

San Francisco Historic District Voted

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SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 14 — A determined urban housewife who took a liking to her threatened neighborhood is on the verge of victory in a three-year struggle to create this city's first residential historic district.

Neighbors and city officials credit the research, petitions and plain persistence of Anne Bloomfield for the recent unanimous vote of San Francisco's Landmarks Advisory Board on a "resolution of intent" to designate 25 old Victorian homes in the Pacific Heights area as a historic district.

The designation is now being converted into detailed legislation for expected approval by local legislators and the mayor in this hilly city that seems to have such a fondness for its past.

Until now, that affection for age and protection from demolition have been lavished only on places of proven historic prominence or architectural gems of famed building designers.

Notables in 1800's

But Mrs. Bloomfield's beloved Webster Street houses, about two miles west of downtown Union Square, were the homes of notable 19th-century nobodies whose ranks included a Turkish tobaccoist, a grain merchant, a hairdresser, a Western Union operator and a wholesale liquor dealer.

Like the older buildings of countless communities across the country, the well-kept, two-story structures here are under severe economic pressures to give way to modern, lucrative high-rise apartment or office developments. In recent years, local critics of such tall structures have decried the "Manhattanization" of San Francisco.

But the residents of two blocks of Webster Street have drawn the line now.

"It's a very friendly neighborhood," said Mrs. Bloomfield, the mother of three children, "and some of us got to thinking we'd like to keep it that way."

So, for the last 11 years, led as often as not by Mrs. Bloomfield, residents have fought many unheralded skirmishes to keep their neighborhood as it is. They are still battling an expanding local hospital over its long-term master plan, but the institution has agreed to landscape at least one vacant lot in the meantime.

The residents got their area downzoned to restrict the number of housing units per lot and thus discourage development. They got the sixth floor of a planned research center lopped off and the

height restrictions elsewhere set at 40 feet instead of 160.

And by themselves they planted trees and shrubs in front of their homes where busy pedestrians walk in the shade of green branches that graze their heads as they scurry about on city errands. However, in one acknowledgment of the realities of urban life; a number of people have cemented their flower pots in place.

From these scraps, residents said, developed a real sense of neighborhood. Mrs. Bloomfield came to be known as the blocks' organizer and people would greet her at the door saying, "What petition is it this time?"

But the specter of developers buying up the neighborhood piecemeal still loomed. At least two of the 25 homes involved are in probate court now facing possible auction, and several others are owned by elderly couples.

So Mrs. Bloomfield, the wife of a newspaper music critic, Arthur Bloomfield, got the idea of protection en masse. This city already has the Jackson Square Historic District, but that is a commercial development.

2 Years of Research

To prepare for the fray, Mrs. Bloomfield spent the better part of two years researching the history of each home. Using real estate records and even old water

bills, she pieced together the histories of the 25 Victorian homes whose bracketed cornices and angled bay windows made them the tract homes of the day in the 1880's. That was about the time the first horse trolley ran out this far from downtown.

"I had a lot of fun doing the work," says Mrs. Bloomfield, "I'm a housewife, so I had the time."

She even learned that her own home at 2229 Webster was originally owned by August Wolters, a liquor dealer, and later acquired by J. G. Sandman, the master of the Russian steamer Alexander.

Mrs. G. Bland Platt, chairman of the Landmarks Advisory Board, sees the Webster Street Historic District as the prototype of many other similar districts, possibly in other cities. Among other things, the designation will provide a one-year moratorium on all demolition and require that all alterations, including painting and signs, enhance and not alter the neighborhood's existing Victorian appearance.

She said she expected no problems during the designation's six-month legislative journey.

"Only one of the owners opposes it," said Mrs. Platt, "but he lives out in the suburbs. So what does he know?"