

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
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DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC SAN FRANCISCO CABLE CARS

AND/OR COMMON

Same

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 1390 Washington Street (Car Barn and Power House)

\_\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN San Francisco

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE California 06 CODE COUNTY San Francisco 075 CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	___PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	___PRIVATE	___UNOCCUPIED	___COMMERCIAL ___PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	___BOTH	___WORK IN PROGRESS	___EDUCATIONAL ___PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	___ENTERTAINMENT ___RELIGIOUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	___IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	___GOVERNMENT ___SCIENTIFIC
	___BEING CONSIDERED	___YES: UNRESTRICTED	___INDUSTRIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		___NO	___MILITARY ___OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME San Francisco Municipal Railway

STREET & NUMBER 1390 Washington Street

CITY, TOWN San Francisco VICINITY OF STATE California

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

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

STREET & NUMBER Room 167, City Hall (Corner Grove and Polk Streets)

CITY, TOWN San Francisco STATE California

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The designated "San Francisco Cable Cars" National Historic Landmark, consists of the cable cars themselves, the mileage of track and cable which remains today (approximately 10 miles on 8 different streets), and the building at Washington and Mason Streets which serves as both the power house and the car-barn, as well as the turning mechanisms which one finds at the ends of the various lines of track.

Since the cars can only move in one direction, when one of them reaches the end of the line, it must be turned around. This is accomplished by driving the car on to a swivelling circular section of the pavement and then having it rotated by the driver and/or passengers.

The power for the system of underground cables is supplied from a building at Washington and Mason Streets. There, in the building that also serves as the car-barn and now a cable car museum, a series of electrically driven wheels keep the cables of San Francisco moving beneath the streets at a steady pace. When the cable car is to be moved along, the driver engages a gripping mechanism which grasps the cable and moves the car along the street. When he wants to stop, he releases the grip and engages a brake, if the car is on grade.

The cable cars of San Francisco constitute one of the city's most identifiable symbols and because of their "quaintness" draw many tourists to the city each year. Only San Francisco retains this form of street railway which once was used in many other American cities.

The San Francisco cable car system consists of the following:

- 1) Rails on which the cars run.
- 2) Cars which run on the rails. There are 39 cars in the fleet.
- 3) Roundtable turnarounds at the end of the lines. This is necessary since the cars can only run in one direction.
- 4) A moving cable between the tracks and below ground, covered over at ground level, with a narrow slot left so that the clutch mechanism from the car can reach through and grasp the moving cable.
- 5) A car-barn and repair shop at the corner of Washington and Mason Streets, which also contains the huge winding mechanism to keep the cables continuously moving throughout the city of San Francisco.

The two-storey building is a simple brick commercial structure with little of particular architectural note. A pair of string courses serve to separate visually the first from the second floor, while the large windows throughout the building are topped by segmental arches at the upper floor and a much more flattened segmental type of arch at the ground floor. This theme carries through except at the two corners of the building on Mason Street, where a round arch is used, creating a visual pin for the structure on that street. The rear of the building is "pinned", so to speak, by a huge mass of brick acting as the smokestack.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Designer: Andrew Hallidee

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The San Francisco Cable Cars are the only ones still operating in a United States city. As a system of traction locomotion designed to accomodate even the steepest of grades, the cable cars have remained useful in this very hilly city, while they were replaced in places less hilly by electric street railways, and then trolleys and buses. San Francisco cherishes the system as a quaint reminder of its past, as one of its prime tourist attractions, and in fact as the virtual trademark of "the city by the Bay."

## History

Andrew S. Hallidee, an Englishman who build aerial cables for use in the mines of the western U.S.A., devised the contrivances used in San Francisco. He arranged a system by which the heavy cables, laid underground, would draw the cars up the steep hills of San Francisco. The first underground cable track was laid from Kearny Street over Nob Hill to Leavenworth, in August 1873. In a relatively short time, eight companies had put down 112 miles of cable track in the city, and other cities, such as New York, Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Boston, and Chicago, soon had their cable car system. But electric street cars were replacing cable cars almost everywhere by the early 1890's, except on steep grades. It is this condition which prevails on many of downtown San Francisco's streets, some of them known for their very steep pitches, that prolonged the life of the cable car there.

Recent proposals and attempts to remove the last remaining vestige of cable car transportation in San Francisco have always produced an outcry from an enraged citizenry that has come to look upon the Powell Street line, for instance, as a beloved institution and an irreplaceable part of the city's atmosphere and life. As the last of its kind, and now a symbol of a departed era and yet a landmark of San Francisco, the cable cars have an unusual significance.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hilton, George and Doe, John F., The Electric Interurban Railways of America (Stanford, 1960).

Smith, J. Bucknell, A Treatise Upon Cable or Rope Traction as Applied to the Working of Street and Other Railways (London, 1892).

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 5½

UTM REFERENCES

D	10	550960	4184400	A	10	553400	4184380
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
B	10	553400	4181800	C	10	550940	4181800

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James Dillon, Architectural Historian, NPS

ORGANIZATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY OR TOWN

Landmark

Designated: JAN. 29, 1944

DATE  
Boundary Certification

TELEPHONE

STATE

*George J. Emery*  
March 15, 1978

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Wm. J. Bennett*  
4/3/78

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

The boundary of the designated San Francisco Cable Cars Landmark, consists firstly, of a building at Washington and Mason Streets, and secondly, of about 10 miles of streets, all that remains with active cable car tracks, of the once more extensive system throughout San Francisco. The building serves a dual function: 1) as a car-barn, it stores the equipment which runs on the tracks, and 2) a power-house, it contains the winding mechanisms for the cables that pull the cars.

The tracks today run on eight streets in the "Nob Hill," "Chinatown," and "North Beach" sections of the city. These streets are:

- 1) Hyde Street, between Beach and Washington Streets.
- 2) Washington Street, between Hyde and Powell Streets.
- 3) Powell Street, between Market and Jackson Streets.
- 4) Jackson Street, between Hyde and Powell Streets.
- 5) California Street, between Van Ness Avenue and Market Street.
- 6) Mason Street, between Washington Street and Columbus Avenue.
- 7) Columbia Avenue, between Mason and Taylor Streets.
- 8) Taylor Street, between Bay and Chestnut Streets.

The lines are identified on the accompanying USGS map of San Francisco. The lines cover approximately five acres. The acreage of the building at Washington and Mason Streets is approximately 1/2 acre. Fronting approximately 150 feet on each of those streets, the boundary of the building is a 150 foot square at the northwest corner of Washington and Mason Streets.