



DRAFT LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Doelger Building 320-326 Judah Street

Draft Landmark Designation Report
October 3, 2012

Landmark No. **XXX**

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The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is a seven-member body that makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the designation of landmark buildings and districts. The regulations governing landmarks and landmark districts are found in Article 10 of the Planning Code. The HPC is staffed by the San Francisco Planning Department.

This draft Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the initiation and designation process. Only language contained within the Article 10 designation ordinance, adopted by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, should be regarded as final.

The Doelger Building

320 – 326 Judah Street

Built: 1932 / 1940

Architect: Charles O. Clausen / Henry Doelger Builder Inc.

OVERVIEW

320–326 Judah Street, located between Eighth and Ninth Avenue in the Sunset District, served as the headquarters, warehouse and sales office of prolific San Francisco builder Henry Doelger. Constructed in 1932 in a bold Art Deco design, the Doelger Building was one of the neighborhood’s first Modern buildings and functioned as Doelger’s base of operations for nearly two decades. The building was a prominent landmark in the Sunset District at that time and served as a bold advertisement for Doelger’s successful house-building empire.

For two decades, beginning in the mid 1920s into the 1940s, merchant builder Henry Doelger constructed thousands of single-family houses atop the sand dunes in San Francisco’s emerging Sunset District neighborhood. Pioneering mass construction house building techniques such as assembly-line production, Doelger’s Sunset District houses rapidly transformed large swaths of southwest San Francisco. Designed for middle-income home buyers and built to Federal Housing Administration specifications, Doelger’s houses share near-identical massing, floor plans, materials, and form, with differentiation provided by a profusion of facade styles. Doelger is widely considered San Francisco’s most prolific and significant merchant builder active during the pre-War era. In 1946, the *San Francisco Chronicle* dubbed Doelger “the poor man’s Frank Lloyd Wright,”¹ and his residential tracts are often affectionately referred to as Doelgerville and Doelger City.

The Doelger Building at 320–326 Judah Street derives significance from its nearly two-decade association with Henry Doelger, its role in the transformation of the Sunset District, and its expressive Modern architectural design.

¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Scene section, August 30, 1946.

CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

In January of 1932, Henry Doelger commissioned architect Charles O. Clausen of Clausen Studios to design the headquarters for Henry Doelger Builder Inc., his emergent construction firm. Clausen had previously worked with Doelger on the design of single-family houses in the Sunset District and was one of the few outside consulting architects to work with Sunset District builders of that era. Clausen's design featured a boldly Modern Art Deco facade and lobby. Constructed at a cost of \$4,000, the one-story with mezzanine building was built at 320 Judah Street, adjacent to the four-story apartment building next door, where Doelger lived and operated his nascent construction business. Later that year, Doelger designed and built an attached one-story garage to the east, fronting the sidewalk, which mimicked the stepped vestibule of the main building.

The success of Doelger's construction business necessitated a series of building expansions just a few years later. In early 1936, the roof of the original building was raised and an additional mezzanine level installed in order to provide more workshop space.² Four months later, Doelger announced that he was again expanding 320 Judah Street, enlisting in-house staff architectural designer Chester Dolphin to draw up the plans.³ Around that time, he added a prominent vertical projecting blade sign, with neon lettering reading "Henry Doelger Homes."⁴

A third major expansion occurred in 1940, with a horizontal addition onto the adjacent lot. Completed in 1940, the new expansion doubled the building's street frontage and resulted in a seamless merging of the addition's Streamline Moderne detailing with the original Art Deco design. It appears likely that the entry doors and vestibule of the original building were modified at the time of the expansion to feature glass block walls and glazed half circles at the entry doors. The expanded building contained the sales office, design workshops, staff office space, as well as lumber, hardware, and other construction materials.

Charles O. Clausen, Architect

Charles O. Clausen was born on September 13, 1886 in Napa California. His father was a Norwegian immigrant who worked as a sail maker.⁵ Clausen was raised in San Francisco, apprenticed with the architecture firm Meyer and O'Brien at 18⁶, earned his architect's certificate by age 23, and opened his own office by age 24, working in the Phelan and Hearst Buildings.⁷ He lived with his parents in the Inner Sunset and later in the Richmond District, at 746 46th Avenue. Clausen was a noted and prolific architect with his work occasionally highlighted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other publications. At age 25, he designed a large Tudor Revival inspired residence on Woolsey Street in Berkeley (1911, extant)⁸ and a few years later, Larkspur's Mission Revival style City Hall (1913, extant)⁹. Other commissions include a four-story reinforced concrete casket company building on Valencia Street (1920, extant); the Colonial Apartments, a four-story, 32-unit brick apartment building on Valencia Street (1918, extant);¹⁰ the six-story Albemarle Apartments

² Department of Public Works, building permit, December 24, 1935. This vertical addition was likely located toward the rear of the building.

³ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Builder Forced to Enlarge," April 4, 1936.

⁴ Department of Public Works, building permit application, November 5, 1935.

⁵ United States Federal Census, 1910.

⁶ Dennis McCarthy, "Charles O. Clausen, Architect." July 1926 column, unnamed newspaper found at San Francisco Public Library biographical clippings file. Also noted in <http://www.classicsfproperties.com/Nav.aspx/Page=/PageManager/Default.aspx/PageID=2175615>

⁷ United States Census, 1910 and San Francisco City Directories.

⁸ www.berkeleyheritage.com (Accessed August 2012).

⁹ www.marinhistory.org (Accessed August 2012).

¹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 16, 1918, 46.

building on Eddy Street (1917, extant);¹¹ and Beaux Arts-inspired apartment buildings in Potrero Hill (1912), the Mission District (1914, 1916), the Tenderloin (1914), Pacific Heights (1910, 1923), Presidio Heights (1918), Russian Hill (1923, 1926), St. Francisco Wood (1935), and Sea Cliff (1940) neighborhoods.

From 1927 to 1931 he partnered with architect F. Frederick Amandes and is credited with the design of theaters, apartment houses, and residences.¹² The firm produced at least one Modern design, the Art Deco Parkside Theater (1928) in the Sunset District. After this partnership ended, Clausen's listed work address is the same as his Richmond District home address (746 46th Avenue).

A review of Clausen's known work indicates that he favored revival styles early in his career, transitioning to Beaux Arts styles for the design of apartment buildings in the teens and 20s, and re-engaging with Italian Renaissance styles for the design of expansive single-family houses later in his career. After his partnership with Amandes ended in the early 1930s – a time that corresponded with the collapse of the construction industry due to the Great Depression – Clausen accepted much smaller commissions for single-family houses in the Sunset District neighborhood. These small-scale houses designed for the middle class are a far cry from the grand apartments that characterize his earlier commissions. He designed individual houses and very small tracts for several home builders in the late 1930s (but none for Doelger), most of which drew from the Mediterranean Revival style.

The Doelger Building is one of a handful of buildings Clausen is known to have designed in a Modern style. His 1936 design of 2134 33rd Avenue, a modest single family tract house, appears directly inspired by the boxy, stepped design of 320 Judah Street.

Clausen was known for his European travel writing in *Architect and Engineer*, which ran for more than a year. In 1928, Clausen was appointed to the advisory committee of the Board of Equalization, which was tasked with reappraising San Francisco's real estate value.¹³ He died in San Francisco in 1973.

¹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 17, 1917, 38.

¹² *Architect & Engineer*, April 1929, 29; Department of Public Works building permits; San Francisco City Directories 1925-1940; and Encyclopedia of San Francisco. <http://www.classicsfproperties.com/Nav.aspx/Page=/PageManager/Default.aspx/PageID=2175615>

¹³ Unnamed newspaper, February 1, 1928. Found in the San Francisco Public Library biographical clippings file.



“THE DOELGER BUILDING”

Photograph of 320 Judah Street from a 1935 Henry Doelger Builder Inc. marketing booklet. Miniature house models are displayed within the inset display cases flanking the entrance. The entry vestibule features sunburst terrazzo (extant) and the sidewalk appears painted in a diamond or checkerboard pattern. Several design elements are no longer extant, including the parapet detailing, exterior hanging lamp fixture, the glazed double-doors and address numbering along the overhang (replaced in the early 1940s), and letter signage reading “Henry Doelger Builder.”



In 1940, the original building was expanded to include a horizontal addition at west facade. Source: History Guild of Daly City/Colma (Portola Studio, circa 1940).

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Primary Facade



The original building consisted of the tall center structural bay (A), a garage added later in 1932 (B), and a horizontal addition in 1940 (C).

320–326 Judah Street is an irregular-plan building characterized by a tall two-story entry lobby and mezzanine, and a shorter one-story with mezzanine wing at the west elevation. The wood-frame building is clad in smooth stucco siding and capped with a flat roof. It is set on two parcels (1763/020 and 1763/021) and covers nearly the entire surface of both lots. According to a recent real estate listing, the building contains 9,672 square feet.¹⁴ It features a loading dock, five half bathrooms, a center open-air courtyard atrium, a kitchenette, and multiple divided office spaces at the first, second, and third stories. The primary elevation faces Judah Street.

The following descriptions of the primary facade focus on:

- (A) Original Building (1932)
- (B) Garage Addition (1932)¹⁵
- (C) Horizontal Addition (1940)

¹⁴ <http://www.320judah.com>, realtor-produced website (Accessed Summer 2012).

¹⁵ Note, the garage addition is set on a separate lot and is not included as a character-defining feature of this Article 10 designation.

Original Building (1932)



Source: *Anomalous_A*, flickr.com and Mary Brown

The original building's most prominent feature is the two-story Art Deco facade, vestibule, and entrance lobby. The deeply recessed lobby is accessed via a muscular, stepped opening, which displays decorative terrazzo paving, stainless steel hinged doors with half circle glazing, glass block sidelights, a projecting metal entry hood, and an oversize fixed window with decorative metal muntins. Above the door hood are individual metal letters that read "320." The facade terminates in a projecting, squared parapet with chamfered corner edges. A bulkhead, clad in non-historic brick, follows the building's return and extends along the horizontal addition to the west. Historic photos indicate that this bulkhead was originally clad in a panel material similar to Vitrolite. Piers flank the entry vestibule and feature deeply recessed storefront display windows set in metal surrounds.

Horizontal Addition (1940)



To the west of the primary entrance extends a Streamline Moderne one-story-with-mezzanine addition. At the recessed first story of this addition is a continuation of the bulkhead (clad in non-historic brick), which functions as a planter box, and a curved window wall built of glass brick. Functioning as a continuous design element, the bulkhead serves to unify the original building with the new addition.

Topping the curved glass block wall and adjacent driveway is a projecting flat overhang, ornamented with rounded corners and three speedlines that run along its length. Above this overhang is the mezzanine level, which likewise spans across the first story and the driveway. Clad in smooth stucco, the mezzanine features a historic clock and flush glass block window wall and terminates in a flat roofline. Though set back approximately one foot from the lobby entrance, the mezzanine level projects farther over the sidewalk than the more deeply recessed first story.

A driveway leading to the rear of the lot is located to the west of the curved window wall. The driveway is secured with a pair of inward-opening historic metal gates, which display a diamond and crescent pattern accentuated with speedlines and circles. Non-historic security bars were recently welded to the top of these gates.

Garage Addition (1932)¹⁶



To the east of the primary entrance is an attached one-story garage. The garage opening mimics the same stepped recessed opening of the primary entrance. It is clad in smooth stucco, topped with a flat roof, and features a non-historic roll-up garage door. Though building permits indicate that the garage was constructed in 1932 by Doelger, the garage's color scheme and door paneling matches the adjacent four-story corner apartment building. It is now part of the adjacent corner lot and is not part of this Landmark designation.

¹⁶ The garage addition is set on a separate lot and is not part of this Landmark designation.

Secondary Facades: Original Building (1932)



View looking northwest (left) and northeast (right).

The secondary facades of the original 1932 building terminate in a stepped parapet that follows the profile of the building. Approximately 25' of these side elevations are clad in smooth stucco, which reinforces the building's box-like design. Beyond 25', the remaining siding, less visible from the street, is clad in horizontal channel drop wood siding.

Secondary Facades: Horizontal Addition (1940)



Far left: Former loading dock at end of the driveway.

Left: West-facing secondary elevations.

Below: Detail of etched glass window now set in the former loading dock door.



The building's west elevation at the 1940 addition is clad in smooth stucco with horizontal wood siding at the third story. This facade is punctuated by wood-sash casement windows with a horizontal muntin pattern and simple wood surrounds, set in single, paired, or ganged configurations at the first and second story.

At the end of the driveway of the south-facing secondary facade is an interior loading dock accessed by a set of inward swinging, over-size wood doors. These doors are a full story in height, and, though extant, have the appearance of a solid wall due to the horizontal wood cladding. A smaller, contemporary pedestrian door was inserted into the swinging door at the right. The left swinging door now features an inserted circular window opening with an intact window etched with the company's logo. Though historic, this etched window was likely originally located in a different location within the building.

Above the oversize wood doors, at the second story of the south-facing secondary facade, is a pair of doors leading to a fire escape and ladder to the third story. This section of the third story is clad in horizontal wood siding and features fenestration at the west-facing elevation.

Secondary Facades: Courtyard Atrium



Above left: View looking southeast toward interior courtyard.

Above right: View looking northeast into the interior courtyard.

Left: View looking southwest from the third story across the courtyard. The third story wood-clad addition is visible (left) as is the atrium wall, which features Spanish clay tile coping.

A small courtyard atrium is located at the eastern end of the building. The exterior walls of this courtyard are clad with thick, textured stucco, reminiscent of Doelger's Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival tract houses. The courtyard is bounded on three sides by the three-story building's walls. Each story features wood sash casement windows with divided lights or a horizontal muntin pattern set in arched or squared window openings. The third story addition is clad with horizontal wood siding and features glass block window walls and double-hung wood sash windows. A low property line wall to the east displays a cornice topped with Spanish clay tile.

INTERIOR

Lobby

The primary entrance of 320–326 Judah Street leads into a light-filled tall lobby space characterized by a south-facing window wall and open mezzanine balcony. The lobby's four smooth walls feature the same stepped pattern as the ceiling, a design that echoes the more pronounced stepped pattern at the exterior entrance. Historically, the lobby was the Doelger Building's publically accessible space and housed the desks of Doelger's administrative staff. The following descriptions focus on discrete areas of the interior lobby: floor and ceiling, north lobby, west lobby, east lobby, south lobby, and balcony mezzanine.



Floor and Ceiling:

The lobby floor is covered in non-historic hexagonal tile which was installed in 1986. The ceiling reflects the same stepped pattern as that found at the building's exterior vestibule. A historic stepped chandelier, also inspired by Art Deco design, is suspended several feet from the lobby's ceiling.



Left: Chandelier and balcony railing Center: Non-historic door opening beneath the balcony Right: View from the lobby into the interior office spaces.

North lobby:

A set of paired contemporary doors at the north wall leads to interior offices. This door opening does not appear historic.¹⁷ The solid mezzanine balcony is ornamented with raised Art Deco-inspired linear patterns that travel from the soffit up the face of the balcony to terminate as projecting chevrons at the balcony wall. Topping the mezzanine is a metal rail, patterned with speed lines and alternating circles.

¹⁷ The parquet floor of the office behind the doors bears scars of historic building walls, which do not align with the existing opening.



Clockwise from top left: View from the balcony mezzanine looking southeast; detail of stainless steel doors; fixed wall sconce; interior of storefront display windows; and ziggurat patterned door (at foot of stairs) leading to the display window area near the east wall.

South lobby:

Flanking the primary entrance are two interior doors that provide access to the recessed display cases fronting the primary façade. The historic door at the east is ornamented with raised geometric paneling – known as a ziggurat – reminiscent of the building’s Art Deco-inspired stepped design and form. At the west, the matching historic door was replaced with a flush contemporary door. Inside the piers are unfinished areas containing rough shelving and utilities. The storefront displays are roughly 2’ wide, by 3’ tall, by 1’ deep. Each display is finished with what appears to be sheetrock and contains a pendant lighting fixture.

Fixed, scalloped lighting sconces are located on either side of the primary entrance’s oversize window.



West lobby:

A contemporary flush door at the west lobby leads to what was Henry Doelger's private office. Historically, a door led from the lobby to Doelger's office; however, the lower portion was altered to accommodate teller windows for a credit union in the 1980s, and the door's original location cannot be ascertained. The teller windows and projecting interior awnings were removed at some point and the wall replaced; however, some evidence of these earlier alterations remains.

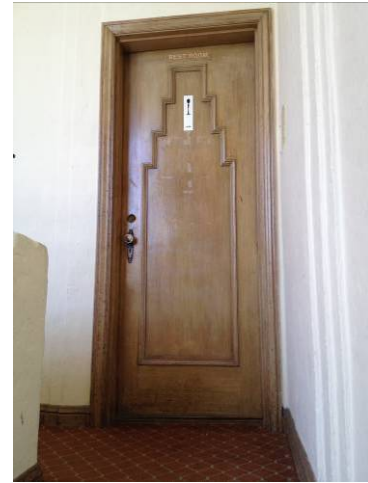
Higher up on the west wall is an area that could have displayed a mural at one time.



Left: View looking east at base of curved stairway Right: View looking south toward the balcony

East lobby:

The open mezzanine level is accessed via a flight of steps at the lobby's east wall. Stairs feature red tile steps and risers decorated with alternating decorative tiles. The stairs are not in keeping with the Art Deco design of the lobby, though they are reminiscent of exterior stair design in Doelger's tract houses. It is likely that the stair tiles are not original, and the tiles are not considered character-defining. The walls feature the same stepped pattern as the ceiling and other interior lobby walls. Additional detailing on the east wall includes a fretted metal vent grate.



Left: Balcony level view looking west. The open doorway leads to interior office spaces. Right: A ziggurat patterned door at the top of lobby's stairway leads to one of two balcony-level half bathrooms.

Balcony mezzanine:

At the top of the stairs is a narrow balcony mezzanine with non-historic carpeting. This level features three doors with raised geometric paneling (ziggurats) reminiscent of the building's Art Deco-inspired stepped design and form. The first two doors lead to half bathrooms.¹⁸ The door at the west end of the mezzanine leads to a warren of additional interior offices and stairways that lead to subdivided office space at the first and third floor.

Alteration History

Below is a short timeline of the property's construction history as reflected in building permits.

May 1911:	Building constructed (single-family bungalow)
Jan. 1932:	Construction of one-story with mezzanine building (320 Judah Street)
March 1932:	Construction of one-story garage
Nov. 1935:	Installation of projecting vertical blade sign with neon lighting
Dec. 1935:	Raise roof of workshop and install new mezzanine floor (likely at rear of building)
Feb. 1940:	Construction of one-story with mezzanine building
April 1957:	Unspecified interior office remodeling
April 1958:	Install greenhouse on 2 nd story roof deck, interior office partitions and sinks, adding one window opening and converting two existing windows to doorways
Oct. 1974:	Repair unspecified interior fire damage
March 1982:	Interior repair, replacement and installation of sheetrock, doors, windows, and shelving.

¹⁸ The bathrooms are largely intact and contain polychromatic glazed tiling and fixtures; however, the bathroom spaces are not considered character-defining.

Dec. 1985:	Enlarge interior doorways
Jan.-Mar. 1986:	First floor interior office and lobby remodeling; alterations in the lobby include removal of non-historic counter, changes to bank teller counters and openings at west lobby wall, replace tile flooring
March 1987:	Erect a 25'x10' billboard
Feb. 1991:	Relocate fire suppression system
Aug. 1992:	Repair dry rot from front parapet, stucco exterior wall, repair roof, replace skylight
Oct. 1998:	Roof replacement
Oct. 1999:	Repair dry rot and address numerous alterations made without a permit

The following alterations were constructed without the benefit of a building permit and/or the original building permit was lost.

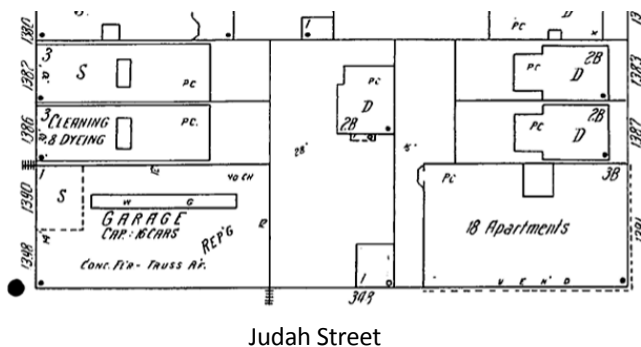
No date:	Single-family house on site demolished (c.1928-1932)
No date:	Bulkhead tiles replaced with brick
No date:	Elongated exterior door handles removed
No date:	Facing material on chamfered parapet edges and coping removed ¹⁹
No date:	Lettering and signage related to Doelger removed

The following maps and aerial photography provide additional information on the historical development of block and lots 1763/020 and 1763/021 and the extant building's expanding massing and envelope.

1928 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map²⁰

In 1911, a two-story over basement single-family dwelling was built at the northeast corner of an oversize lot on Judah Street in between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Clad in rustic tongue-and-groove wood siding, the residence was set back toward the rear of the 50'x100' lot. A one-story ancillary structure was built adjacent to the sidewalk at some point between 1911 and 1928. The original address for the house was 348 Judah Street; changes in street numbering resulted in an address of 320 Judah Street when Doelger constructed the first sales office on this site in 1932.

The house and ancillary structure were demolished at some point between 1928 and 1932.



¹⁹ It is possible that the facing and coping material was simply paint.

²⁰ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1928, Volume 10, Sheet 1038

1937-1938 Aerial View

An aerial photograph taken several years prior to the 1940 horizontal building expansion shows 320 Judah Street, which covers nearly all of block 1763/020. Directly to the west of 320 Judah Street is what appears to be a vacant lot fronted by gate or fence. Presumably, this lot (1763/021) was used to store Doelger's trucks and lumber.



Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection

MODERN DESIGN

The Doelger Building displays bold Modern design elements and detailing from two distinct stylistic eras: Art Deco and Streamline Moderne. The following section describes the evolution of these two styles and their application to various building types in San Francisco.

Art Deco Buildings in San Francisco²¹

Beginning in the 1920s, the sleek and graphic elements of the Art Deco style were adopted, particularly in the design of commercial and public buildings such as theaters, hotels and office buildings. Relatively few residential buildings were designed in the Art Deco style. A precursor to the Art Moderne and Streamline Moderne Styles, Art Deco was popularized by the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts) held in Paris. The exposition brought together Europe's leading Modern artists, designers, architects, furniture makers, and craftspeople. Thoroughly European in origin, the stylized motifs and forms of Art Deco were introduced to American audiences in the years immediately following the Exposition. The style's bold, futuristic look was further disseminated through films of the late 1920s.²²

Art Deco design is noted for its use of rich materials and profuse ornament of chevrons, zigzags, and rays, stepped arches, stylized floral forms, and the repetition of forms and motifs. Buildings were oriented vertically and facades often feature a series of stepped setbacks. Developed during the post-World War I "Jazz Age," the exuberant Art Deco design was a reaction to the death, misery, and deprivation of the previous decade. It represented an embrace of a "brave new

²¹ The following discussion of the Art Deco style in San Francisco is pulled directly from the Planning Department's 2010 historic context statement: *San Francisco Modern Architectural and Landscape Design, 1935–1970*.

²² Michael F. Crowe, *Deco By the Bay: Art Deco Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1995), 4.

world in which democracy, clinical efficiency, capitalism, and even luxury prevailed.”²³ The geometric forms of Cubism also influenced the style as did the use of zigzags, chevrons, and rays by earlier German Expressionists.²⁴

The onset of the Great Depression in 1930 and the resultant near collapse of the building industry curtailed the construction of Art Deco buildings. As a result, relatively few buildings in San Francisco were designed in this style and the style was largely replaced by the more restrained, softer and curvier Streamline Moderne in the mid-1930s.

The Art Deco style is most closely associated with San Francisco’s commercial and institutional property types and was infrequently applied to domestic architecture. In the late 1920s, several prominent large-scale commercial buildings were designed in the style, many by master architect Timothy Pflueger for the firm Miller & Pflueger. Iconic Art Deco commercial buildings include Timothy Pflueger’s terra cotta clad Pacific Telegraph and Telephone Building (1925) at 140 Montgomery Street and the Sutter Medico-Dental Building at 450 Sutter Street (1929). The retail corridor along Chestnut Street in the Marina District features a concentration of Art Deco storefronts. Scattered one-story storefronts are also found in the outlying areas of San Francisco, including the Richmond and Sunset Districts. Very few single-family houses incorporated Art Deco design, though multi-family residential buildings, particularly in the Marina District, incorporated elements of the style. Examples of grand, luxurious Art Deco apartment buildings are also scattered throughout the central areas of the city.

The exterior facade and interior lobby of the 320 Judah Street, at the original 1932 building, displays features typical of the Art Deco style including a recessed and stepped opening, stepped parapet, stylized sunburst terrazzo tiling, metal geometric window sash, and stepped ornamentation (zigurat pattern) found on interior wood-paneled doors and on the hanging chandelier.

Streamline Moderne in San Francisco²⁵

Streamline Moderne, also referred to as Art Moderne, Moderne, Modernistic, or Depression Modern, was a conscious architectural expression of the speed and sleekness of the Machine Age. The style referenced the aerodynamic forms of airplanes, ships, and automobiles of the period with sleek, streamline rounded corners and curves. Considered a unique American style, Streamline Moderne is the first “modern” style to gain widespread acceptance in mainstream America.²⁶ It evolved from the Art Deco movement and incorporated design elements associated with the International Style.²⁷

Most Modern styles that emerged in the 1920s to 1960s were typically applied to just one or two property types, (i.e., residential buildings or office towers); however, design elements of the Streamline Moderne style were incorporated into a wide range of property types including residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, educational, and recreational. Older commercial storefronts of the period were commonly remodeled to include elements of this popular style. Industrial and institutional buildings frequently incorporated glass blocks and rounded corners.

Design elements associated with Streamline Moderne include rounded corners and curved surfaces; curved railings and overhangs; speed lines (bands of horizontal piping); curved glass windows or small porthole windows; flat roof with

²³ Sarah Cunliffe and Jean Loussier, *Architecture Styles Spotter’s Guide* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2006), 220.

²⁴ Ibid. 3.

²⁵ Discussion of the Streamline Moderne style in San Francisco is pulled directly from the Planning Department’s 2010 historic context statement *San Francisco Modern Architectural and Landscape Design, 1935–1970*.

²⁶ Lester Walker, *American Shelter* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1996), 220.

²⁷ Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 9.

coping at the roofline; smooth stucco or concrete wall surface, often painted white; wraparound windows at corners; metal balconettes, often curved; general absence of historically derived ornamentation; horizontal orientation; glass block window walls; aluminum, stainless steel, chrome, and or wood used for door and window trim; and towers or vertical projections. Design elements specifically associated with Streamline Moderne storefronts include curved plate-or structural-glass and bulkheads; aluminum or metal bands; oval or semi-oval window glazing; angled and recessed entry vestibules; colored structural glass used as facing (Carrera and Vitrolite); Vitrolux accents (color-infused tempered plate glass) used for nighttime illumination; porcelain enamel facing, often in a squared pattern (Enduro and Veribrite); extruded metal door and window settings, often anodized; and signs composed of individual letters, often in a sans-serif, contemporary type face.²⁸

Streamline Moderne design elements found on the 1940 addition at 326 Judah Street include horizontal speed lines, curving exterior walls, glass bricks, smooth stucco cladding, and a geometric patterned gate. Streamline detailing including glass block sidelights, curved metal entry hood, and metal doors with glazed half circles is also found at the remodeled lobby entrance. Extant Streamline Moderne storefronts are extraordinarily rare.²⁹

Doelger's embrace of the style had, by the late 1930s, extended to his residential tracts as well. This resulted in an early adaptation of Modern architectural design to mass produced residential properties. His earliest Modern designs, built in 1937, include three atypically large, custom-designed Streamline Moderne residences on corner lots in the Sunset District (on Moraga and Rivera streets). Beginning in 1939, Streamline Moderne was offered as one of many standard facade styles (typically traditional or revival styles) available to prospective middle- and lower-middle-income house buyers. In 1940, Doelger advertised "The Styleocrat" and "The Rainbow House" Streamline Moderne facade options. His competitor Ray Galli introduced the "Casa Moderna" that same year.³⁰ It was not a common residential tract style in San Francisco. For example, fewer than 10% of houses in many 1940s tracts in the Sunset District were designed in the Streamline Moderne style.³¹ A handful of neighborhood tracts, such as Cayuga Terrace (1940) and Anza Vista (1948), feature Streamline Moderne facades as the dominant style.



Left: 1941 photo of Doelger's "Styleocrat" model house located at 3430 Moraga Street. Introduced in 1940, the "Styleocrat," according to its promotional materials, "follows the modern lines of architecture."

Photos: www.outsidelands.org

²⁸ Mary Brown. *San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design, 1935-1970, Historic Context Statement*, San Francisco Planning Department, 168-170.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Galli Heritage," in Galli Heritage: Since 1925 Galli Built Means Better Built, (Galli Heritage, 1925–2010) www.galliheritage.com (accessed July 2010).

³¹ Based on analysis of randomly selected blocks in the Sunset District constructed from 1940-1945.

Henry Doelger Builder Inc.

Intro

Henry Doelger Builder Inc. dominated the home-building industry in San Francisco in the 1930s and early 1940s. An admirer of Henry Ford, Henry Doelger applied the “Fordist” principles of mass production to the home building industry, with impressive results. During his 30-year career, Doelger’s firm constructed approximately 11,000 buildings in San Francisco, primarily in the Sunset District.³² From 1934 to 1941 he was the largest home builder in the United States, constructing an average of two houses a day and employing 500 people. His specialty was a one-story over garage, single-family house, though he also built a limited number of duplexes and apartments in the Sunset District.

Henry Doelger was born in San Francisco on June 24, 1896 in a back room above his parent’s bakery at 1321 Mason Street.³³ In 1904, his parents opened a grocery store at 7th Avenue and Hugo Street in the Sunset District.³⁴ His father died when he was ten years old, prompting Henry to quit eighth grade (a few years later) to work in order to contribute financially to his family. He never returned to school and later stated that he would “flunk a fifth-grade arithmetic test.”³⁵ To earn money, Doelger ran a hotdog and tamale stand, though, according to his granddaughter, he used the stand as a front to sell his homemade liquor: “My grandfather told us the story many times of brewing bathtub gin and homemade beer to sell at a tamale stand they had in Golden Gate Park. Henry invested all the earnings from the stand in land purchased from artichoke farmers, which he was told he was crazy for trying to build on since it was mostly sand.”³⁶ Further evidence of his illicit, entrepreneurial activities was noted in the *San Francisco Examiner* on November 6, 1928. The article states that federal agents broke down the door at 545 Hugo Street (Henry’s mother’s home address, located across the street from where Henry sold his “hot dogs” from a stand) looking for homemade liquor. Doelger reportedly escaped out of the back of the house.³⁷

Early Career

In 1922, while still in his 20s, Doelger bought (and sold) his first lot in the Sunset District, an area that 15 years later would be known as “Doelger City.” With his brother Frank, an established Sunset District realtor, Henry entered the realm of real estate speculation, purchasing raw land as speculative investments. His first investment, an empty lot at 14th and Irving streets, purchased for \$1,500 in 1922, was flipped a few months later for a handsome profit.³⁸ Several years later Doelger’s investments increased in scale when, using borrowed money, he purchased 14 blocks for \$140,000, \$10,000 a block. Henry’s son Michael Doelger describes his father’s shift from speculation to construction:

“My father’s older brother, Frank, taught him how to buy and sell lots, how to speculate. My father bought lots, but during the hard economic times there were no buyers for ‘raw lots.’ My father had overextended himself by buying these lots and had to recoup his costs. He hooked up with Carl Vedell. They hired a few

³² Rob Keil, *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb* (Daly City, California: Advection Media, 2006). Note, because Doelger destroyed his business records, the exact number of Doelger-built houses in San Francisco is unknown. The 11,000 figure quoted in various publications may overstate his building activity, though it is within the realm of possibility. Doelger assigned a serial number to each of his houses (and possibly, dwelling units). The serial numbers for his Westlake development begin in the 13,000-range, lending some weight to the argument for 11,000 San Francisco houses.

³³ Crocker-Langley San Francisco Directory, 1896; and Keil, *Little Boxes*, 31.

³⁴ Andrew Curtin, *San Francisco Examiner*, “Henry Doelger, The City’s premier homebuilder dies,” July 24, 1978, 24.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ <http://www.outsidelands.org/sw2.php> (Accessed August 2012).

³⁷ *San Francisco Examiner*, November 6, 1928.

³⁸ *San Francisco Examiner*, “Henry Doelger, The City’s premier homebuilder dies,” July 25, 1978

carpenters and built a few houses. When these sold, they built more. His success in building and selling grew out of necessity: he couldn't sell empty lots, but with houses on them he could."³⁹

In 1927, Doelger built his first house in the Sunset District, a barrel front single-family house at 1427 39th Avenue.⁴¹ Later that year, on that same block, he began construction of the first tract of Doelger-built homes.⁴² This solid block face of barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses located on the 1400 block of 39th Avenue between Judah and Kirkham Streets, features alternating parapet forms and remains largely intact. Like other early tract builders of that era, Doelger's first tract houses were designed in a single style, with identical massing and footprint, with differentiation limited to window muntin pattern, cornice ornamentation, and alternating parapet forms.

San Francisco City Directory listings trace his evolution from real estate speculation to construction: in 1925 and 1926 Doelger's listed occupation was "real estate," in 1927 it expanded to "real estate and builder," and by 1928 he is listed solely as a "builder."



Fisheye view of Doelger's first tract development on the 1400 block of 39th Avenue. Photo: Google street view.

During this early phase of his career, Doelger worked out of a one-room office in the basement of the apartment building he lived in at the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Judah Street (1391 Eighth Avenue/300 Judah Street). Henry bought the 18-unit apartment building in 1924, which was likely managed by Henry's wife, Thelma.⁴³ This basement office – which Doelger described as a "hole in the wall"⁴⁴ was located next door to what would become the Doelger Building at 320 Judah Street.

320 Judah Street + Expanding Firm

In order to accommodate a growing number of employees and to provide a base for marketing and sales, Doelger bought a 26'x100' lot (320 Judah Street) on October 5, 1931 and commissioned architect Charles O. Clausen to design a headquarters for his growing business. The new building functioned as a sales office, warehouse, and prominent visual advertisement for Doelger's emerging home building firm. Its bold Modern design was highly unusual for that time and Doelger highlighted the sales office in promotional materials, including the cover photograph of a 1936 promotional booklet. According to Doelger's son, Michael Doelger, the expanded building "held the sales office, the executive offices,

³⁹ As quoted in Lorri Ungaretti's *Stories in the Sand: San Francisco's Sunset District, 1847-1964* (San Francisco: Balangero Books, 2012), 61.

⁴¹ The Western Neighborhoods project website contains an article that documents and confirms the correct address of Doelger's first house. <http://www.outsidelands.org/first-doelger.php> The San Francisco Assessor's office provides a construction date of 1927.

⁴² Thatcher Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*. (Promotional booklet published by Henry Doelger Builder Inc., 1935), 47.

⁴³ San Francisco Sales Ledger Block #1763, 1914-1938 lists Henry Doelger as the owner of this lot from 1924-1936. According to the 1930 United States Federal Census, Thelma Doelger was listed as the manager of an apartment building with more than 17 units. The apartment she and Henry resided in contained 18 units.

⁴⁴ *San Francisco Examiner*. "Doelger Opens New Firm Offices," Saturday, April 20, 1940, 10.

and [Doelger's] workrooms, where some of his house designs were created."⁴⁵ Lumber, construction materials, a fleet of Doelger trucks, and hardware were also stored onsite.

By the mid-1930s, Henry Doelger Builder Inc. employed an increasing number of in-house employees who worked at 320 Judah Street, including architectural designers John Hunter and O.E. Peterson;⁴⁶ a painting and decorating department led by H.G. Douglas; a team of salesmen; and Doelger's secretary Ms. Alpha Porter, whom Doelger later described as his "right hand man."⁴⁷ Henry's younger brother John was also actively involved in the business. As a carpenter in 1927, he constructed many of the company's early homes. His roles at the company included carpenter, foreman, and superintendent of construction, and, by 1934, he served as the company's vice president.^{48 49}

From his office at 320 Judah Street, Doelger presided over the firm's extraordinarily rapid expansion and construction of thousands of houses in the Sunset District. By 1934 Henry Doelger Builder Inc. was building a home a day, earning Doelger the moniker "the Henry Ford of housing."⁵⁰ The Doelger Building was also an important space — one that marked a life-changing event — for home buyers who filled out the required sales and title paperwork with Ms. Porter in her office adjacent to the main lobby.



Above Left: Henry Doelger in front of one of his first homes, circa 1920s. Source: Leslie LaManna, www.outsidelands.org

*Above Right: Henry Doelger in front of 320 Judah Street (circa 1932-1940, prior to 1940 addition and remodel). Source: *San Francisco Chronicle*, Obituary, July 25, 1978*

⁴⁵ San Francisco Architectural Sunset Parkside Education and Action Committee (SPEAK), Architectural and Historical Resources of the Sunset District, "Sixteen Notable buildings," 2004-2005.

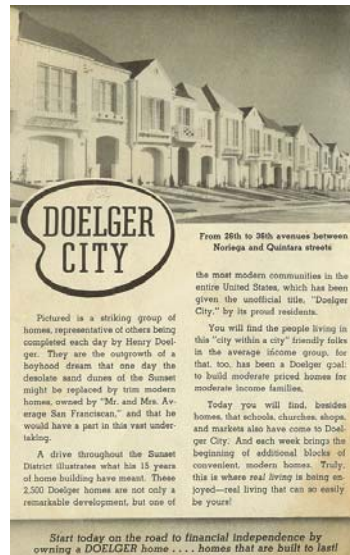
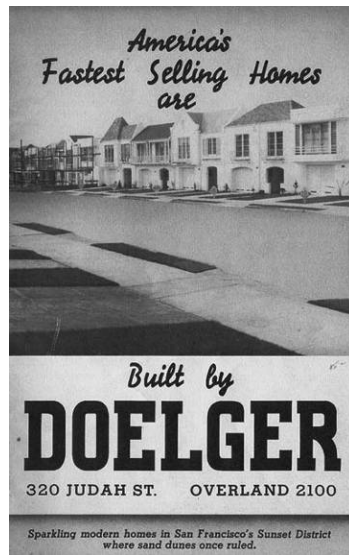
⁴⁶ Thatcher Covely, *Homes of the Moment*, 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid. and *San Francisco Examiner*, "Doelger Opens New Firm Offices," Saturday, April 20, 1940, 10.

⁴⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Firm Official Began Service in Overalls" May 5, 1940, front page of "Home" section.

⁴⁹ San Francisco City Directories, 1928-1940.

⁵⁰ Rob Keil, *Little Boxes*, 31.



Above: 1940 promotional brochures. Source: Prelinger Library

Henry Ford of Housing

Doelger's business continued to grow at an unprecedented pace. By 1940, Doelger had constructed more than 2,500 homes, mostly single-family houses in the Sunset District and Golden Gate Heights area, with 425 bought and sold in 1939 alone.⁵¹ The largest concentration of Doelger houses spanned a cross-section of the Sunset District, from 15th Avenue, in between Lawton and Quintara streets, to the Pacific Ocean.⁵² At that time, Doelger's operation at 320 Judah Street employed 26 workers (including designers, draftsmen, sales staff, and administrative staff) and seven crews of carpenters totaling 300 men.⁵³ Doelger's lead in-house staff architectural designer for more than 20 years – Chester Dolphin – along with staff designer Ed Hageman developed versions of standardized plan layouts for five- and six-room houses.^{54 55}



Chester Dolphin (left) and Ed Hageman (right) in the drafting room at 320 Judah Street, circa 1937.

Source: Daly City Public Library Photo Collection.

By 1940 Doelger was recognized as the nation's largest home builder and promoted himself as the builder of the nation's fastest selling homes.⁵⁶ He was able to offer lower prices than smaller-scale builders because of the economies of scale of

⁵¹ Brochure: America's Fastest Selling Homes are Built by Doelger, 1940

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Note that neither Dolphin or Hageman were trained or licensed architects (Keil, *Little Boxes*, 74).

⁵⁵ Keil, *Little Boxes*, 74-77.

⁵⁶ Brochure: America's Fastest Selling Homes are Built by Doelger, 1940.

his building operation. By purchasing vast quantities of nails, lumber, and gypsum, for example, Doelger was able to command a lower price, which he passed on to consumers. He called this “buying power” and emphasized its importance in various marketing materials.⁵⁷ A promotional brochure from 1940 notes, “By the tremendous savings effected in the purchase of building materials in carload lots, Henry Doelger is able to build and sell a far better home at a lower cost than ordinarily could be done by smaller builders.”⁵⁸ Doelger was inspired by Henry Ford’s model for mass production of automobiles and applied this “Fordist” production model to assembly-line house building. Rather than build houses individually, workers were organized into specialized crews, each focusing on a specific step in the process: foundation work, framing, sheetrock, siding, and roofing. At one point Doelger even experimented with a conveyor belt to move pre-fabricated parts. To cut costs in his later developments, Doelger had his own lumber mill at the job site.⁵⁹

The firm’s rapid expansion necessitated a major addition in 1940, which nearly doubled the Doelger Building’s footprint. The Streamline Moderne addition increased the building’s visibility and signage and provided an excuse for additional marketing and newspaper copy. A photograph of the newly expanded building was printed on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s “Home” section in May 1940 and the building was included in promotional materials.⁶⁰ The new office was described as streamlined with “such features as indirect lighting, glass brick front and soundproof offices.”⁶¹



Left: The newly expanded Doelger Building was highlighted in a 1940 promotional brochure.

Source: Prelinger Library

In a 2006 oral history interview with Lorri Ungaretti, Doelger’s long-time architectural designer Ed Hageman described the expanded building’s lobby and interior:

“Henry Doelger’s office was on the main floor, to the left as you went in [in the horizontal addition, west of the lobby]. The lobby had a big receptionist desk in front, two desks behind, and two along the wall. To the right was the salesman’s area; to the left was Alpha Porter’s desk. She was Henry Doelger’s right hand and the bookkeeper. Boy oh boy. She ran the office. Upstairs, right above Henry’s office, there was this big conference room. John Doelger’s office was up there. There was also a bar with a kind of a Mexican motif – leather seats and all that. The big warehouse was in the back. All the hardware was back there –lock sets, storage, hardware.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Thatcher Covely, *Doelger’s Homes of the Moment*.

⁵⁸ Brochure : *America’s Fastest Selling Homes are Built by Doelger*, 1940.

⁵⁹ Keil, *Little Boxes*.

⁶⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 5, 1940.

⁶¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, “Doelger Opens New Firm Offices, April 20, 1940, 10.

⁶² Lorri Ungaretti. *Stories in the Sand, San Francisco’s Sunset District, 1847-1964*, 143.

FHA Mortgages

The success and scale of Doelger's home building enterprise is due, in part, to government policies designed to spur the construction industry and increase home ownership. Beginning in the 1930s, the federal government played a direct role in dramatically increasing the construction and purchase of single-family housing for the middle class. This involvement resulted in the adoption of mass production techniques in the construction industry and a dramatic increase in homeownership, from 44 percent of American families in 1934 to 63 percent in 1972.⁶³

The federal government's role began during the Great Depression when the country faced an alarming drop in home construction and a rise in foreclosures.⁶⁴ To revive the moribund housing industry, the federal government created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. These agencies revolutionized home financing by making it less expensive and less risky for banks and homeowners to finance mortgages. With its low-interest loans to homeowners, the HOLC pioneered the concept of a long-term, fully amortized mortgage. Prior to this, mortgages had to be renewed every five to ten years, and foreclosures often occurred because the owner could not secure financing to renew.⁶⁵ With full amortization, homebuyers had lower monthly payments with uniform payments spread over the life of the debt, and foreclosures became less likely.⁶⁶

The FHA insured long-term mortgage loans made by private lenders with the United States Treasury as guarantor. This reduced the risk to bankers, which led to lower interest rates and more manageable down payments.⁶⁷ Prior to HOLC and FHA, a typical down payment in the 1920s was at least 30% of the house value. HOLC and FHA policies resulted in a substantial reduction in down payment requirements, typically to less than 10% of the house value. With low down payments and mortgage payments extended for the 25- to 30-year life of the loan, home ownership became a feasible alternative for millions of Americans. While the HOLC's lending programs were disbanded in 1936, the mortgage innovations and the FHA survived.⁶⁸ The Federal National Mortgage Association (aka Fannie Mae), introduced in 1938, further incentivized mortgage lending by purchasing FHA mortgages from private lenders.⁶⁹

Kenneth Jackson, author of the seminal text *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, argued that "no agency of the United States has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the FHA."⁷⁰ In addition to substantially increasing the feasibility of home ownership, the FHA stimulated building to an impressive and immediate degree. On a national scale, the construction of new houses nearly quadrupled in just a few years, from just 93,000 in 1933 to 332,000 in 1937. Exponential growth in the home building industry continued into the 1940s, with 399,000 houses constructed in 1938; 458,000 in 1939; 530,000 in 1940; and 619,000 in 1941.⁷¹

These new mortgages and the concept of home ownership were heavily promoted in San Francisco by merchant builders such as Henry Doelger, who uniformly mentioned FHA terms and government-approved financing in newspaper advertisements.

⁶³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 215-16.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 196-97.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 196.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 203-205.

⁶⁸ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 203.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

Racial Restrictions

Like many merchant builders of that era, Henry Doelger adopted the use of restrictive deeds and racial covenants in his later San Francisco housing developments. In the 1920s, the use of restrictive covenants, which legally prevented the sale of property to African-Americans, Asians, Jews, and other specified non-Caucasian groups, became widespread throughout the country.⁷² In San Francisco, many of the largest private developers of the 1920s to 1950s — such as Baldwin & Howell, Henry Doelger, Standard Building Company, and Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (Parkmerced) — included racial covenants or discriminatory practices prohibiting non-Caucasians from purchasing and/or renting properties, particularly in the western and southwestern areas of San Francisco.

These restrictive deeds and covenants resulted in a segregated geography of race and ethnicity in San Francisco. Although deed restrictions that applied to a single parcel had been in use for more than a century, the new covenants “applied to the entire established neighborhood and extended into perpetuity.”⁷³ The neighborhood-based covenants were a reaction, in part, to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in 1917 that struck down municipal residential segregation ordinances. As a result, some real estate boards and property owners associations “turned to contractual agreements between individuals which were not outlawed by the Supreme Court until 1948.”⁷⁴ Although racial covenants and deed restrictions were ruled unconstitutional in a series of court cases beginning in 1948, the practice of exclusion continued, albeit unofficially.

It is interesting to note, however, that Sunset District developers typically did not adopt racially restrictive deeds until the late 1930s.⁷⁵ For example, early tracts of picturesque houses designed in full expression of Period Revival styles by Doelger (1932) on 31st Avenue between Lawton and Moraga streets and by Oliver Rousseau (1932) — on 36th Avenue between Kirkham and Lawton streets — did not contain deed restrictions. By the late 1930s, however, racially restrictive deeds on new properties constructed in Doelger’s large-scale “Doelgerville” area appear to be standard practice. Restrictions on Doelger-built houses constructed in 1939 on the 1800 block of 30th Avenue, for example, state that the property “shall not be sold, conveyed, leased, rented or occupied by any person other than one of the White or Caucasian race.”⁷⁶ It is possible, that in placing deed restrictions, Doelger was attempting to create an air of exclusivity to his later tracts, which cost less and featured far more restrained ornamentation and design.⁷⁷ Likewise, FHA appraisal policies discouraged FHA-backed loans in areas that contained a presence of foreigners or ethnic/racial minorities, resulting in a strong financial incentive for builders to restrict neighborhood to whites/Caucasians. Nonetheless, this exclusionary practice casts a pall on the work of Doelger — and other builders of that era — who transformed the sand dunes and the form of working-class housing in San Francisco.

Doelger-Built Houses

By the early 1930s, builders had shifted from constructing tracts of near identical buildings designed in the same style to tracts that displayed a wide range of architectural styles. Although the interior layouts were limited to just a few options, the facades of Doelger’s early 1930s houses are extraordinarily picturesque, featuring miniature chateaus and castles designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, French Provincial, Mediterranean Revival, and

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 212.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ One notable exception is Fernando Nelson’s Parkway Terrace tract developed in the 1910s. Other exceptions are likely.

⁷⁶ “Declaration of Restrictions, Conditions and Covenants affecting real property situated in the City and County of San Francisco, State of California,” filed February 19, 1940, San Francisco Recorder’s Office, 1886 30th Avenue.

⁷⁷ In *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia 1870-1930*, author Robert Fogelson posits that deed restrictions and covenants in working class and middle income neighborhoods were sometimes used to provide the appearance of exclusivity.

Storybook styles. This range of styles resulted in block faces with remarkably varied roof forms and cladding, entrances and stairways, fenestration patterns, and ornamental detailing.

The exuberant designs of the early 1930s, however, had evolved by the late 1930s into more restrained versions of this wide spectrum of architectural styles. The FHA stimulus and resultant mass production of housing resulted in house exterior facades that were more standardized, displayed less articulation, and were quicker and cheaper to construct.



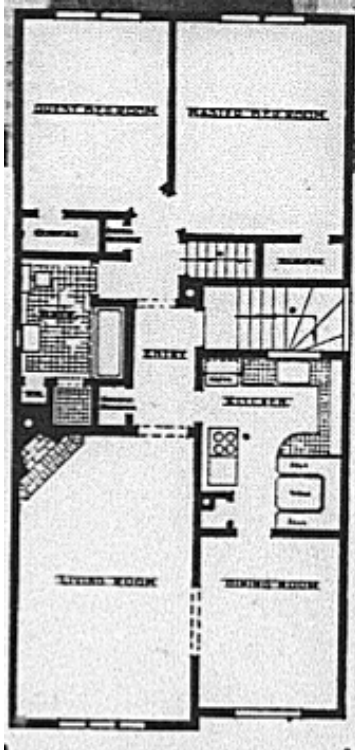
Doelger's early- to mid-1930s Sunset District tract houses featured fully expressed Period Revival styles, such as this muscular Spanish Colonial Revival house at 1530 33rd Avenue, built in 1935.

To minimize costs and maximize efficiencies, the interior of Sunset District houses were typically limited to a few standardized layouts. A typical Doelger house consisted of five rooms and slightly less than 1,000 square feet of livable area. It contained a single bathroom, a kitchen, living room, dining room, two bedrooms, and a two-car (parked in tandem) garage. The separate living and dining rooms were typically located at the front, kitchen and bathroom near the center, and two bedrooms overlooking the rear yard. Variations on the basic five-room floor plan included built-in breakfast nooks, sunrooms, a third bedroom, or ground story living spaces.

Design features touted by Doelger include an internal patio, a "Pullman" breakfast nook, a center atrium, a reverse floor plan, and a "daylight" kitchen.⁷⁸ In February 1941 Doelger told the *San Francisco Examiner*, "the very nature of this work ... requires constant ingenuity, for example kitchens which avoid a laboratory like uniformity and bring for a spontaneous 'that's the kitchen I want' from women visitors. Through the conscientious effort to make each house not merely a job number, but the potential 'perfect home' for someone, builders are fulfilling a real obligation to the community."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Brochure: America's Fastest Selling Homes are Built by Doelger, 1940.

⁷⁹ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Builders Owe Debt To Community," February 8, 1941.



Floor plan of "The Headliner" model house at 1687 33rd Avenue. The house featured two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, patio entrance, dining room, living room and at the ground story, a two-car garage.

Source: San Francisco Chronicle, May 19, 1940.

Due to economies of scale, efficient Fordist production, and new government-backed FHA mortgages, Doelger was able to offer the affordable homes and the possibility of home ownership to a wider range of household incomes. In 1941, buyers could purchase the \$5,560 "Rainbow House" with a 10% down payment and \$37.50 monthly mortgage. The slightly smaller "Freedom House" was available in 1942 for \$4,780, with \$480 down and a monthly mortgage of \$32.50.⁸⁰

By the late 1930s, consumers had the option of choosing a traditional revival style or a modernistic Streamline Moderne house. Doelger's early versions of the Streamline Moderne style, houses marketed as the "Styleocrat" and the "Rainbow House," provided some of the first Modern design options to his largely traditional or revival facade designs. Features such as glass block walls, curved balconies, flat parapets, and porthole windows are hallmarks of Doelger's early Modern designs. "We used to call that dog-and-cat hospital architecture," staff designer Edward Hageman of the glass block walls that are ubiquitous feature of Doelger's Streamline Moderne designs.⁸² Around 1940, Doelger explained his decision to offer a variety of styles, including new Modern styles: "We've kept foremost in our minds the realization that houses, like people, have a definite character which should be expressed and which is completely lost if long rows of identical houses are constructed, as once was a builder's policy."⁸³

The geographic focus of Doelger's building operation was San Francisco's emerging Sunset District neighborhood. From the late 1920s into the early 1940s, Doelger constructed many of the houses bounded by 27th Avenue, 39th Avenue, Kirkham Street, and Quintara Street.⁸⁴ He also constructed larger, often detached houses on many blocks of Golden Gate Heights and Sunset Terraces. During World War II, Doelger worked for the United States Army Corps of

⁸⁰ Housing costs listed in 1941 and 1942 advertisements in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, accessed (July 2012) at www.outsidelands.org

⁸² As quoted in a January 29, 2003 *New York Times* article by Patricia Leigh Brown: "Praising San Francisco's Champion of Conformity."

⁸³ As quoted in Rob Keil's *Little Boxes*, page 86.

⁸⁴ Ken Zinns, "The Tradition Continued: The Sunset District Rowhouse of San Francisco, 1920–1945," December 9, 1983. Also, one of Doelger's promotional brochures from 1940 explicitly describes "Doelger City" as 26th to 36th Avenues between Noriega and Quintara Streets.

Engineers and built an estimated 3,000 military dwelling units in South San Francisco, Benicia, Vallejo, and Oakland.⁸⁵ By 1948, Doelger had expanded his building ventures to the Richmond and Parkside areas, as well as San Mateo County. Plans for a new developments called for “200 sets of two-family flats, together with 25 four family and six-family dwellings in San Francisco proper.”⁸⁶ Additionally, he had begun plans for more homes in the Golden Gate Heights neighborhood. These new homes were going to be larger three-bedrooms to accommodate larger families.



In 1939, Doelger built a handful of large detached single-family houses on 15th Avenue. The period revival houses were set on oversize lots and featured a rear alley, expansive front lawns, matching white picket fences, and mailboxes that were designed as miniature replicas of each house. Several of the mailboxes are extant.

Photo: San Francisco Planning Department

Marketing, Advertising, and Model Homes

Nationwide, the 1930s–1940s witnessed an onslaught of advertising, contests, and inventive sales techniques to lure prospective house buyers, including the new marketing strategy of staging fully furnished and decorated “model homes.” These nationwide design trends and marketing strategies were readily embraced by Henry Doelger and his competitors, who attempted to promote and differentiate their products through a variety of marketing techniques, including staged model homes, house naming contests, poetry, publications, and extensive newspaper advertising.

Doelger embraced model homes as a marketing strategy early in his building career. In 1932, prior to the mass construction that characterized the Sunset District later in the decade, Doelger displayed several fully furnished model homes on 31st Avenue and 18th Avenue. With evocative names such as The Windsor, The Abbey, The Chatel, and Casa Alhambra, Doelger sought to evoke an upscale atmosphere in the midst of a crippling economic depression. By the late 1930s, Henry Doelger relied heavily on the showcase model home as a sales and marketing strategy and, like other merchant builders of that era, frequently partnered with furniture stores to provide the interior design and furnishings. Each year Doelger displayed a constantly rotating display of model homes for public view; in 1940, for example, his policy was to keep two distinct and differently priced model homes continuously on display. Doelger’s model homes were heavily advertised in local newspapers, often with accompanying articles extolling the building’s style, latest technological gadgetry, value, and availability of FHA mortgage financing.

⁸⁵ Bunny Gillespie, *Images of America: Westlake* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

⁸⁶ *San Francisco News*, “Doelger Pushes Dunes,” April 6, 1948.



Left: A 1941 model house – “The Lafayette” at 1750 34th Avenue.

A sample of Doelger’s model homes, as advertised in promotional brochures and the real estate section of the Sunday *San Francisco Chronicle*, include:

1930s

The Windsor, 31st at Lawton, 1932⁸⁷
 The Abbey, 1651 31st Avenue, 1932
 The Chester, Ortega at 18th Avenue, 1932
 Casa Alhambra, 1687 31st Avenue, 1932
 The Chatel, 1651 31st Avenue, 1932
 El Cadre, 1647 31st Avenue, 1932
 The Wiltshire, 1925 17th Avenue, 1933 (Sunset Terrace)⁸⁸
 The Normandie, 18th Avenue at Ortega, 1933
 The Riviera, 1917 17th Avenue, 1933
 The Padre, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
 The Deauville, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
 The Yorkshire, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
 The Charm House, c.1936⁸⁹
 Maison Distingue, 1855 26th Ave, September 1939
 The Trenton, 1843 27th Avenue, September 1939

1940s

The Lexington, 1766 16th Avenue, January 1940
 The Doe-Val (as in Doelger-Value), 1858 30th Avenue, February 1940
 The Forty Finer, 1538 40th Avenue, March 1940
 The Westchester, 1619 33rd Avenue, May 1940
 The Headliner, 1687 33rd Avenue, May 1940
 The El Dorado, 1614 41st Avenue, June 1940
 The Georgian, 1739 33rd Avenue, August 1940
 The Lynbrook, 1646 34th Avenue, August 1940
 The Doelworth, 1754 19th Avenue, August 1940
 The Lafayette, 1750 34th Avenue, 1941⁹⁰
 The American, 1958 30th Avenue, 1941
 The Styleocrat, 3430 Moraga Street, 1941
 The Courtland, 1746, 35th Avenue, 1941
 The Liberator, 1987 46th Avenue, 1944
 The Modernaire, 1900 15th Avenue, 1947

During the peak of building construction and intensive sales competition, Doelger sponsored several house naming contests as a marketing strategy to generate excitement, advertisement copy, and news stories, and to physically lure contestants to the Sunset District to view his completed houses. Applicants were required to visit the contest house in order to enter the contest. The winning entrant for an August 1940 contest to name 1754 19th Avenue: “The Doelworth.”⁹¹ The first-prize winner received \$100 and a new kitchen stove.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Model houses from 1932-1935 are found on page 41 of Thatcher Covely’s 1935 brochure, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The Lafayette, American, Styleocrat, and Courtland are listed in Lorri Ungaretti’s book *Stories in the Sand, San Francisco’s Sunset District, 1847-1964*.

⁹¹ Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 65., and *San Francisco Examiner*, “Thousands Enter Name Contest,” August 31, 1940.

⁹³ *San Francisco Examiner*, “Oh, For a Name!” January 13, 1940. Note: According to the Consumer Price Index calculator, \$100 in 1940 equates to the buyer power of over \$1,600 in 2012.

Name This **DOELGER STERLING HOME** OVER **\$300 IN PRIZES**

FIRST and SECOND PRIZES
\$100 Cash & \$136.50
 Buy 1935 Wedgewood Lane
 (Check goes to first prize winner)
THIRD PRIZE \$50.00 CASH
FOURTH PRIZE \$25.00 CASH
 Rules and prize list on separate sheet
 "NAME PLEASE"

See this Beautiful MODEL HOME
1935-29th AVE.
 Come with us and visit our first model home of 1940. Pass through the distinctive glass entrance with its beautiful rock garden. Relax in the new-view living room overlooking a magnificent sweep of the Pacific. See the tiled multiple kitchen attractively finished in white walls and trim—note the club car breakfast nook, the streamlined bath, and a host of other distinctive features. Here is your ideal home—awaiting your inspection.

Furnished by
Sterling Furniture Co.
 One of the most interesting examples of modern interior decoration, with attractive furniture and fixtures, complete with the latest home accessories. The full, new model is one of the finest and most complete ever created by Sterling designers.

HENRY DOELGER
 320 JUDAH STREET OVERLAND 2100

San Francisco Chronicle, January 7, 1940

Cross Marketing

In the 1930s-1940s, cross-marketing between builders and related stores and suppliers was common practice. Sales brochures and other builder-produced marketing materials in San Francisco frequently contained advertisements from businesses supplying services, furnishing, or equipment such as venetian blinds, painting supplies, plaster ornamentation, custom upholstery, and wallpapering. Newspaper advertisements for furnished model homes were funded, in part, by furniture stores such as Sterling, Redlick-Newman, and Lachman Bros. Advertising costs were shared. As evidenced by the copious number of ads and special weekend sections devoted to real estate, the local newspapers benefited from prolific builder advertisements, and reciprocated with glowing copy highlighting the rapidly expanding building industry.

Cross-marketing materials also included promotional literature, such as a 50-page booklet "Doelger Built Homes of the Moment" commissioned by Doelger in 1935. In addition to glowing text, photographs, and poetry devoted to Doelger homes, this free booklet contained advertisements for 47 local products and services related in some way to the production or purchase of a Doelger house. These included banks and insurance companies; furniture and drapery stores; suppliers of plumbing, gas, and lighting fixtures; lumber and paint companies; hardware and nails suppliers; various contractors (foundations, decorative stonework, electrical work, iron work, plastering, stucco work, excavation, landscaping, roofing, cabinetry, wallpapering, and wood flooring); cleaning suppliers; moving and storage companies; automobiles dealers and service stations; and even a muralist (Harry Tyrrell, who described his interior murals in Doelger's homes as "completing a symphony of color and enhancing the value of the home").⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Thatcher Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*, 32.

This extensive cross-marketing effort hints at the widespread impact and “trickle down” effect of FHA loans designed to stimulate the construction industry and promote home ownership.

The following is one of several poems by Thatcher Covely included in the 1935 promotional booklet “Doelger Built Homes of the Moment.”⁹⁵

Contentment

A Doelger Built Home is our castle ...
Our dream house that came true,
He built it ... we dreamed it
While courting ... we two.

It isn't a mansion with acres of ground,
But a cozier built home is hard to be found —
So *quiet* ... so *peaceful* ... so *modern* and *neat*,
It's nice to reside on a Doelger Built street
Where contentment and beauty blend into one,
And then sweet repose when worktime is done.
Is it to wonder we're happy living out there
In a Doelger Built Home so roomy and fair —
Out in the “*Sunset*” where sunsets are gold,
In our Doelger Built Home we're going to grow old.

Neighborhood Presence

Like many Sunset District builders, Doelger resided in the neighborhood that he helped transform. In 1938, he moved his family from their apartment (next door to 320 Judah Street) to 1995 15th Avenue, near the eastern border of the Sunset District. From his hilltop house, Doelger looked over the thousands of houses he constructed in the neighborhood he helped create. The Doelger residence was known as a community gathering place and can be seen, in part, as an extension of the Doelger Homes brand.



Doelger's longtime personal residence at 1995 15th Avenue. The L-shaped Monterey Revival house in Golden Gate Heights overlooks the thousands of Doelger-built houses in the Sunset District.

(Photo: Planning Dept.)

Westlake

The Doelger Building at 320-326 Judah Street was center of Doelger's planning and operations for San Francisco-based residential tracts. It was also the place from which Doelger planned and designed his most ambitious project—the planned community of Westlake. By the mid 1940s, Doelger's attention had shifted from San Francisco to a large tract of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 21

land in San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco. In 1945, Doelger purchased the 1,350-acre tract of hog and cabbage farms for \$650,000 and over the following two decades he transformed the area into the iconic midcentury subdivision of Westlake.⁹⁶ Westlake was Northern California's largest planned community constructed during the 1950s.⁹⁷ Over a 20-year period, Doelger built Westlake's approximate 6,500 single-family houses, 3,000 apartment units, architect-designed public schools, and central 40-acre shopping center.⁹⁸

From his 320-326 Judah Street offices, Doelger oversaw the original design of Westlake, as well as the initial grading (1947), ceremonial ground breaking (March 1949) and shopping center grading and construction (July 1949).⁹⁹ The first tract of 32 residential houses in Westlake was completed in 1950.¹⁰⁰ Doelger vacated 320 Judah Street around that time, moving to 375 South Mayfair Avenue, the relocated firm's temporary office in Westlake.¹⁰¹ In 1956, Doelger constructed the firm's permanent offices at 333 Park Plaza Drive just south of Westlake's commercial core.¹⁰² By 1952, Doelger was building five homes a day in Westlake and employed 1,200 workers.¹⁰³ In 1965, Doelger sold the Westlake shopping center,¹⁰⁴ and by 1969 he had sold off most of his remaining undeveloped land on the coast in San Mateo County (approximately 8,000 acres).¹⁰⁵

Doelger sold 320-326 Judah Street on April 26, 1951.¹⁰⁶ After his departure, the building was rented to a variety of professional service providers including an accountant, insurance broker, and architect (Martin Rist), and was occupied by the new owner, the builder / real estate development firm of Cleland Whitton.¹⁰⁷ Many of the same tenants were still in place in 1964, and were joined by new tenants including the International Agricultural Service and the Berryessa Land Sales real estate firm.¹⁰⁸



Example of an iconic Midcentury Modern house found in Doelger's Westlake development.

Source: Rob Keil

⁹⁶ Bunny Gillespie, *Images of America: Westlake*, 8.

⁹⁷ Chris VerPlanck, "We're Sitting Pretty in Daly City: A Critical Analysis of Suburban Planning in Henry Doelger's Westlake Subdivision in Daly City, California, (extended, unpublished version of final paper presented at the Society of Architectural Historians annual conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, March 20, 2008.), 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁹ Keil, *Little Boxes*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Chris VerPlanck, *We're Sitting Pretty in Daly City*, 14.

¹⁰¹ San Francisco City Directories, 1951 to 1955.

¹⁰² Keil, *Little Boxes*.

¹⁰³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1952.

¹⁰⁴ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Westlake Shopping Center Sold", April 2, 1965.

¹⁰⁵ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Doelger Sells Coastside Acreage", October 8, 1969.

¹⁰⁶ San Francisco Assessor's Office Sales Ledger, Block #1763, 1939-1947

¹⁰⁷ Polk's San Francisco City Directory, 1954

¹⁰⁸ Polk's San Francisco City Directory, 1964

Henry Doelger: A San Francisco Original

Henry Doelger was a highly competitive workaholic, a perfectionist who linked his personal reputation to the firm's success. One employee described him thusly, "He wanted everything associated with his name and his company to be right ... He had no tolerance for mediocrity."¹¹⁴ Doelger's son Michael shed further insight on his father's habits, "Keep in mind where he came from. He didn't come from affluence. He'd created it on his own. He came from a side of town and a part of life that he didn't want to return to."¹¹⁵ Despite his exacting standards, Doelger was known to be a fair and generous employer and was described as having "a heart like butter."¹¹⁶ On one occasion, in January 1954, Henry invited 87 of his employees (all of whom had been with the company five years or longer) to a lavish party in Westlake and announced that he would be distributing \$100,000 evenly among them as a bonus.¹¹⁷ And in June of that same year, he hosted a dinner for his entire sales staff at Alfred's, "for selling \$7,250,000 worth of homes in Westlake (more than 600 houses) since the first of the year."¹¹⁸

Doelger's financial success allowed him many personal luxuries and stories about him abound in the society pages of local newspapers. He collected cars, yachts, toupees, shoes, ties, and custom-made sport coats. On Sundays the Doelgers often invited 10 to 40 of their friends to join them on their yacht.¹¹⁹ Nearly everyone knew Doelger, and some—especially columnist Herb Caen—derived some pleasure from hearing gossip about the millionaire.¹²⁰ Caen opined about a Doelger purchase in November 1954 writing, "Henry Doelger's '54 Cad El Dorado has 4,500 miles on it, so naturally he's turning in the old wreck on a '55. Gets it Wednesday."¹²¹ He reported again three days later, "Henry Doelger not only bought the first '55 El Dorado in town, he got a new Fleetwood, too. 'For the nighttime,' he explains patiently to the peasants."¹²²

Doelger was long interested in maritime activities and as a teenager was employed as a seaman at Matson Navigation in San Francisco.¹²⁷ With success as a builder, Doelger indulged in his love of the sea. He purchased his first yacht, a 30-foot cruiser, in 1947 and proceeded to sail it right into a sandbar near San Rafael on its first outing.¹²⁸ This was a first in a long line of boating disasters for Doelger, as many other newspaper articles describe his poor captainship, and his proneness to seasickness. In April 1949 he was to join the Sausalito Cruising Club in his newest yacht but had a rough start when his anchor line got wrapped around his propeller. When he finally set sail, he wound up in thick mud in Black Point. Once free from the mud, a heavy gale blew him all the way to Vallejo.¹²⁹ Herb Caen poked fun at Doelger in October of that same year when he reported that Doelger, in an attempt to sail to Mexico, veered too far west, ran out of gas, and even the Coast Guard would not go and get him. Caen reported that the Navy eventually came to Doelger's rescue.¹³⁰

¹¹⁴ As quoted in Keil, *Little Boxes*, 35.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁶ *Golden Gate Gazette*, September 22, 1953.

¹¹⁷ *San Francisco Examiner*, January 13, 1954.

¹¹⁸ Herb Caen, "Tempest Storm," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 1954.

¹¹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1952.

¹²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Scene," August 30, 1946.

¹²¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Herb Caen's column, November 22, 1954.

¹²² *San Francisco Chronicle*, Herb Caen's column, November 25, 1954.

¹²⁷ Draft application form, 1917-18, World War I (available at ancestry.com).

¹²⁸ *San Francisco Examiner*, November 12, 1947.

¹²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 2, 1949.

¹³⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Herb Caen: It's News to Me, Monday Medley, October 3, 1949.

On January 2, 1953 his yacht, *The Westlake*, caught fire and suffered \$6,000 in damages.¹³¹ In addition to his yachts, Doelger reportedly purchased four speedboats in just a couple of years, three of which he crashed in one summer on Clear Lake.¹³² In 1952 he was voted Culver Distiller's Man of Distinction and received \$1,000 for having his photograph taken while aboard his yacht. He donated the money to the Police Widows and Orphans Fund.¹³³ Later that year the ad was featured on the inside cover of *LIFE* magazine in the September 13 issue.¹³⁴

The Doelgers were known for their extravagant lifestyle and eccentric hobbies. Henry's wife, Thelma, had a heart for stray animals and was drawn toward the exotic. The *San Francisco Examiner* reported in 1940 that the Doelgers' pet deer, Timothy, had escaped and was wandering around 15th and Taraval Streets in the Sunset District. Construction workers employed by Doelger recognized the animal and he was returned home, where he was "welcomed by three Great Danes which [were] his constant playmates."¹³⁵ In addition to the deer, the Doelgers also had pet monkeys. Herb Caen reported in 1949 that one of them, Chichi, broke several dishes and glasses in their home before biting Thelma, requiring her to get stitches. Following the incident, the family donated the monkey to the San Francisco Zoo.¹³⁶ Another example of Doelger extravagance was reported in 1953 when Doelger returned from Germany with an expensive new toy: a toy circus with life-size performers and animals, for which he paid \$15,000.¹³⁷

During his retirement in the 1970s, Doelger spent at least half of the year on his yacht, *The Westlake III*, in Monte Carlo,¹³⁸ and the rest of the year traveling or at the family ranch in Healdsburg, California. He died in 1978 in Borgaro, Italy.¹³⁹ Doelger's estate attests to his financial success and his personal generosity. In his will, he left \$5 million in a trust for charities; "gifts ranging up to \$85,000 each" to 45 of his close friends and former employees; and the rest to his wife, his children, and his four grandchildren—providing they were never convicted of a felony, or used narcotics.¹⁴⁰

Unfortunately for scholars and historians, Doelger destroyed all of his business records before he died.¹⁴¹



Bust of Henry Doelger located within the Westlake development.

Source: David Gallagher, flickr.com

¹³¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, January 3, 1953.

¹³² *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 30, 1947.

¹³³ *San Francisco Examiner*, January 28, 1952.

¹³⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 10, 1952.

¹³⁵ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Recognized on Street, Taken Home", February 21, 1940.

¹³⁶ Herb Caen, "It's News to Me, Monday Medley," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1949.

¹³⁷ *San Francisco Examiner*, November 22, 1953.

¹³⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 11, 1969.

¹³⁹ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Deaths: Henry Doelger, The City's premier home builder, dies," July 25, 1978.

¹⁴⁰ *San Francisco Examiner*, "Doelger makes a no-drugs bequest," August 1, 1978.

¹⁴¹ According to Rob Keil's unpublished interview with Theodore Tronoff, Doelger's engineer.

ARTICLE 10 LANDMARK DESIGNATION

This section of the report is an analysis and summary of the applicable criteria for designation, integrity, period of significance, significance statement, character-defining features, and additional Article 10 requirements.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Criteria

Check all criteria applicable to the significance of the property that are documented in the report. The criteria checked are the basic justification for *why* the resource is important.

- ☒ Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- ☐ Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Statement of Significance

Characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation:

The Doelger Building at 320–326 Judah Street derives its significance from its role in the transformation of the Sunset District, its nearly two-decade association with Henry Doelger, and its expressive Modern architectural design.

Association with significant events

The Doelger Building is closely associated with the transformation of the Sunset District from windswept sand dunes to a residential neighborhood dominated by single-family houses designed for the working and middle classes. It is closely associated with Henry Doelger Builder Inc., an extraordinarily influential and productive building firm that led the large-scale development of the emerging Sunset District neighborhood. From his office at 320–326 Judah Street, Henry Doelger presided over the firm's remarkably rapid expansion and the construction of thousands of single-family houses. The building served as the headquarters, warehouse and sales office of Henry Doelger Builder Inc., a firm that reshaped the production, sales, and marketing of working class and middle class housing in San Francisco. For two decades, beginning in the late 1920s and through the 1940s, Henry Doelger Builder Inc. constructed thousands of single-family houses atop the sand dunes in San Francisco's emerging Sunset District neighborhood. Doelger's houses share near-identical massing, floor plans, materials, and form, with differentiation provided by a profusion of facade styles.

In addition to housing production, the Doelger Building was a significant site in terms of housing consumption. By pioneering mass construction house building techniques such as assembly-line production and the purchasing power of efficiencies of scale, Doelger constructed houses built to Federal Housing Administration specifications that were within reach of modest-income home buyers. The Doelger Building derives its significance from its close association with home production and consumption; creative marketing and advertising techniques; and innovative federal financing that exemplify the pre-war American ideals of home ownership.

Association with significant person

The Doelger Building is closely associated with Henry Doelger, a master builder, entrepreneur, and prominent community figure in San Francisco's Sunset District from the late 1920s through 1950. As founder and president of Henry Doelger Builder Inc., Doelger is widely considered San Francisco's most prolific and significant builder active during the pre-War era. In 1946, the *San Francisco Chronicle* dubbed Doelger "the poor man's Frank Lloyd Wright."¹⁵¹ His residential tracts are often referred to as Doelgerville, the White Cliffs of Doelger, and Doelger City. Doelger fully embraced the Fordist method of housing production in San Francisco. Despite his lack of a formal education, Doelger is considered a masterful marketer, salesman, and business entrepreneur.

Significant architecture

The Doelger Building displays a high level of architectural expression. It is an excellent example of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne design and represents a successful merging of the two early Modern styles. Constructed in 1932 in a bold Art Deco design, with a Streamline Moderne expansion in 1940, the Doelger Building was one of the neighborhood's first Modern buildings and functioned as Doelger's base of operations for nearly two decades. The building was a prominent landmark in the Sunset District at that time and served as a bold advertisement for Doelger's successful house-building empire.

Period of Significance

The Doelger Building has a period of significance that reflects the tenure of Henry Doelger Builder Inc.: 1932 to 1950. The building was constructed for Henry Doelger in 1932 and served as the firm's headquarters for nearly two decades. Doelger vacated the building in 1950, moving to temporary quarters in the Westlake subdivision in San Mateo County. Doelger sold the building in 1951. During his tenure, Doelger's small firm grew to become the largest home building operation in the country.

Integrity

The seven aspects of integrity are location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association in relation to the period of significance established above. Cumulatively, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its association with Henry Doelger, its function as a prominent sales office, and its expressive Modern architectural design.

Location, Feeling, Setting, Association

The Doelger Building at 320–326 Judah Street was constructed at its current location in 1932. Its street frontage doubled with a major horizontal addition in 1940; this addition is considered an important part of the building's design and is character-defining. The building has not been moved. It is still flanked by two large corner apartment buildings that were present during the identified Period of Significance. The 300 block of Judah Street is still commercial in nature and is close to the commercial corridor on 9th Avenue. The larger surrounding Inner Sunset neighborhood retains the residential feeling present in the 1930s-1950. Although Henry Doelger vacated the building in 1950, the building retains its singular appearance as a sales offices due to the intact spatial configuration of the interior lobby, which was never subdivided or converted into a retail storefront. Likewise, the intact recessed window displays provide a tangible connection to the building's prior sales and promotional function.

¹⁵¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, Scene: section, August 30, 1946.

Design, Materials, Workmanship

The exterior of 320–326 Judah Street retains most design features that were present during the established period of significance, including its form, massing, smooth stucco cladding, shaped parapet, large plate glass window, recessed entry vestibule with terrazzo paving, half circle metal doors, projecting entry overhang, glass block sidelights, recessed window displays, bulkhead, integrated planter box, glass block window walls, curved projecting overhang ornamented with speedlines, circular clock, and decorative metal security gates.

Some exterior design elements have been modified or removed. All three business signs, including the vertical blade sign are no longer extant. The historic black vitriolic cladding at the bulkhead and planter was replaced with brick, and the elongated front door handles were removed. The exterior hanging chandelier was removed. These exterior alterations are relatively minor and do not detract from the building's significance or design intent.

The interior lobby retains its historic spatial volume, stepped ceiling and wall detailing, and most of its physical integrity. Extant design features that were present during the established period of significance include the Art Deco-inspired chandelier, mezzanine balcony and railing, curved staircase, wood doors with raised Art Deco pattern, access to storefront display windows, and scalloped sconce lighting fixtures.

Several interior alterations are apparent. The tile flooring was replaced in the 1980s, the clay tile cladding at stairs does not conform to the historic Art Deco design and is likely not original, and the balcony features contemporary carpeting. Several door openings do not appear to be historic. The west wall was converted into bank teller windows at one point, though that configuration was later removed and replaced with a flush wall. The alteration of minor interior lobby features does not negatively impact the building's overall integrity.

ARTICLE 10 REQUIREMENTS SECTION 1004 (b)

Boundaries of the Landmark Site

Encompassing all of and limited to Lots 20 and 21 in Assessor's Block 1763 on the north side of Judah Street, 94' west of Eighth Avenue.

Character-Defining Features

Whenever a building, site, object, or landscape is under consideration for Article 10 Landmark designation, the Historic Preservation Commission is required to identify character-defining features of the property. This is done to enable owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark. The character-defining features of the Doelger Building's exterior and the interior lobby¹⁵² are listed below.

The character-defining *exterior* features of the building are identified as:

- All exterior elevations and rooflines
- All architectural finishes and features of the exterior elevations
- Building plan including spatial configuration of driveway area
- Shaped parapet with chamfered edges and stepped secondary parapet walls
- Stepped detailing at the recessed entry vestibule
- Sunburst terrazzo paving
- Stainless steel doors with glazed half circles flanked by glass block sidelights and topped with a curved metal band
- Large plate glass lobby window with metal muntins set in geometric pattern
- Recessed window displays set in piers
- Bulkhead and integrated curved planter box, excluding brick cladding
- Curved glass block window wall and projecting curved overhang with speedline detailing
- Flush glass block window wall and protruding clock
- Metal gate with diamond and crescent pattern (excluding the recently welded metal security bars)
- Fenestration at the secondary, visible elevations, which primarily consists of wood sash casement windows with horizontal muntins
- Fenestration at the nonvisible courtyard elevations, which consists of arched and squared divided light wood sash casement windows with a horizontal muntin pattern

The character-defining *interior* features of the building are identified as:

- The entry lobby and all its historic fixtures and finishes with the following exceptions:
 - o Non-historic door openings

¹⁵² The limits of the lobby are defined as the historic doors and door frames that face onto the lobby from the first story as well as the balcony mezzanine. It does not include the interior office space, hallways, or bathrooms behind these door openings.

- o Contemporary elements including non-historic doors, vents, and mailboxes
 - o Non-historic tile floor and stair cladding¹⁵³
- Lobby spatial volume, mezzanine balcony, and curved side stair configuration
- The mezzanine balcony level with the following exceptions:
 - o Interior of mezzanine level bathrooms
 - o Balcony carpeting
- Stepped ceiling and wall detailing
- Art Deco hanging chandelier and scalloped wall sconces
- Balcony ornamentation including raised chevrons and decorative metal railing
- Wood doors with raised Art Deco ziggurat pattern

Note: The historic garage located at the east end of the building is now part of the adjacent corner lot and is not covered by this Landmark designation.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Historic Name: The Doelger Building

Popular Name: Henry Doelger Sales Office

Address: 320 – 326 Judah Street

Block and Lot: 1763020 and 1763021

Owner: Geoffrey Darby

Original Use: Sales Office & Warehouse

Current Use: Vacant

Zoning: NCD – Inner Sunset Neighborhood Commercial

¹⁵³ The Spanish Colonial-inspired stair cladding is not consistent with the lobby's historic Art Deco design. Although it is likely that Doelger re-clad the original stairs with the extant clay tile during the identified Period of Significance, the cladding choice was likely a matter of on-site material availability rather than design intent. There is no evidence to suggest that the tiles were used to market or display features associated with Doelger's Spanish Colonial style houses. Therefore, the clay tile stair cladding has not gained significance in its own right.

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