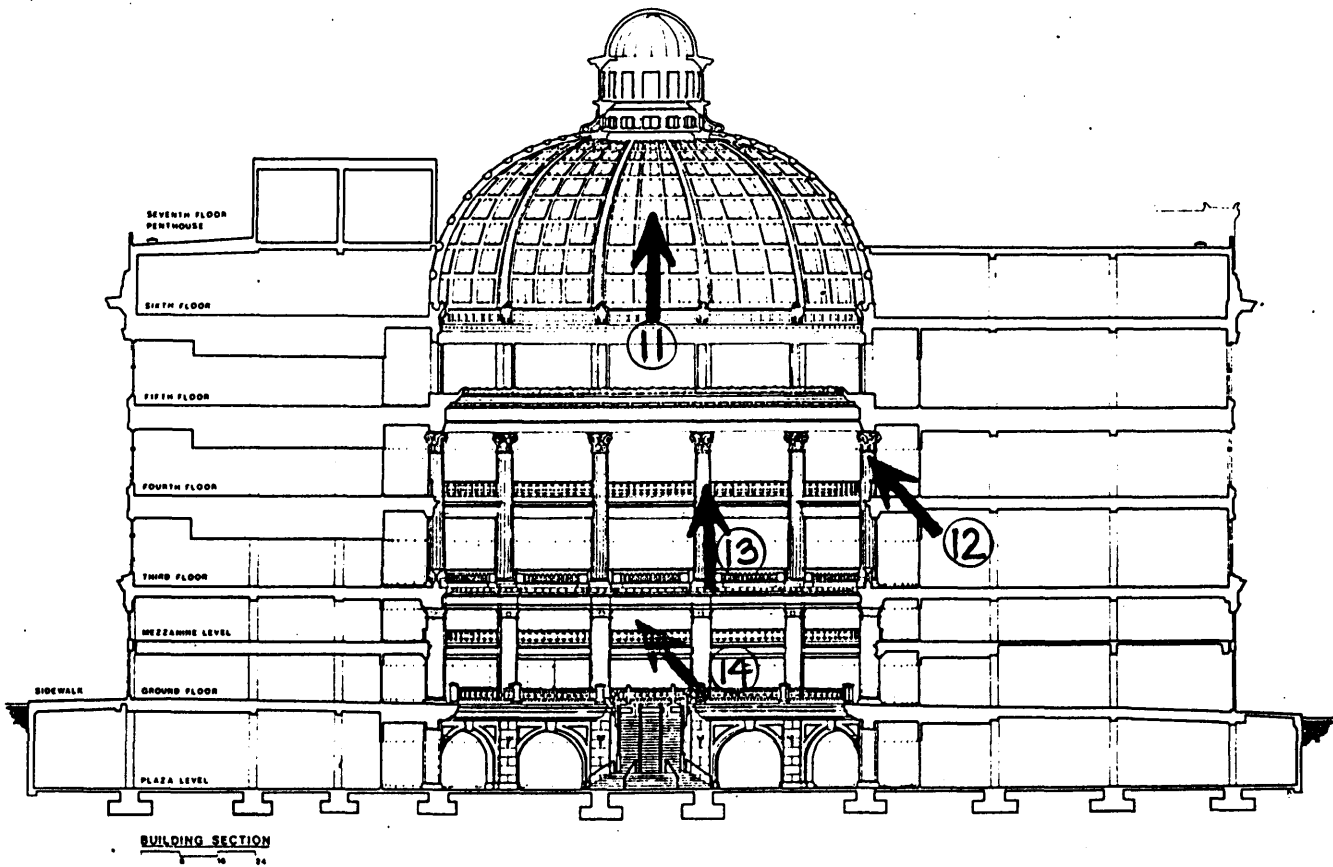


PHOTOGRAPH KEY: A

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PHOTOGRAPH KEY: B