



# LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



## New Era Hall 2117-2123 Market Street

Initiated by the Historic Preservation Commission, December 7, 2016  
Approved by the Board of Supervisors, March 20, 2018  
Signed by Mayor Mark E. Farrell, March 28, 2018  
Effective date: April 28, 2018

Landmark No.  
**277**

Cover: New Era Hall, 2012.

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.

*Only language contained within the Article 10 designation ordinance, adopted by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, should be regarded as final.*

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# New Era Hall

## 2117-2123 Market Street

**Built:** 1906  
**Architect:** August Nordin

### OVERVIEW

New Era Hall at 2117-2123 Market Street is a combination commercial building and social hall designed by architect August Nordin and located within San Francisco's Upper Market area. Completed just seven months after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, the building responded to the pressing need for commercial and public assembly space in the wake of the disaster. It was commissioned as a speculative investment by Edward M. Bennett, a successful manufacturer and real estate investor, who resided a half-block away from the building site. The name "New Era" appears to have been used intentionally for its association with the rebuilding of San Francisco. Following its construction, New Era Hall provided crucial meeting space for organizations displaced by the disaster, such as the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and the Woodmen of the World.

The building also housed a variety of commercial tenants, the most durable of which was the Visalia Stock Saddle Company. A pioneer Mexican-American business with state-wide significance, the company made notable contributions to the development of what is today known as the "western saddle" design. Between 1911 and 1953, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company exclusively manufactured their high-end and custom saddles in the New Era Hall building, developing an international reputation for superior craftsmanship and quality. None of the company's other manufacturing facilities remain extant, leaving this site as the most appropriate location to commemorate this significant California enterprise.

New Era Hall is also significant as the work of a master architect, and as an example of a type, period and method of construction. Of the seventy-two social halls which existed in San Francisco in 1907, New Era Hall is one of only nine surviving examples of its type. Its engineering is also notable. August Nordin's design for the building featured the use of an innovative structural system based on the Howe Truss. These trusses, which avoid the need for structural support columns, were used to support the roof structure above the lodge rooms, thus creating large, open assembly spaces while conserving building materials. The building has experienced relatively few alterations since its construction and retains a high degree of physical integrity.



## BUILDING DESCRIPTION



2117-2123 Market Street is a two-story, wood frame, commercial and public assembly building located on the south side of Market Street between Church Street and 15th Street (APN 3543/012). Designed with Craftsman and Classical Revival influences, the building is rectangular in plan and clad with flush wood siding and channel siding on its primary façade, wood channel siding on its east and west facades, and asbestos shingles on its rear elevation. It is capped by two roof sections which differ in height. The front of the building features a flat roof with a shallow parapet, while the rear of the building features a double-height interior space capped by a shallow gable roof.

### Primary Façade

The primary façade faces northwest onto Market Street and is three bays wide. The first story features two symmetrically arranged storefronts flanking a center entrance which leads to rooms on the second story. A divided-light wood transom runs the full width of the façade and is crowned with a molded wood trim and an intermediate cornice. The primary façade terminates in a cornice with four pairs of oversized, wooden corbels featuring oversized nailhead block ends, with stylized drip pendants at the base.



*Eastern storefront addressed as 2117 Market Street*



*Western storefront addressed as 2123 Market Street*



*Center entry leading to Lodge Rooms*

The two storefronts are largely identical and feature recessed entry vestibules flanked by contemporary metal-frame and plate glass display windows with painted stucco bases. The entry vestibule at 2117 Market Street has been reduced in depth from its original configuration and features fully-glazed wood double doors, a scored concrete threshold, and an ornamental metal security gate. The storefront at 2123 Market Street includes paired, non-historic aluminum double doors, a smooth concrete threshold, and a metal accordion-style security gate with a deeply recessed vestibule entry configuration. Contemporary fixed awnings are located above each storefront and partially obscure the transom windows. An illuminated box sign is also affixed to the exterior above the western end of the 2123 Market Street storefront.

The building's center entry is approached via a small wooden step and features fully-glazed, wood double doors and an ornamental door surround. This surround is flared at the base and rises in a taper to meet an entry hood supported on wooden blocks featuring a nailhead design identical to that used for the top of the cornice brackets. The center of the entry hood includes a pair of carved, wooden floral ornaments.

Fenestration on the second floor consists of double-hung, wood-sash windows crowned by fixed transoms. A single window in the center bay is flanked by symmetrical groupings of three windows. The center window features flat board trim, while the flanking window groupings include bracketed hoods and sills. Historic building plans and permits indicate that the center window is not original and was installed in 1920.





*Detail of window and cornice*



*Detail of cornice brackets*

### **Roofline**

The rear half of the building rises ten feet above the front half. The north (front-facing) façade of this double-height section features a series of six double-hung, wood-sash windows with flat board surrounds. A wooden beltcourse spans the width of the façade above the windows. The façade terminates in a shallow gable with metal coping.



*Satellite view of New Era Hall looking southeast. Note the raised section at rear. (Bing.com Maps)*



*Detail of windows on the north façade of the raised rear section of the building.*

### **Rear Facade**

This rear of the building faces southeast toward Church Street and is clad with asbestos shingles. It includes a shallow, partial-height shed-roofed projection at the center and eastern portions of the façade that is clad with asbestos shingles above a stucco base. A shallow, flat-roofed projection is located at the western portion of the façade. Fenestration toward the western end of the rear façade consists of a pair of double-hung vinyl windows with flat board surrounds and fixed wood transoms. Fenestration toward the eastern end includes two small fixed wood windows with horizontal division. The addition features a narrow, sliding aluminum window and a single-hung aluminum window.



*View of the rear elevation from Church Street.*

#### **Interior: Ground Floor Commercial Spaces**

The interior of New Era Hall building originally featured two commercial spaces on the ground floor. The current tenant occupies both storefronts and has removed the partition walls such that, today, the interior is one large space with ten turned posts spaced symmetrically along the length of the room, dividing it roughly into thirds. As built, the eastern storefront floor level was approximately one foot lower than the western storefront. The current tenant has raised the eastern floor level to that of the western. What appears to be an original pressed tin ceiling is found in the western storefront area.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Interior: Ground Floor Entry Vestibule**

The paired wooden doors centered on the Market Street façade of the New Era Hall access an entry vestibule and wood stairs leading to the second floor Lodge Rooms. The vestibule features carpeted wood floors and a tall board-and-batten wainscot that continues along either side of the stairs. The upper walls and ceiling are clad with bead board. A wooden utility box is located on the east side of the vestibule. Historic building plans indicate that the vestibule was originally outfitted with a second, interior set of doors that are no longer extant.

#### **Interior: Second Floor Entry Hall & Ante Rooms**

A small entrance hall with a tall board-and-batten wainscot is located at the top of the stairs. Restrooms are located to the east and feature paneled wood doors with flat board trim and corner blocks which replicate the nailhead design used on the exterior brackets. Paired wood paneled doors to the north lead to an ante room adjacent to Lodge Room No. 2.





*Ground floor entry vestibule and stairs leading to the second floor entry hall. (Google Maps)*



*View east of the second floor entry hall and restroom entrances. (Google Maps)*



*View west of the second floor entry hall and doorway to the larger anteroom. (Google Maps)*



*View south from the larger anteroom to Lodge Room No. 1. (Google Maps)*

A doorway set within an arched niche along the west side of the second floor entry hall leads to a larger ante room. Above the doorway is a carved gilt-wood ornament featuring floral designs. It is not presently clear whether this is an original feature. The larger ante room features a board-and-batten wainscot with bead board above. At the south end are paneled wood doors leading to Lodge Room No. 1. A paneled wood door on the west leads to what was originally a small meeting room. Near this door and on the opposite wall are tall wooden staffs affixed to the wall via scrolling metalwork. It is unclear whether these staffs or the metalwork are original to the building. At the north end is a doorway which accesses Lodge Room No. 2. Historic building plans show that the north end of the room originally included a small partitioned vestibule.

### **Interior: Second Floor Lodge Rooms**

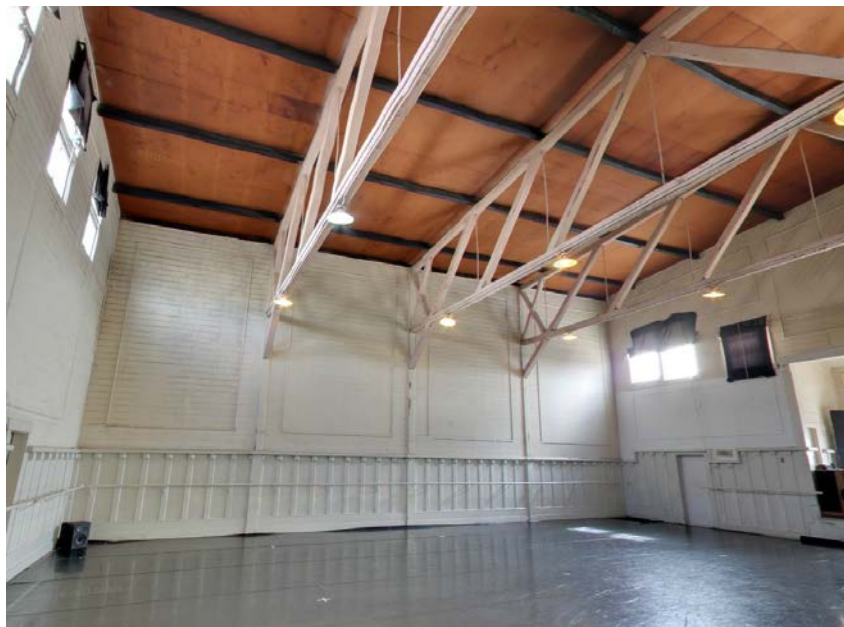
Lodge Room No. 1 is a large, 49-foot x 49-foot open space with ceiling height of 24 feet. A board-and-batten wainscot runs around the room and features nailhead blocks supporting the rail. The upper walls are flush tongue-in-groove boards. A set of three exposed eight-panel Howe trusses span the upper walls to support the roof.<sup>2</sup> A small, elevated

<sup>2</sup> A Howe truss uses vertical iron rods in tension and diagonal heavy timber members in compression to support weight.

platform or stage is located within a niche at the center of the south wall of the room. This niche is outlined with flat board trim and includes nailhead blocks at the upper corners. Within the niche, wood boards and molding have been used to create a pediment. This triangular shape is echoed above by the diagonal arrangement of the tongue-in-groove boards on the upper walls.



*View south toward the stage within Lodge Room No. 1. (Google Maps)*



*View east within Lodge Room No. 1. (Google Maps)*

Lodge Room No. 2 is located at the opposite end of the building and encompasses a smaller open space measuring 49 feet by 20 feet with a ceiling height of 16 feet. This room originally spanned the width of the building, but a section at the western end has been partitioned to create a small office clad with faux board-finish paneling. The remainder of the room features a board-and-batten wainscot with bead board above. Two six-panel Howe trusses support the roof.

These trusses were enclosed in wood panels ca. 1920 when the space was partitioned for offices. A flush wood door is located at the southeast corner of the room.



*View east within Lodge Room No. 2. (Google Maps)*



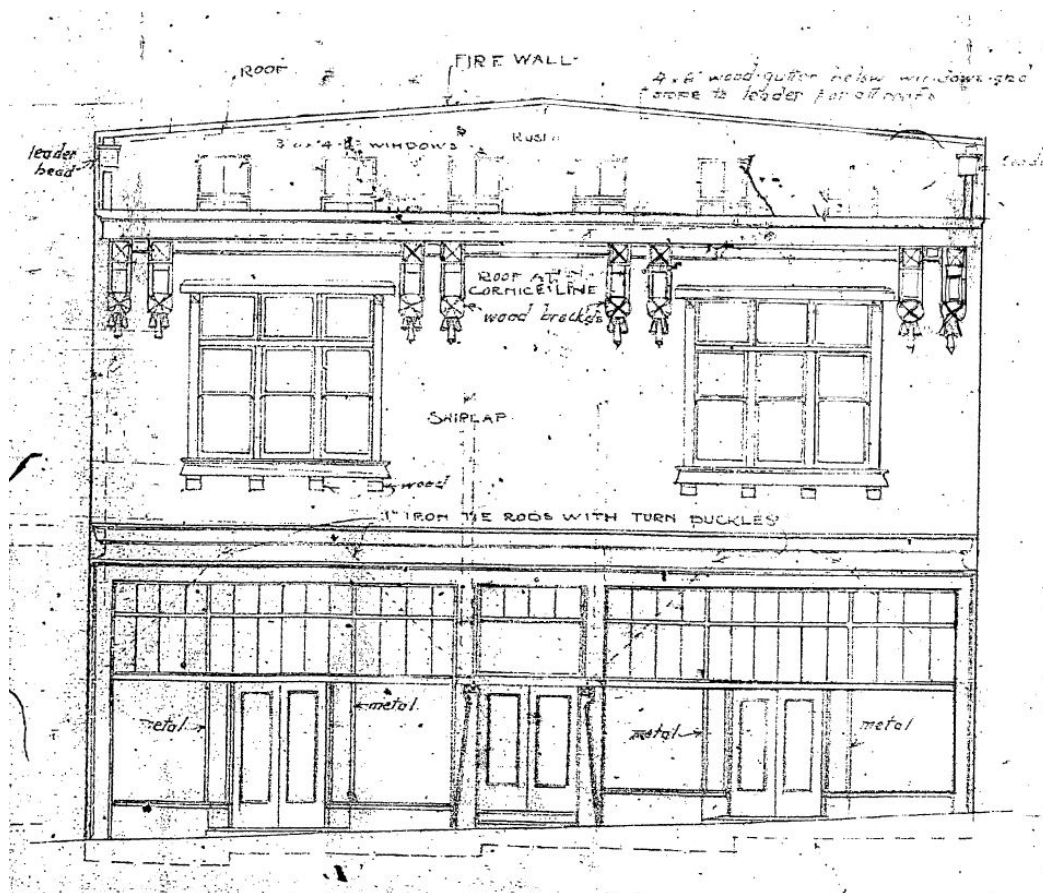
*View west within Lodge Room No. 2. Note the Howe Truss has been enclosed with boards. (Google Maps)*

## CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

New Era Hall was erected in 1906 on a vacant and unimproved lot.<sup>3</sup> According to the 1894 Block Book, the 50-foot by 100-foot lot was owned by Mrs. Caroline Sharp. The Sharps were an early California pioneer family, and controlled extensive land holdings on the San Francisco peninsula. In the 1901 Block Book, the owner of the lot was Catherine Cheesman, a Sharp descendant.

Following the Earthquake and Fire of April 1906, San Francisco businessman and real estate investor, Edwin W. Bennett, purchased the lot and commissioned the construction of New Era Hall. The original building contract for New Era Hall, dated July 3, 1906, was published in Edwards Abstract from Records on July 6, 1906. It states: "E. W. Bennett [owner] with C. L. Wold [contractor]. August Nordin [architect] – All work except deafening shades and light fixtures for a 2-story frame building on the southeast line of Market Street 105 [feet] southwest Church street SE 100 x SW 50 for \$9,895." As a building designed to be quickly erected with minimal labor, New Era Hall was constructed without a basement.

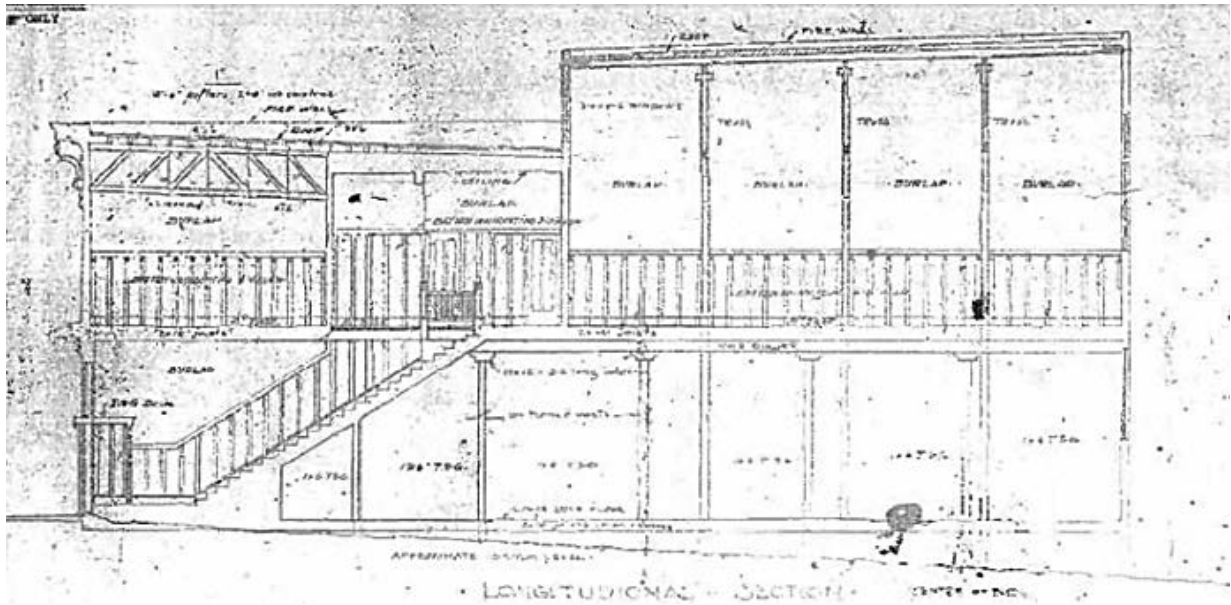
The original building permit, Number 1292, was filed on July 5, 1906. The permit details construction of a wood frame building 50 feet wide, 92 ½ feet deep, and 40 feet tall. Interior heights of the lower floor are listed as 14 and 15 feet, and at the upper floor 16 and 24 feet. Two sheets of the original drawings survive and show the front elevation, longitudinal section and cross section, as well as plans for the foundation, first and second floor.



*Original permit application drawing for New Era Hall*

<sup>3</sup> Both the 1899 and 1905 Sanborn maps show that there were no buildings on this side of Market Street between Church and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets.



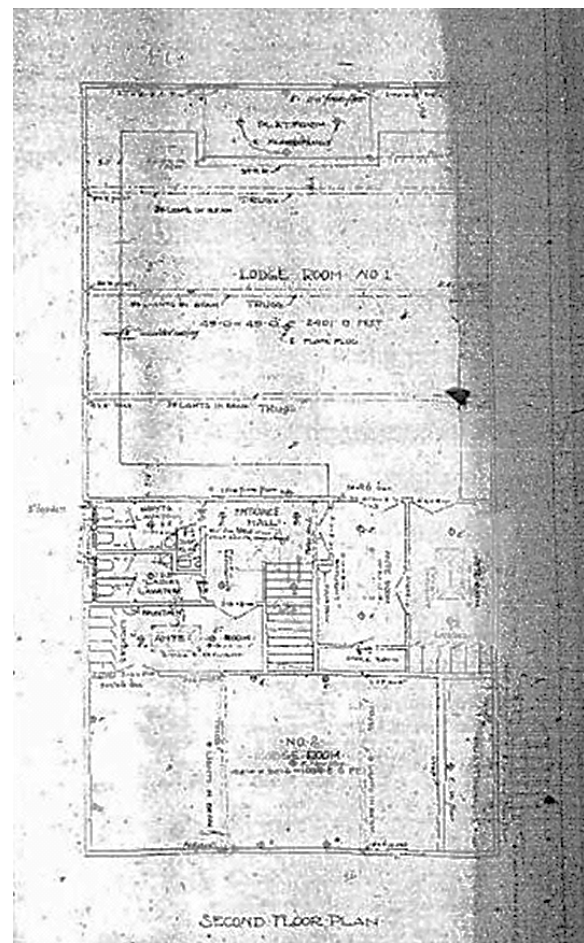


*Longitudinal Section of New Era Hall accompanying the original building permit application (above). The primary façade facing Market Street is at left. Below at right is the second floor plan.*

The drawings show that the board-and-batten wainscot found in much of the building was to be placed on the lower 6'8" for most of the interior walls, and eight feet within the entrance hall. The plans also specify placing burlap on the walls from the top of the paneling to the ceiling. This simple and visually pleasing solution was easy to maintain, inexpensive and assisted in controlling noise. It also reflected the necessary austerity of the City's post-1906 recovery period, when building materials were at a premium.

There are two structural systems employed at New Era Hall. The commercial ground floor is supported by traditional 2-inch by 6-inch studs at the perimeter with the posts resting on piers. Two rows of columns running front to back support the floors of the Lodge Rooms above.

Unlike a typical western platform frame that distributes the loads over many smaller studs, the weight of the roof is borne by a series of Howe trusses and is carried down to the foundation on a post-and-beam structural system. These trusses are discussed at greater length below.



### Architectural Influences

Nordin's design for the façade of the New Era Hall features a relatively simple hierarchy and visually-balanced composition. Scale is manipulated along the façade such that it presents as a modest structure, while actually being quite tall for a two-story building. New Era Hall also exhibits a sense of solidity in its massing, enhanced by the ratio of solid wall to window openings on the second floor, as well as through the use of oversized brackets at the cornice. As originally designed, there was no central window, further emphasizing the solidity of the façade.

As with many buildings, New Era Hall is not a pure expression of a single architectural style. The few decorative elements include the simple banded projecting cornice with paired brackets, articulated window surrounds, and a simple belt course. While the use of these features is consistent with Classical Revival style designs, Craftsman inspired details are the most dominant element.

The Craftsman style is a subset of the larger Arts and Crafts movement which took root during the late 19th century and remained popular through the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> The Arts and Crafts style was applied to both architecture and the decorative arts. Aesthetically, the style emphasized simplicity of design, the use of unadorned natural materials and hand-crafted construction. New Era Hall's Craftsman ornamentation is found in the rectilinear theme of ornament throughout the design, such as the bold window surrounds and the nailhead blocks used on both the exterior and interior. The extensive use of board-and-batten wainscots on the interior may likewise be viewed as an expression of the Craftsman aesthetic, as was the use of exposed Howe trusses in the Lodge Rooms (discussed below). The flared surround at the center entry facing Market Street is reminiscent of Art Nouveau design, which was a not-infrequent influence on Craftsman decorative pieces during this period.

All ornament was designed to be simply executed and specified to be made of wood, which was not only economical and practical, but also consistent with Craftsmen ideals. In the months following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, there was an unprecedented demand for all building materials—as well as skilled construction labor. Wood in California was plentiful and generally did not require great skill to work.

### The Howe Truss System

One of the most significant aspects of New Era Hall's construction is the early use of Howe trusses to create large open spaces in the Lodge Rooms. The 1902 publication, *The Design of Simple Roof-trusses in Wood and Steel*, included illustrated designs of the Howe truss and engineering tables describing the materials necessary to span various widths.<sup>5</sup> This publication, the first to be available to architects and building designers, came out just four years before the erection of New Era Hall. An illustration on page 139 of the publication provided a model for the trusses found in New Era Hall.

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<sup>4</sup> In San Francisco some variations of the Craftsman Style evolved into the First Bay Tradition architecture.

<sup>5</sup> A full text of the book is available online at: [http://books.google.com/books?id=8\\_s4AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=8_s4AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false)

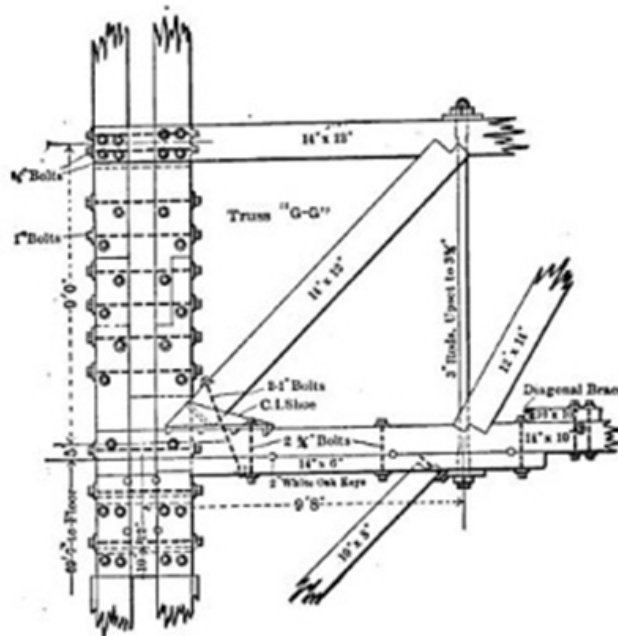


FIG. 6d.—Howe Truss, Horticultural Building, Pan-American Exposition.

Diagram of a Howe Truss as illustrated in *The Design of Simple Roof-trusses in Wood and Steel*, page 139

This Howe truss is a combination metal-and-wood truss that allows for uninterrupted assembly space without the need for structural support columns. This system, originally patented in 1840 by William Howe, uses large wooden beams for most of the structure, while threaded iron rods are used to pull the wooden beams tightly together.<sup>6</sup> The system is strong, simple to assemble and inexpensive to construct.<sup>7</sup> It was, however, principally used for bridges and rarely used for buildings.

#### August Nordin, Architect

New Era Hall is significant as an early work by master architect, August Nordin (1869-1936). Between circa 1897 and 1936, Nordin designed more than 300 buildings, including fraternal halls, churches, apartment houses, multi-family dwellings and private residences.<sup>8</sup> Surviving examples of Nordin's work demonstrate his mastery of divergent architectural styles and his skill in working with a variety of building materials. Nordin more frequently employed individualized designs as opposed to variants on a single design theme, and his strengths as a designer are evident in the careful balance of scale, proportion and ornament.

August Nordin was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1869 and immigrated to the United States in 1891. Between 1892 and 1899, San Francisco city directories list August Nordin (aka Norden, Nordan, Nicolaus A. Nordin and N. August Nordin) as "carpenter" or "contractor."<sup>9</sup> *The Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* reports that Nordin had received "a thorough training in architecture" and opened an office in San Francisco in 1899. However, a newspaper real estate notice indicates that Nordin was building houses at least as early as 1896.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/bridges/historybridges.htm> Accessed December 20, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Delony, "The Golden Age," *Invention and Technology*, Fall 1994: 8-22.

<sup>8</sup> August Nordin Obituary: *The Architect and Engineer*, January 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Research by Tom Mayer, San Francisco Architectural Heritage, Heritage News/Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, Page 7.

<sup>10</sup> "Builder's Contracts," *San Francisco Call*, July 3, 1896.





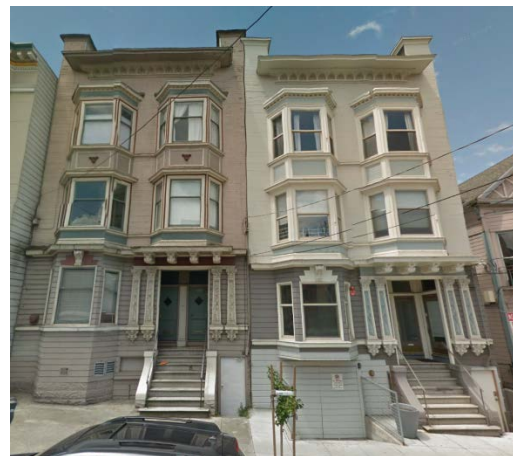
August Nordin, ca. 1910  
(Collections of the Swedish  
American Hall)

The 1900 city directory lists August Nordin as an architect, with offices at 1926 Market Street. Following the 1906 Earthquake, Nordin temporarily relocated to an office at 563 Fillmore Street, running almost daily advertisements of his services in the San Francisco Call from June through September. By 1908, Nordin had set up practice in the Mills Building at 220 Montgomery Street where he remained until his death. City directory and U.S. Census records indicate that Nordin frequently moved within San Francisco, living at 853 Folsom Street in 1900; 1858 Fell Street in 1910; 1360 Page Street in 1920; and 1390 Central Avenue in 1930. Nordin had several children with his first wife, Annie Nordin, a native of Ireland, who passed away in 1898. Nordin was remarried by 1910 to Florence Nordin, and had one additional child. August Nordin died of a heart attack at the University of California Hospital in January 1936. His obituary noted that he was a member of Islam Temple Shrine and the Scottish Rite.<sup>11</sup>

Nordin worked directly with the owners of the buildings he designed, rather than for developers who would sell the completed building to a third party. In this respect, each commission was unique, and individually designed to address the client's programmatic needs without sacrifice of design. Nordin's buildings frequently play with massing and volumes, such as used for the 1905 house of Edwin Bennett, who commissioned the New Era Hall the following year. Nordin also favored strong articulation and shadow lines, amply represented by the Whiteside Apartments and the Altamonte Hotel, both completed in 1912. For these buildings Nordin used the thickness of the wall to create bay windows that are partially inset within the exterior plane of the building.



1080-1082 and 1086-1088 Fulton Street, designed by  
August Nordin and completed in 1902. (Google Maps)



Flats at 847-851 and 853-857 Cole Street designed by  
August Nordin and completed ca. 1904.<sup>12</sup> (Google Maps)

Nordin's designs most frequently display Classical Revival style ornament, which was dominant in San Francisco architecture from the turn of the century through the late 1920s. However, Nordin was equally adept at designing buildings influenced by Queen Anne, Art Nouveau, Spanish Colonial Revival and Craftsman precedents, as well as interpreting Scandinavian architecture through his designs for the Swedish American Hall (1907), and his assistance in the construction of the Swedish Pavilion for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exhibition. Nordin also designed several churches with strong Gothic influences. These include the Trinity English Evangelical Lutheran

<sup>11</sup> August Nordin Obituary: *The Architect and Engineer*, January 1936.

<sup>12</sup> "Builders' Contracts." *San Francisco Call*. November 11, 1903.



Church at 722 South Van Ness Avenue, and the Ebenezer Swedish Lutheran Church at 15th and Dolores Streets, which was destroyed by fire in 1993.

Over the course of his career, Nordin demonstrated flexibility in adapting his designs to different construction methods. These include the brick masonry Twin Oaks Hotel at 1010 Post Street (1907), the steel frame (clad with brick) Windeler Apartments at 424 Ellis Street (1915), and a reinforced concrete parking garage at 675 Post Street (1919). Of interest, the Twin Oaks Hotel—constructed shortly after New Era Hall—features similar oversized brackets and stylized drip moldings. Other examples of Nordin's work that maintain a high degree of integrity include the Lange house at 199 Carl Street (ca. 1900); a mixed-use building at 2761 Hyde Street that houses the Buena Vista Cafe (1911); a residence at 435 Cabrillo Street (1912); the Cristobol Apartments at 750 O'Farrell Street (1913); and a mixed-use building at 295 Miramar Avenue (1917).



*Whiteside Apartments at 150 Franklin Street, designed by August Nordin and completed in 1912. (Google Maps)*



*The Altamonte Hotel at 3048 16<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by August Nordin and completed in 1912. (Google Maps)*



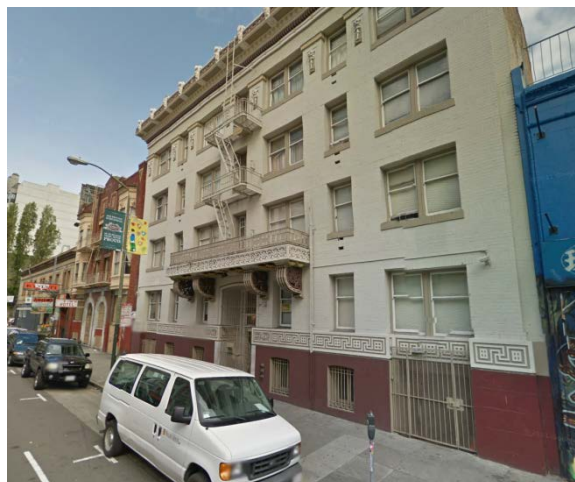
*2168 Market Street, designed by August Nordin and completed in 1907. (Google Maps)*



*Ebenezer Swedish Lutheran Church and rectory, designed by August Nordin and completed in 1903. (San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph Collection, AAB-1410)*



*Twin Oaks Hotel, 1010 Post Street, designed by August Nordin and completed in 1907. Note the similarity of the brackets to those used for New Era Hall. (Google Maps)*



*Cristobal Apartments at 750 O'Farrell Street (1913) at top; Parking garage at 675 Post Street (1919) at bottom. Both buildings incorporate a Greek key ornamental motif. (Google Maps)*



Several of Nordin's buildings, including 750 O'Farrell and 424 Ellis Street, are listed on the National Register as part of the Uptown Tenderloin District. The flats at 1080-82 and 1086-88 Fulton Street are listed locally in the Alamo Square Landmark District. 150 Franklin Street is listed locally in the Market Street Masonry Landmark District. The other buildings are well represented on historic surveys conducted by the Junior League in the 1960s, and the Planning Department in 1976.

### **Edwin W. Bennett, Original Owner**

Edwin William Bennett (1854-1943) commissioned August Nordin to design New Era Hall, and maintained a strong working relationship with Nordin around the turn of the 20th century. Bennett was born in London, England and came to the United States in 1872. His wife Hermana Brekke Bennett was a native of Dramm, Norway and arrived in the United States in 1859.<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census records indicate that the couple was living in Buffalo, New York in 1880, where Edwin worked as a brick mason. It is not presently clear when the couple moved to California, but voter records indicate that Edwin became a naturalized citizen in Chicago in 1881,<sup>14</sup> and was working as a farmer in the City of Martinez in 1888.

<sup>13</sup>Olaf Brekke obituary. (d. 3/20/1918) San Jose Mercury Herald, Thursday morning, March 21, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> Naturalization date is shown in the 1892 San Francisco Voter Registration Records, 6<sup>th</sup> Precinct, 36<sup>th</sup> Assembly District.



Bennett first appears in San Francisco City Directories in 1890 where he is identified as a “canvasser” living at 211 Castro Street. The following year he moved to 630 Castro Street and would continue to reside on the 600 block of Castro Street for the remainder of the decade. Beginning in 1892 Bennett is identified in city directories as a “manufacturer” associated with his business, “E. W. Bennett’s Brilliantshine Metal Polishing Paste” at 640 Castro Street. Sanborn maps published around that time indicate that a three-story stables and storage building was located at the rear of the property and was likely used as the first manufacturing facility for Bennett’s company.

In addition to manufacturing metal polish, San Francisco newspaper real estate listings make clear that Bennett was an active real estate investor and developer in what are today the Castro, Duboce Triangle, Mission Dolores, and Noe Valley neighborhoods. At least as early as 1899, Bennett began working with August Nordin on his projects, including the construction of 103-111 Noe Street on the corner of 14th Street (1899—extant)<sup>15</sup>; a brick can factory at 1950-1952 15th Street on the corner of Landers Street (1901—no longer extant); and a building on the 200 block of Dolores Street (no longer extant). In 1901, Nordin also completed alterations and additions to Bennett’s property at 640 Castro Street.<sup>16</sup>



1950-1952 15<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by August Nordin and constructed in 1901 as a can factory for Edwin Bennett. This brick masonry building was heavily damaged during the 1906 Earthquake and subsequently replaced. (Bancroft Library)



Edwin Bennett residence at 140 Divisadero Street completed in 1905 at top. (Google Maps); Ca. 1910 tin of E.W. Bennett’s Brilliantshine Metal Polishing Paste.

<sup>15</sup> *California Architect & Building News*, Vol. 20, No. 10, October 20, 1899, p.vi.

<sup>16</sup> “Builder’s Contracts,” *San Francisco Call*, November 27, 1901.

Also in 1901, Bennett employed Nordin to design two new buildings on the northwest corner of Church and 15th Streets. These included three story, wood-frame flats today addressed as 292-296 Church Street, as well as a two-story brick building immediately to the north to be used as a metal polishing paste factory (no longer extant).<sup>17</sup> These buildings are located on the same block as New Era Hall, and beginning in 1902 Bennett is identified in city directories as living at 296 Church Street. Bennett would continue residing at 296 Church Street until 1905, when he commissioned Nordin to design a new residence for him at 140 Divisadero Street (extant), which would remain Bennett's home for the rest of his life.<sup>18</sup> In 1907, Bennett's metal polish manufacturing operations moved to a new building at the northwest corner of 16th and Utah Streets in what is today known as San Francisco's Showplace Square neighborhood. This building remains extant and is addressed as 2000 16th Street.

In the hiring of Nordin, a Swede, for so many commissions, there may have been some cultural affinity as Edwin Bennett's wife, Hermana, was also Scandinavian. Just as likely however, is that Nordin established his first office in the Upper Market neighborhood at the same time Bennett was actively investing in the area's real estate.

### **Christian Larsen Wold, Contractor**

The contractor who built New Era Hall was Christian Larsen Wold (1874-1956). A native of Norway, Wold immigrated to the United States in 1897 and was naturalized in 1902. He is not listed in San Francisco city directories immediately before or after the 1906 Earthquake. Given the time of New Era Hall's construction, it may be that Wold came to San Francisco seeking work during the rebuilding efforts. City directories from the 1910s show that Christian Wold and his wife, Anna, lived at 132 Scott Street. During this same period, advertisements appeared in *The Western Architect and Engineer* for the C. L. Wold Company, General Contractors, with offices at 75 Sutter Street, in partnership with Joseph Dunn. During the 1920s the Wolds moved to 4416 Fulton Street and remained there until Christian's death in 1956.

### **New Era Hall & Post-1906 Earthquake Reconstruction**

New Era Hall is located along what is today known as Upper Market Street, a three-block long stretch of commercial and mixed-use buildings located between Church and Castro Streets. The neighborhoods flanking the Upper Market Street corridor are primarily residential, and were largely developed between circa 1885 and 1915. The catalyst for the initial development of the area was the opening of public transportation routes, including the Market Street Cable Railroad's Blue Line, which opened in 1883 with a route out Market Street to Valencia Street. This was followed by the White Line, which opened in 1888 and ran out Market Street to Castro Street. These lines provided a connection with the City's downtown core, and by the turn of the century, many blocks in what are today the Duboce Triangle, Mission Dolores, and Castro neighborhoods were either partially or substantially built out. Two notable exceptions were the triangular block bounded by Market, Church, and 15th Street where New Era Hall would be constructed, as well as the triangular block bounded by Market, Sanchez, and 16th Street.

In the early morning of April 18, 1906, a great earthquake rocked San Francisco. The seismic waves severed gas and water lines, and helped spark fires that burned for three days, destroying large areas of the city. Although the entire South of Market and much of the Mission District were destroyed, the Upper Market area was spared through heroic firefighting efforts which confined the conflagration to the blocks east of Dolores Street.<sup>19</sup> Throughout San Francisco, areas that had been untouched by the fires soon experienced a huge influx of displaced residents and a concurrent boom in residential development. Correspondingly, commercial development along transportation corridors such as upper Market Street swelled to meet the demand for goods and services. By 1915, much of the area had been completely built out.

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<sup>17</sup> "Builder's Contracts," *San Francisco Call*, May 11, 1901.

<sup>18</sup> "Builders' Contracts," *San Francisco Call*, February 27, 1905

<sup>19</sup> This section is derived from Page & Turnbull, Upper Market Street Commercial Historic District DPR 523D form: Market & Octavia Area Plan Historic Resource Survey (San Francisco Planning Department, June, 2007).





*View south along Dolores Street from Market Street, 1906. Buildings east of Dolores Street were destroyed by fire, while buildings to the west in the Upper Market area survived. (California State Library)*

Less than three months after the Earthquake, Edwin W. Bennett commissioned August Nordin to design a speculative commercial and public assembly building in the Upper Market area, just over two blocks west of the Dolores Street fire line. Bennett, as a real estate investor, was clearly responding to the soaring demand for new construction. New Era Hall was to be a rental property with two Lodge Rooms that could be rented to organizations in need of meeting places, with added revenue from two commercial storefronts on the ground floor. While there is no surviving documentation confirming the reason the name was selected, the phrase “New Era” commonly emphasizes a division between the past and the present. Just as San Francisco’s official seal is a phoenix rising from ashes, the city’s recovery from the 1906 disaster signified a new era in its history. Research has not indicated any building, business or organization using the name “New Era” in San Francisco prior to 1906.

New Era Hall was one of the earliest buildings constructed on its block, despite being outside of the fire zone. The 1905 Sanborn map shows a total of six buildings clustered at the southeast corner of the block, including Edwin Bennett’s flats and metal polish paste factory. By 1914, the block was approximately fifty percent built out with a mix of commercial, residential and industrial buildings, including two sheet metal works, a print shop and a car repair facility. These buildings were all clustered toward the east end of the block, while the western end was sparsely developed with small offices and stores, a stable and “asphalt kettles,” presumably for a roofing business.

### **Pre-1907 Social Halls**

New Era Hall is an example of an extremely rare property type: a purpose-built mixed-use social hall from the period before 1907. The building’s construction was not associated with any particular fraternal or social organization, but rather a response to a critical shortage of meeting space for organizations left homeless by the disaster.<sup>20</sup> In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fraternal societies were one of the primary sources of health insurance for the working classes, as well as burial services. At their peak in about 1920, over one-quarter of all adult Americans were members of fraternal societies.<sup>21</sup> Some fraternal groups limited membership to a particular ethnic or religious group. Others were pan-ethnic and centered on business or professional affiliations, often combined with defined rituals and protocol. Of the latter, the Masons and the Odd Fellows are well-known examples. Lesser known are groups which include the Knights of Pythias and the Woodmen of the World—two fraternal lodges that were once active in the area surrounding New Era Hall.

<sup>20</sup> Page & Turnbull, Historic Context Statement: Market & Octavia Area Plan Historic Resource Survey (San Francisco Planning Department, December 20, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Woodmen and Fraternalism (booklet), Form 4154 R-5/97; Modern Woodmen of America History, 1997.

New Era Hall was one of 72 social halls listed in the 1907 city directory, of which only eighteen remain extant. Surviving buildings that housed these halls generally conform to one of three sub-types. The first includes single-story buildings that may or may not have been intended to be temporary. Simple in construction, they did not require elaborate building materials, nor did they support other uses. Many were later replaced by permanent buildings on the same site, such as the Equality Hall at 139 Albion Avenue, while others were redeveloped as residential building sites such as the Veteran Hall at 432 Duboce Avenue. Of the dozen or so examples of this type known from the period, only one has survived: the Woodmen of the World lodge at 2140 Market Street (now the Lucky 13 bar), across the street from New Era Hall.

The second type included social halls that occupied temporary sites within other buildings. These might include pre-1906 Earthquake buildings where a generic storefront was used as a hall; or when the lowest flat in a multi-story apartment building was used as a hall. Two examples of this type are extant: Callegari's Hall at 421 Union Street (1906); and Coleman's Hall at 1988 Bush Street (ca. 1902). However, the facades of these building give no indication of their use as social halls.

The third type, to which New Era Hall belongs, are purpose-built mixed-use buildings where the ground floor was occupied by storefronts, with the meeting rooms located on the upper floor. There are nine examples of this type which survive and have good integrity: Divisadero Hall at 321 Divisadero Street (1896); Equality Hall at 139 Albion Street (1908); Findlay's Dancing Academy at 3245 16th Street (1907); Mission Turn Verin Hall at 3543 18th Street (1910); New Era Hall at 2121 Market Street (1906); Oakland Hall at 1805 Divisadero Street (1903); Richmond Hall at 309 4th Avenue (1908); the Sheet Metal Workers Hall at 224 Guerrero Street (1906); and Stegeman's Hall at 225 Valencia Street (1907). The Sheet Metal Workers Hall is San Francisco Landmark #150, while Mission Turn Verin Hall is San Francisco Landmark #178.

### **Occupant and Alteration History**

The New Era Hall opened its doors on November 18, 1906, seven months to the day following the 1906 Earthquake. At that time it contained two storefronts: 2117 Market Street to the east, and 2123 Market Street to the west.<sup>22</sup> The Lodge Rooms on the second floor were accessed from the center entry addressed as 2121 Market Street. The address 2119 Market Street was never used historically for this building.

Over the ensuing years, San Francisco city directories provide detailed information about the occupants and uses of the building, while building permits identify alterations made in conformity to changing uses. Below is a discussion of the uses of the Lodge Rooms, as well as the commercial tenants of New Era Hall.

### *Fraternal Societies and Other Groups*

The Lodge Rooms at New Era Hall were at peak usage during the years 1906 through 1908.<sup>23</sup> The rooms were rented by various fraternal societies and clubs for regularly scheduled meetings, as well as the public for special occasions. On the building's opening day, the San Francisco Call noted that the Hermann Lodge, a German fraternal organization, had secured meeting rooms at New Era Hall. Over the ensuing years, known groups that met regularly at New Era Hall included: Order of Scottish Clans; Order of the Eastern Star; Knights of Pythias; Woodmen of the World; Patriarchs Militant Independent Order of Odd Fellows; Ancient Order of Hibernians; Foresters of America; Rebekah Assembly, I.O.O.F.; Native Daughters of the Golden West; and National Association of Post Office Clerks. An appendix detailing participation by these groups, as well as a selection of advertised political meetings, is found at the end of this report.

In the years following the 1906 disaster, many fraternal societies rebuilt their own permanent social halls. These included the Odd Fellows, who constructed a new hall at 7th and Market Streets in 1907. The Order of Knights of

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<sup>22</sup> The western storefront was sometimes addressed as 2125 Market Street.

<sup>23</sup> Only for the year 1908, did New Era Hall have a live-in janitor, Louis J. Switzer, listed in the city directory. This appears to coincide with the busiest year for the rentals of the Lodge Rooms.

Pythias built a large brick office building with meeting rooms at 101 Valencia Street in 1909, and the Masons constructed a new lodge at Van Ness Avenue and Oak Street in 1911.<sup>24</sup> As more groups constructed their own facilities, use of the New Era Hall Lodge Rooms fell off dramatically. Other factors contributing to this decline included a diminishing need for fraternal orders as insurance companies and doctors became more professionalized. Working-class San Franciscans were also presented with an increasing variety of diversions for their spare time.<sup>25</sup>



March 1907 view of Market Street. The arrow points to the upper story lodge rooms at New Era Hall. San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Authority archives, photo UO1220.

It is not known how the Lodge Rooms were used between 1914 and 1920. No groups advertised that they were holding regular meetings at New Era Hall, and no business associated with the address for the Lodge Rooms is shown in the city directories. New Era Hall did continue to be listed in the city directory as a social hall however, indicating it was likely used as a general-use event space.

As demand for the Lodge Rooms declined, New Era Hall was leased out to a single user. In 1920, the headquarters of the Christian Philosophical Institute located to the upper floor of the building and partitioned Lodge Room No. 2 into three offices. As part of this remodeling, a new window cut into the center of the Market Street façade. The Christian Philosophical Institute, widely accepted as a cult, was organized in the 1910s by Wilbert LeRoy Cosper, and did not occupy the Lodge Rooms for long. Moving to Oakland, it faded into relative obscurity during the 1930s. Its lasting legacy is a silent film, *The Kingdom of Human Hearts*, made in Marin County in 1921.<sup>26</sup> The New Era Hall building is not considered historically significant for its associations with the Christian Philosophical Institute or Wilbert LeRoy Cosper.

<sup>24</sup> Designed by San Francisco architects Charles Paff and John Baur, the Knights of Pythias hall was subsequently purchased by the Salvation Army, which used the building as its Northern California and Nevada headquarters until 1989. It was converted to residential use in the 1990s.

<sup>25</sup> Siddeley, Leslie, *The Rise and Fall of Fraternal Insurance Organizations*. Humane Studies Review, V7, No. 2 Spring 1992.

<sup>26</sup> The American Film Institute catalog of motion pictures produced in the United States. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1971. Page 407.

From the mid-1920s until 1953, uses of the Lodge Rooms are not known. However, in the years 1931 and 1932 it was temporarily renamed Liberty Hall (formerly located at 1791 Mission Street), so it may be assumed that it was used as a general hall for hire, as was the original Liberty Hall. The 1940 and 1948 Land Use Survey produced by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Planning Department identified the upper floor simply as a “hall.” In 1953, Guillermo Del Oro and Carolyn B. Parks converted both Lodge Rooms into a dance studio known as the Academy of Ballet. For a time, Del Oro also resided on site.<sup>27</sup> Although the Academy of Ballet continues to occupy the space, New Era Hall is not considered historically significant for its association with this organization.

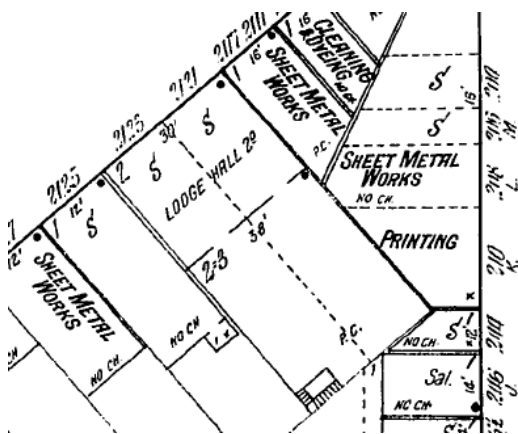
### *Commercial Occupants*

In 1907, the 2117 Market Street storefront was occupied by Wacker & Allemann pork packers, and Hencken & Hencken poultry.<sup>28</sup> A pool hall is shown operating out of this storefront in 1910. The most significant tenant of New Era Hall, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company, began its tenure in this storefront in 1911, and would later take over the entire ground floor. The Visalia Stock Saddle Company is discussed at greater length in the following section.

The 2123 Market Street storefront was initially occupied by the Stein & Falk restaurant.<sup>29</sup> In 1907, a building permit was issued to alter the storefront for use as the Majestic Nickelodeon., which included the opening of an exit door into the side passage. The nickelodeon was only in operation for a short period, as a building permit issued in May of 1909 indicates that the storefront was reconstructed to the original specifications. Beginning that same year and lasting until 1917, Hermana Bennett, the wife of the building owner, operated a millinery shop selling hats from this storefront.

In 1919 the Visalia Stock Saddle Company expanded operations into the western storefront and became the sole commercial tenant of the building. In 1929, the company installed additional windows along the western wall, and two doors were opened to communicate between the two storefronts. To meet the growing demand for saddles, a three-horsepower motor with shafts and pulleys was also installed to run a band saw, a cross-cut saw and a lathe. Also in 1929, a fire at the lower floor required repair to the floor joist and exterior siding; however, it is not known specifically which portion of the building was damaged.

Research has not revealed any clear historic photographs of the building from this period, save for a 1938 aerial view. It shows that the western end of the block remained mostly undeveloped, although by this time it was in use as large used car dealership.



1914 Sanborn fire insurance map showing New Era Hall.



1938 Aerial photo with arrow pointing to New Era Hall.  
(Harrison Ryker via David Rumsey Map Collection)

<sup>27</sup> 1954 City Directory.

<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the listing for John Allemann indicates that he also resided at 2117 Market Street.

<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the storefront appears to have been the residence of J. Mahoney, who may have been an employee of the restaurant.

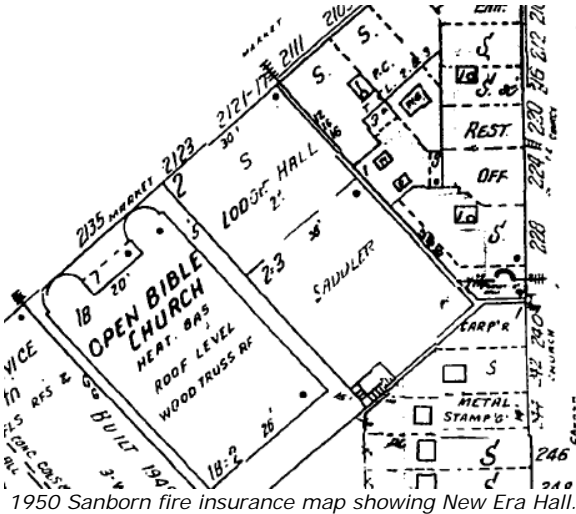


The Visalia Stock Saddle Company continued to operate from the storefronts until 1953, when the company moved operations to Sacramento. In 1954, George E. Bennett (son of the original owner) sold the building to the Open Bible Church, which had previously constructed a uniquely styled building directly adjacent to New Era Hall at 2135 Market Street in 1946. Following the transfer of ownership, the Open Bible Church in 1956 removed interior partitions in one of the storefronts on the lower floor so that the space could be used as a “servicemen’s center.” The other storefront was briefly used by Al Church Saddle Supplies circa 1954-1955.



1944 photo showing flooding at Church and Market Streets. New Era Hall is visible in the distance at left.  
(San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph Collection, image AAB-6348)

It is not presently clear when the depth of the 2117 Market Street storefront was reduced, but 1975 repair work to the front of the building by the Open Bible Church documented the differing depths of the entry vestibules. In 2002, the lower floor storefronts were combined internally; the eastern floor level was raised to the elevation of the western storefront, and all interior partitions and mezzanines were removed.



1964 photo of the Open Bible Church. A small portion of New Era Hall is visible at left.  
(San Francisco Public Library image AAB-1690)

## VISALIA STOCK SADDLE COMPANY

The Visalia Stock Saddle Company was headquartered in New Era Hall from 1911 until 1953. The survey, *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*, provides baseline information about the company's founding and history:

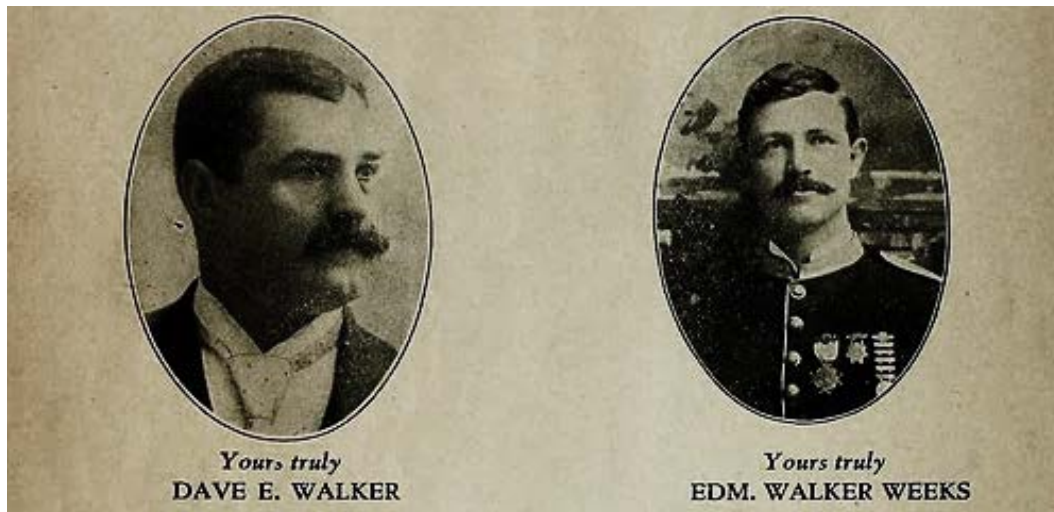
Juan Martarell [Martarel] and his two associates, Alsario Herrera [Herrea] and Ricardo Mattley [Mattlé], opened the first store of the Visalia Saddle Company in the community of Visalia in 1869. Here, they began making the famed Visalia Stock Saddle for the vaqueros and herdsmen of the surrounding ranches in Tulare County. These three men had come to California from the Mexican state of Sonora during the gold rush and settled in the town of Hornitos, a center of Hispanic settlement in Mariposa County. Martarell entered the saddle business and originated the Visalia Stock Saddle design, which he called the Vaquero Saddle. This model was lighter, stronger, and more comfortable for both horse and rider than the Spanish saddle that was then widely used. It quickly gained renown for Martarell and his associates in the saddlemaking trade ....

According to tradition, Martarell had first hit upon his saddle design when a vaquero asked him to repair a worn Spanish saddle. Instead of making repairs, Martarell completely transformed the vaquero's equipment. His model lacked the high horn and long stirrups of the classic Spanish saddle, and it added a skirt for protection of the rider's legs. As this pattern was developed by Martarell and others, Visalia saddles defined an ideal of saddle design for skilled riders wherever the Hispanic vaquero tradition spread. Other saddle makers in Visalia adopted the design and helped give Visalia saddles a worldwide reputation for excellence in craftsmanship and practicality.

A year after his store opened, Martarell sold the business to David E. Walker, an experienced businessman and promoter who began an extensive advertising campaign to expand the market for the Visalia Saddle Company. Martarell, Herrera, and Mattley remained in charge of saddle production, though in time Martarell went to work for another Visalia saddle shop. Mattley and Herrera remained with the company more than 20 years.

Walker was extremely successful in building up the company's trade, especially through his catalogs which brought in a large mail-order business. His D. E. Walker trademark was stamped on every saddle that left the shop, making his name famous wherever cattlemen and riders gathered

together. Visalia Stock Saddles and other company products found a market throughout the American West, as well as in British Columbia, the Hawaiian Islands, Central America, Argentina, Chile, and Australia.<sup>30</sup>



*Images of David Walker and Edmund Weeks from the 1935 Visalia Stock Saddle Company catalog (Internet Archive)*

Initially, the firm was not known as the Visalia Stock Saddle Company. David E. Walker co-owned the business with another Englishman, Henry Gust Shuham, and it was operated as Shuham & Walker from a location at Main and Garden streets in Visalia.<sup>31</sup> Shuham and Walker had previously worked for Main & Winchester, another saddlery founded in San Francisco in 1849. By the 1860s, Main & Winchester had earned numerous awards for the craftsmanship of its saddles, and served as a training ground for several saddle makers that would establish their own brands, including David E. Walker and Alfred W. Nolte of the firm Olsen-Nolte.<sup>32</sup> In the course of their work for Main & Winchester, Shuham and Walker made a set of double harness for President Ulysses S. Grant, earning them “considerable praise for the artistry of their work.”<sup>33</sup>

Shuham & Walker’s principal competition in Visalia was the firm of T. Salazar, which employed noted saddle tree maker Tony Ladesma. A saddle tree is the frame around which a saddle is constructed, and Ladesma believed that a properly constructed tree was the secret to building successful saddles. This belief was also shared by Jose Rodriguez, a saddle maker from Bakersfield, who had created his own saddle tree, the “White River tree,” based on an older Mexican design known as the “Chappo tree.” According to Lee M. Rice and Glenn R. Vernam’s authoritative work on Western saddle making, *They Saddled the West*, the addition of Rodriguez’s talents to Shuham & Walker marked the birth of the renowned Visalia stock saddle design:

Rodriguez was persuaded to come to the Walker and Shuman shop at Visalia, there to combine his talent with that of Mattlé in designing a new, and more improved, tree. Working on the advanced ideas gleaned from the Chappo, Mattlé and White River trees, they came up with a design that was destined to make the name of Visalia famous throughout the Western cow country. So successful were these new saddles that Walker and Shuman soon surpassed Salazar as a manufacturer of California’s most popular outfits. And long after T. Salazar was all but forgotten, the renowned

<sup>30</sup>National Park Service, *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*, “Visalia Saddle Company Site,” [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/5views/5views5h98.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/5views/5views5h98.htm) accessed 26 June 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Henry G. Langley, *The Pacific Coast Business Directory for 1876-78*, (San Francisco: Henry G. Langley, 1875), 280.

<sup>32</sup> “Main & Winchester,” <http://www.highnoon.com/bios/mainwinchbio.htm#> accessed 7 July 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Lee M. Rice and Glenn R. Vernam, *They Saddled the West*, (Cambridge, Maryland: Cornell Maritime Press, 1975), 55.

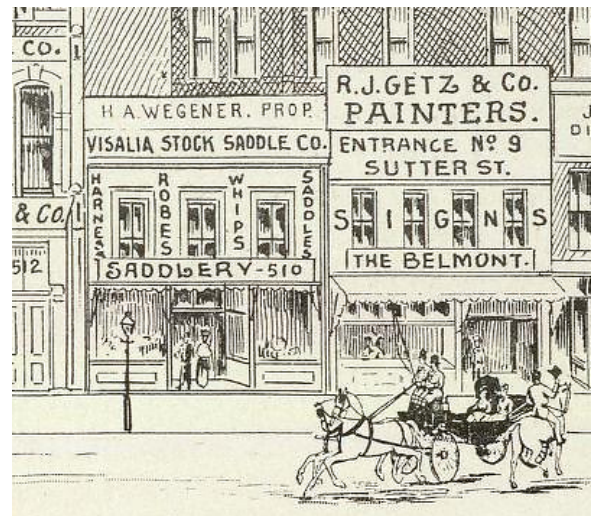
Visalia Stock Saddle, carrying the D.E. Walker brand and serial number, was a favorite with the cowboy clan from Mexico to Canada.<sup>34</sup>

Despite their success, Shuham and Walker disagreed over the direction of their business and dissolved the firm in 1877, with Shuham purchasing Walker's interest. Walker then opened a competing firm in the same town, and by 1879 was able to buy out his former partner, acquiring the both the shop and working personnel, which included Martarel, Mattlé, Rodriguez and Herrea.<sup>35</sup> Walker heavily promoted the craftsmanship of his saddles using through direct mail, handbills and catalogues, with catalogue sales emerging as the bulk of his business. In addition to saddles, the company also offered stirrups, harnesses, reins, bits, spurs, conchas, cinches and quirts.<sup>36</sup>

In 1887, Walker formed a partnership with William W. Wade, General Manager of the Johnson Company of San Francisco, and by 1888 had opened a store in San Francisco at 111 Front Street under the name of Walker & Wade. For a time, Walker also retained the Visalia shop as a private business.<sup>37</sup> By 1891, the Walker & Wade shop had relocated to 221 California Street, and around the same time Wade's share in the company was sold to Henry A. Wegener, necessitating another business name change to Walker & Wegener.

David Walker died in San Francisco in January 1894, and his share of the company was inherited by his nephew, Edmund Walker Weeks.<sup>38</sup> Around the same time, the company moved again to 510 Market Street where the name Visalia Stock Saddle Company was established. City directories from the 1890s indicate that the company then employed approximately eight saddlers, and Henry Wegener is named as the proprietor. At the time there were only two other saddle tree manufacturers and dealers in San Francisco: Main & Winchester at 214-220 Battery Street, and Jorss & Leonard at 511 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The Visalia Stock Saddle Company remained at 510 Market Street until 1906, although Edmund Weeks assumed full control of the company after Wegener's death in 1904.

All three of the locations occupied by the company before 1906 were located within a relatively compact area at the edge of the Financial District. Anecdotal evidence suggests that locating in this area helped expose the company's saddles to wealthier clientele, as well as the tourist and business traveler markets. Sanborn maps also indicate that the company's operations were not large. All of the buildings where the company operated tended to be similar — typically two-story brick or wood-frame storefronts.



1894 illustration of 510 Market Street with a sign for the Visalia Stock Saddle Co., Henry A. Wegener Proprietor (The Illustrated Directory Company)

The 1906 Earthquake and Fire destroyed the company's San Francisco building, stock, tools and all records. By the end of the year the company had relocated to 2283 Market Street where it would remain until 1911. The reasons for the company's move to the Upper Market area are not clear. Doubtless the area was initially attractive as the neighborhood had been untouched by the 1906 disaster. As well, the company may have become more reliant on catalog sales and no longer felt it was necessary to rebuild in downtown San Francisco. It may also have been a matter of familiarity and convenience for the owner. In 1905, Edmund Weeks resided at 39 Hartford Street, only a block-and-a-half away from the 2283 Market Street address.

<sup>34</sup> Lee M. Rice and Glenn R. Vernam, *They Saddled the West*, (Cambridge, Maryland: Cornell Maritime Press, 1975), 55.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

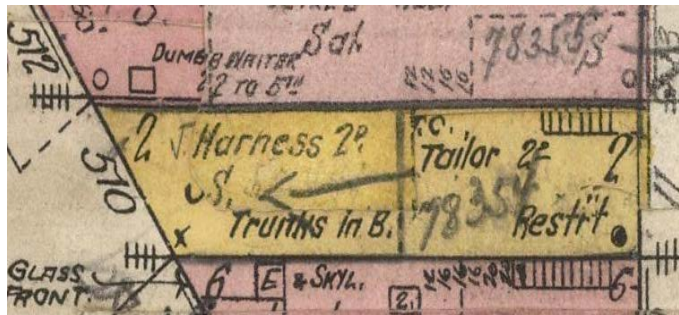
<sup>36</sup> A history of the Visalia Stock Saddle Company and the quality of its craftsmen was included in a profile article for one of their saddlemakers: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=SaNUAAAIBAJ&sjid=J48DAAAIBAJ&pg=6600%2C5043752> accessed November 20, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 59.

<sup>38</sup> "Died," *The Morning Call*, January 11, 1894, p.10.

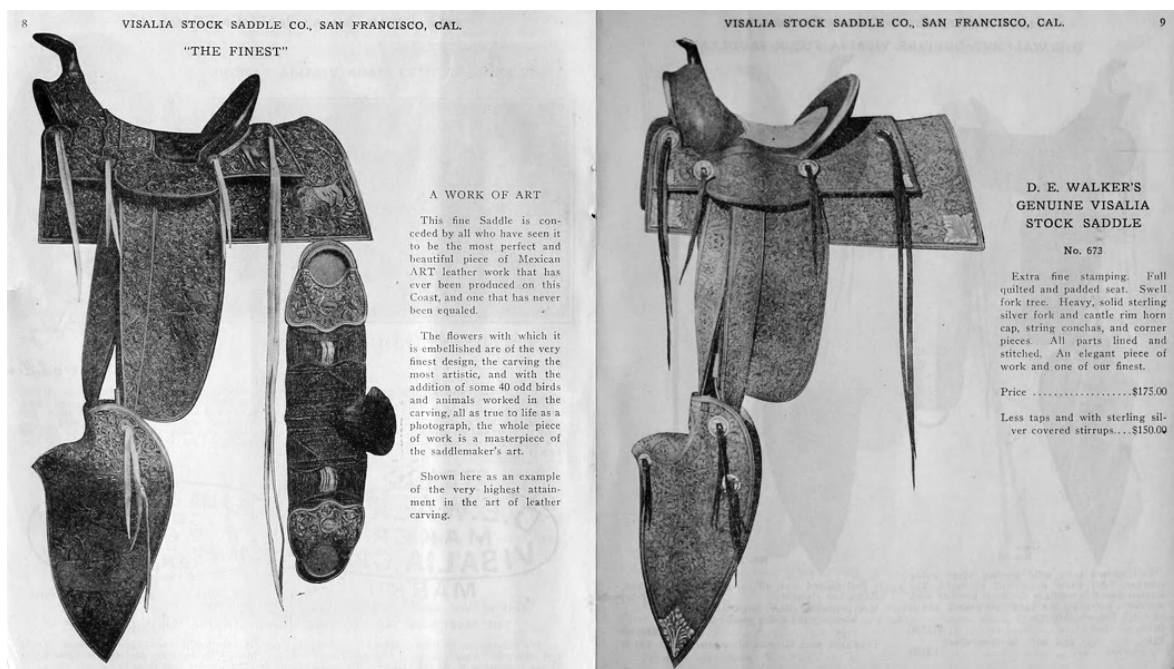


In 1911 the company moved all of its saddle-making operations and sales room to the eastern storefront of New Era Hall. A company catalog from that year states that: "Our specialty is CUSTOM WORK, which we shall always get up as expeditiously as possible, and we shall also carry a line of our most popular styles made up for rush orders. Custom work naturally requires time to build, but if you need of a rig in a hurry, write or telegraph us, and we will do our very best to fit you out at once."<sup>39</sup>



1905 Sanborn map showing the Visalia Stock Saddle Company at 510 Market Street, labeled as a harness store.

Note that a tailor on the 2nd floor is shown as associated with the business. (David Rumsey Collection)



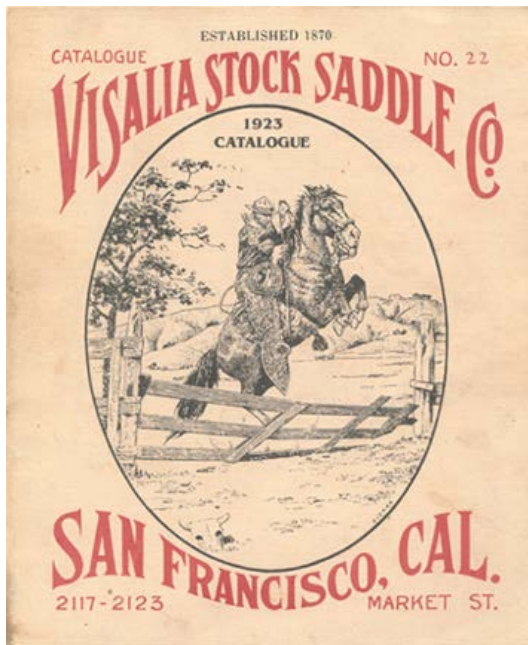
1911 Visalia Stock Saddle Company catalog (Internet Archive)

During the 1910s, it appears that some of the company's saddle makers lived on-site at 2117 Market Street. City directories show that in 1911, saddle makers Martin J. Reardon and John W. Wilson lived at the store. They were joined in 1913 by Arthur McLea and Steven (Estevan) Ybarra. In 1915, Estevan Ybarra was again listed as a resident of 2117 Market Street, as were Edward P. Hardenbrook and Frederick K. Bradlee. Hardenbrook stayed another year, and Bradlee was last listed as a resident in 1917, with no residents listed in 1918. The following year, in October 1919, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company expanded their saddle-making operations by occupying the entire ground floor of New Era Hall. At the time, the company was one of thirteen saddlers active in San Francisco.

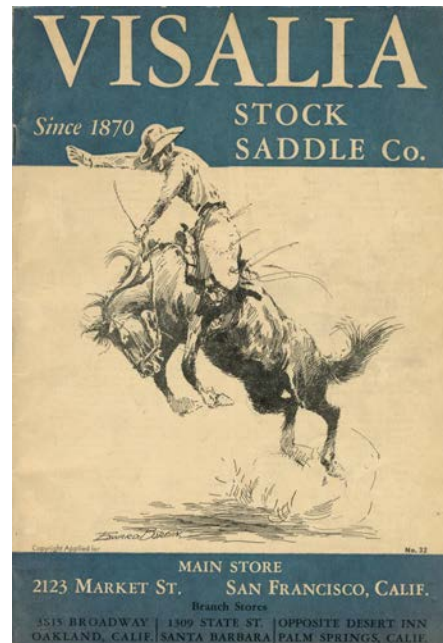
Between 1911 and 1950, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company exclusively manufactured their high-end and custom saddles in the New Era Hall building. At no other period in the company's history was its brand more widely-known throughout the world. This Market Street location is also where the company developed, through their catalogs, an international brand for high-quality standard and custom saddles. By the 1930s, branch stores had been opened in Oakland, Santa Barbara and Palm Springs. The latter two locations, both of which were associated with leisure

<sup>39</sup> Visalia Stock Saddle Co., *Catalogue No. 17*, (San Francisco: Visalia Stock Saddle Co., 1911), 1.

tourism, strongly implies that by this time the company was serving primarily affluent clientele. The company's catalogs during this period indicate that in addition to high-end saddles, the company also sold chaps, hats, gloves, shirts, shoes, belts and gun holsters.



1923 Visalia Stock Saddle catalog cover



Circa 1933 Visalia Stock Saddle catalog cover

When David Weeks died in 1930, management of the company was taken over by his stepson, Leland Bergen. In 1945, the company was sold to Sheldon E. Potter, the son of a successful rancher, who believed that the firm could expand its business by refocusing on the ranch and cowboy trade. Circa 1953, Potter relocated the company to 4643 Freeport Boulevard in Sacramento. According to a 1994 newspaper article, Sheldon Potter moved the company because he "thought that San Francisco was getting too big for cowboys wanting to buy custom-made saddles."<sup>40</sup>

In 1958 the company was sold again to Kenneth Coppock, owner of the Canadian Kenway Saddle and Leather Company. The consolidation of the firms offered considerable advantages as "Canada had always been a prime field for Visalia products."<sup>41</sup> Potter continued to manage the company's shop in Sacramento until it was destroyed by fire during the 1960s. Some of the employees purchased the D.E. Walker Visalia Stock Saddle name and moved operations to Castro Valley, California under the management of Bill Magers.<sup>42</sup> The company was subsequently sold several times, but the Visalia Stock Saddle Company continues as an active brand and trademark.<sup>43</sup> The company's older saddles also continue to command a premium from saddle collectors.

<sup>40</sup> Dixie Reid, "For legendary saddlemaker, the art is a cinch," *Ellensburg Daily Record*, February 19, 1994, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Lee M. Rice and Glenn R. Vernam, *They Saddled the West*, (Cambridge, Maryland: Cornell Maritime Press, 1975), 61.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> The company was sold four more times (1958, 1964, 1977 and 1982).

## 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

Check all criteria applicable to the significance of the property that are documented in the report. The criteria checked is (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 the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, 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:

Constructed in 1906, New Era Hall is a combination commercial and social hall building that is architecturally significant for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction and as the work of master. The building is a rare, extant property type: a purpose-built, mixed use building with a social hall and commercial frontage. The building is also significant for its associations with the events of the City's post-Earthquake reconstruction, where the building houses meeting spaces for a number of social and fraternal organizations, and as the sales and manufacturing headquarters of the Visalia Stock Saddle Company, a pioneering Mexican-American business founded in California.<sup>44</sup> The building survives with relatively few alterations from its original design, and retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

#### Significant Architecture and Work of a Master

Constructed in 1906, New Era Hall is architecturally significant for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction and a work of master architect, August Nordin. Designed and constructed shortly after the 1906 disaster, the building employs a relatively simple palate of materials and ornament. The mixed-use building features an overall Classical Revival design, demonstrated through its symmetry and oversized-scale of the two-story building, combined with exaggerated Craftsman details including the cornice, paired brackets with pendants, and bold window and door surrounds. On the interior, Nordin's innovative use of the Howe Truss system allowed him to create uninterrupted assembly spaces in the Lodge Rooms while simultaneously economizing on materials. As an example of a type and period, New Era Hall is part of a class of social halls that incorporated a ground-floor commercial use with the meeting rooms occupying the upper floor(s). Of the seventy-two social halls extant in San Francisco in 1907, New Era Hall is one of only nine examples of its type which survive and have good integrity.

#### Association with Significant Events

New Era Hall is significant for its association with the Visalia Stock Saddle Company, recognized as one of California's pioneering saddle-making companies, especially for its role in developing and popularizing a design presently known as the "western saddle." Between 1911 and 1953, the Visalia Stock Saddle Company exclusively manufactured their high-end and custom saddles in the New Era Hall building, developing an international

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<sup>44</sup> A history of the Visalia Stock Saddle Company was included in a profile article for one of their saddle makers: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=SaNUAAAAIBAJ&sjid=J48DAAAAIBAJ&pg=6600%2C5043752> accessed November 20, 2012.

reputation for superior craftsmanship and quality. The building also served as a training ground where generations of saddle makers learned their trade.

Today, the building is the only extant building associated with the productive period of the Visalia Stock Saddle Company. The company's original Marysville, Yuba County location was demolished, although the site is presently marked with a commemorative plaque, while the company's three early San Francisco locations were all destroyed in 1906. Thus, the New Era Hall building, where the company was located from 1911 to 1953, is the best remaining location to commemorate this significant California enterprise.

New Era Hall is also important for its role in the recovery efforts following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, though this is not its primary significance. The building was purpose-built shortly after the disaster to provide crucial meeting space for displaced organizations and over the next several years continued to serve as a formal gathering place for a variety of social and fraternal groups. In this respect, New Era Hall provided continuity for these organizations and met a pressing public need in the post-Earthquake period.

## Periods of Significance

New Era Hall has two periods of significance:

**1906-1909:** Architecturally, the period of significance is assigned as 1906-1909, reflecting the original construction of the building as designed by master architect, August Nordin, through the reconstruction of the western storefront to its original configuration in 1909 following its use as a nickelodeon.

**1911-1953:** For its association with historic events, reflecting the period of occupancy by the Visalia Stock Saddle Company. Architecturally, the period of significance is assigned as 1906-1909, reflecting the original construction of the building as designed by master architect, August Nordin, through the reconstruction of the western storefront to its original configuration in 1909 following its use as a nickelodeon.

## 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 at 2117-2123 Market Street retains sufficient integrity to convey its architectural significance, as well as its use by the Visalia Stock Saddle Company.

It, likewise, retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling. Known alterations are relatively limited in scope and include the addition of a second-story window in 1920, and the 1975 installation of a metal-frame storefront and doors at 2123 Market Street. At an unknown date, the entry vestibule for the eastern storefront was somewhat reduced in depth, and the rear of the building clad with asbestos shingles. Despite these alterations, nearly all key character-defining features dating to its original construction remain intact, including the dual storefront configuration, the center entry and surround, the storefront transom, the second-floor fenestration, and the distinctive paired brackets at the roofline. Similarly, although the second-story Lodge Rooms are no longer used by social and fraternal organizations, they retain their open and unobstructed plans, wall cladding, and decorative trim.

The building also retains integrity of association with its commercial context. The south side of Church Street on the subject block remains a primarily commercial corridor, and the adjacent buildings were both in place during some or most of the period of occupancy by the Visalia Stock Saddle Company. The larger neighborhood, which was mostly built out during the years following the 1906 Earthquake, also retains much of its historic fabric and feeling.



## ARTICLE 10 REQUIREMENTS SECTION 1004 (B)

### Boundaries of the Landmark Site

Encompassing all of and limited to Lot 12 in Assessor's Block 3543 on the south side of Market Street between Church and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets.

### 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 exterior features of the building are identified as:

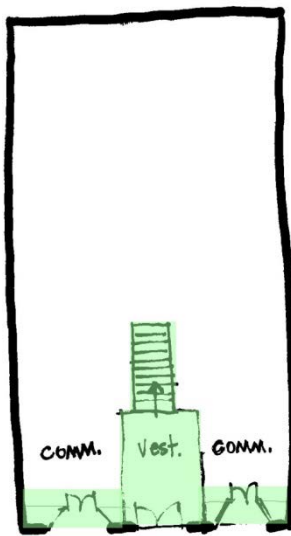
- Two-story height and massing (ground floor of 14 and 15-feet and second floor of 16 and 24 feet);
- All rooflines, including the flat roof;
- All exterior elevations including the narrow, flush wood siding at the second floor of the front elevation and channel drop siding at the side elevation;
- All architectural details and motifs: including the cornice with plain frieze; over-scaled, paired brackets with extended triple pendants; and square, beveled rafter tails supporting a deeply projecting cornice with banded moldings.
- Central entry doors within the center bay at 2117 Market Street including; the single-glazed, double leaf, wood doors with decorative flared door surround, capped by a beveled lintel entry hood with applied floriated ornament, supported by nailhead block details;
- Ground floor storefronts including; the partially recessed, angled vestibule storefront entry with tile flooring at 2117 Market Street and the deeply recessed, angled vestibule storefronts at 2123 Market Street; the configuration of the storefronts at 2117 and 2123 Market Street comprised of stucco bulkheads, raised display platforms, and plate glass storefront windows; the over-scaled, divided light, wood transom spanning the plate glass storefronts at the ground floor; and the wood-sash, single-light doors at 2117 and 2121 Market Street (non-historic aluminum doors at 2123 Market Street are not character-defining features);
- Second floor fenestration including; triple-ganged, wood sash, double-hung windows with ogee lugs surrounded heavy casings and bracketed lintels and sills with nailhead block trim, located in the first and third building bays. The single double-hung, wood sash window with ogee lugs and heavy casings located within the middle bay.

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

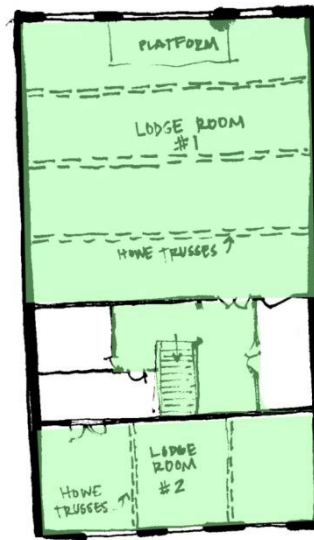
- Stairway to Second Floor Lodge Rooms
  - Vertical board-and-batten wood paneling with bead board above (presently painted)
  - Wooden steps to upper floor
- Second-Story Entry Hall
  - Vertical board-and-batten wood paneling and flat-board surrounds with nailhead block details
  - Turned wood staircase baluster
- Second-Story Anterooms
  - Vertical board-and-batten and bead board paneling with nailhead block details
- Second-Story Lodge Room No. 1, including:
  - Open plan and volume measuring 49-feet by 49-feet, with a ceiling height of 24-feet to the underside of the roof.

- Board-and-batten and tongue-in-groove wall cladding (presently painted) with nailhead block details.
- Three exposed Howe trusses
- Second-Story Lodge Room No. 2, including:
  - Open plan and volume historically measuring 49-feet by 20-feet with a ceiling height of 16-feet to the underside of the roof.
  - Interior wall finishes including: the wide board shiplap siding, laid horizontally; board and batten wainscoting with nailhead block details, and door and window casings? (all currently painted);
  - Howe trusses (Currently, these are altered enclosed in non-historic siding)

Below are floor plans illustrating the location of interior character-defining features (shaded in green).



First Floor



Second Floor

## PROPERTY INFORMATION

**Historic Name:** New Era Hall

**Popular Name:** n/a

**Address:** 2117-2121 Market Street

**Block and Lot:** 3542012

**Owner:** CTC RE III, LLC

**Original Use:** Stores and lodge halls

**Current Use:** Store and dance studio

**Zoning:** NCD - Upper Market Neighborhood Commercial Transit District

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## APPENDIX

Based on city directory and newspaper research, the following are organizations which advertised regular meetings at New Era Hall between 1907 and 1914:

- 1907:           *Order of Scottish Clans*: Clan Frasier, No. 78. Meets first and third Thursday evenings each month at 2121 Market Street. David Mowatt, Chief
- 1907:           *Order of the Eastern Star*: Yerba Buena Chapter, No. 228. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday evenings at 2121 Market Street.
- 1907-1908:     *Knights of Pythias*: Phoenix Lodge, No. 53. Meets every Monday at 2121 Market Street.
- 1907-1909:     *Woodmen of the World*: Golden Gate Camp, No. 64. Meets every Friday at 2121 Market Street.
- 1907-1910:     *Patriarchs Militant Independent Order of Odd Fellows*: Subordinate Herman Lodge, No. 145. Meets every Friday evening at 2121 Market Street.
- 1908-1909:     *Ancient Order of Hibernians*: State officers meet at New Era Hall. Michael Donahoe, President; William O'Brien, Vice President; T. P. O'Dowd, Secretary; T. Lynch, Treasurer; Rev. T. Carather, Chaplin. County Officers meet at New Era Hall every 4<sup>th</sup> Monday. William Boyle, President; James J. Barry, Financial Secretary; Con Herlihy, Recording Secretary.
- 1908-1914:     *Foresters of America*: (white males 18-50) Court California, No. 4. Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays at 2121 Market Street. Court Justice, No. 16. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays at New Era Hall. Court Presidio, No. 40. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays at New Era Hall. Court Mayflower, No. 41. Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays at 2121 Market Street. Court Sunflower No. 187. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays at 2121 Market Street. Court James G. Blaine, No. 207. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays at New Era Hall.
- 1909:           *Rebekah Assembly, I.O.O.F. of California*: Oriental Rebekah Lodge, no. 90. Meets every Wednesday evening at 2121 Market Street.
- 1909-1911:     *The National Union*; San Francisco Council, no. 540. Meets second Thursday of each month in New Era Hall, 2121 Market Street. E. H. Hills, Secretary.
- 1910-1912:     *Native Daughters of the Golden West*. Castro Parlor, no. 178. Meets Wednesdays.

1911-1912: *National Association of Post Office Clerks*, Branch No. 8. Joseph Cone, President; George P. Feely, Secretary. Meets second Saturday of each month at 2121 Market, New Era Hall.

Other notable events and political meetings:

August 20, 1910: the *San Francisco Call* reported that the Twin Peaks Tunnel and Improvement convention had met the previous evening to present a report on the feasibility and plans for construction of a streetcar tunnel beneath Twin Peaks.

October 24, 1910: the *San Francisco Call* reported on a meeting of the James G. Conlin Club at New Era Hall. Conlin was running as an independent candidate for the elected office of Justice of the Peace.

September 13, 1911: the *San Francisco Call* announced that accommodations for 1,000 persons have been provided at New Era Hall in preparation for a speech by James Rolph to the Thirty-Fourth District Central Nonpartisan Rolph Club.

April 29, 1912: the *San Francisco Call* announced a meeting of the Taft Republican meeting to be held at New Era Hall, Joseph Duffy presiding.

October 6, 1912: the *San Francisco Call* covered a fundraising card party held at New Era Hall by the Daughters of Isabella.