

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE July 1, 2021 PROJECT 21089  
NUMBER  
TO Doug Biggs, Executive Director PROJECT 620 Central Avenue/1245 McKay  
Avenue, Alameda  
OF Alameda Point Collaborative FROM Stacy Kozakavich, Cultural  
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CC Lada Kocherovsky, Page & Turnbull VIA Email

REGARDING 620 Central Avenue/1245 McKay Avenue, Alameda (APN 74-1305-26-2)

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**Introduction**

This memorandum has been prepared by Page & Turnbull at the request of the Alameda Point Collaborative regarding a proposed project at the former Alameda Federal Center at 620 Central Avenue / 1245 McKay Avenue (APN 74-1305-26-2). The proposed project is located at the site of the U.S. Maritime Service Officers School, Alameda, which was constructed during World War II to train officers and seamen in the wartime operation of the merchant fleet, and which operated at the site until 1954. The original school buildings at the Alameda Federal Center site have been previously found significant under National Register of Historic Places (National Register) Criterion A (Events) for their association with training during World War II and the Korean War, and under Criterion C (Architecture) as part of a “rare example of an early modern campus design, as a large example of a Bay Region style complex, and as an exemplification of World War II planning and design.”<sup>1</sup> However, due to alterations to the complex, including building demolitions and exterior modifications to remaining buildings, the complex was found to lack sufficient integrity for eligibility for listing in the National Register. The site is currently listed in the City of Alameda’s Historical Buildings Study List.

Page & Turnbull understands that recent local history research conducted in support of a new National Register nomination for the site of the Maritime Service Officers School has identified two master architects, Harry Bruno and Joseph Esherick, who contributed to the original design of and alterations to the facility. This memorandum briefly addresses the potential significance of the site

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<sup>1</sup> Page & Turnbull, HBPP, Statement of Significance, Page 1. This text is also included in the Significance section on Page 2 of the section for each individual building.

under National Register Criterion C and California Register of Historical Resources (California Register) Criterion 3 for its association with master architects or builders.

### Evaluating the Work of Master Architects

National Park Service Guidance for applying the National Register criteria for evaluation provides the following description for significance based on association with a master architect or builder under Criterion C:

A master is a figure of generally recognized greatness in a field, a known craftsman of consummate skill, or an anonymous craftsman whose work is distinguishable from others by its characteristic style and quality. The property must express a particular phase in the development of the master's career, an aspect of his or her work, or a particular idea or theme in his or her craft.

A property is not eligible as the work of a master, however, simply because it was designed by a prominent architect. For example, not every building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright is eligible under this portion of Criterion C, although it might meet other portions of the Criterion, for instance as a representative of the Prairie style.<sup>2</sup>

As Criterion 3 for the California Register is based on National Register Criterion C, this guidance is also applicable to evaluation for designation at the state level.

Eligibility requirements for listing as a City of Alameda Historic Monument specify that, for association with an architect, a property must represent "a *notable work* of a master builder, designer or architect" [emphasis added].<sup>3</sup>

As defined by the criteria for inclusion in the City of Alameda Historic Buildings Study List, architectural significance "has to do with the style of a historic resource, the reputation and ability of the architect, the quality of the design, its uniqueness and its execution, and the materials and methods of construction."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin No. 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington D.C., 1995), 20.

<sup>3</sup> City of Alameda, Alameda Municipal Code, Chapter XIII, Article VII – Historical Preservation, Section 13-21.2. Electronic resource at [https://library.municode.com/ca/alameda/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=CHXIIIIBUHO\\_ARTVIIHIPR](https://library.municode.com/ca/alameda/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CHXIIIIBUHO_ARTVIIHIPR), accessed March 26, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> City of Alameda, *Architectural and Historical Resources of the City of Alameda*, 10.

In addition to representing a master architect or builder's work as a strong example of a significant phase or theme in their career, to be eligible for listing in the National Register, California Register, or local register based on this association, properties must retain sufficient integrity of design, materials, and workmanship to convey that association.

### Harry A. Bruno

Tennessee-born Harry A. Bruno was a prolific architect who worked for several decades in the East Bay beginning in the 1930s. He is perhaps best known for his design of many buildings completed in the 1950s and 1960s in Oakland's Jack London Square.

On June 28, 2021, Page & Turnbull reviewed blueprints for the original construction of the Maritime Service Officers School in the collection of the Alameda Museum. Harry A. Bruno is listed on the cover sheet of the blueprint set as the architect working with the local general contracting firm, the Fred J. Early Jr. Co, who was contracted to build the facility. The drawing list for the set of blueprints identifies that revised architectural and mechanical drawings were based on original drawings prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard Engineering Headquarters. These original drawings specified the overall design and appearance of the buildings as they were constructed. For example, original structural drawings, plans, sections, and elevations for the Engineering Building (Building 1) and Barracks Unit (Building 2) at the subject property were prepared by the United States Coast Guard Engineering Headquarters in Washington, D.C. in October 1942. The Fred J. Early Jr. Co. and their consulting professionals (including mechanical, electrical, engineering, and dock consultants in addition to Bruno) prepared revised drawings when aspects of the project designed by the U.S. Coast Guard Engineering Headquarters needed additional detail or revision due to local conditions. As Harry Bruno's name appears on only one revised drawing, Sheet 34A dated July 1943, it is difficult to ascertain what contribution he made to the design of the complex. Based on the information provided in the blueprint title blocks, it appears that Bruno served in the capacity of a consulting architect for the Fred J. Early Jr. Co. during construction of the building, but did not personally design the buildings.

### Joseph Esherick

Philadelphia-born architect Joseph Esherick began working in San Francisco in 1937 and maintained an active professional and academic career through the 1980s. Strongly influenced by the work of well-known Bay Area architects Gardner Daily and William Wurster, Esherick is widely known for such projects as his 1963 residential designs at Sea Ranch. Esherick's Bay Region style is represented by hundreds of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings.

On June 22, 2021 Page & Turnbull reviewed photographs of a 1946 drawing sheet for a boiler room addition at the Maritime Service Training Station, prepared by Joseph Esherick and provided by staff of the University of California, Berkeley Environmental Design Library. The rectangular, one-story addition appears to have been located at the northwest corner of the Engineering Building (Building 1), adjacent to the original boiler room and a previous addition. Based on photographs of the Alameda Federal Center, the addition designed by Esherick appears to have been removed by 1977.

### Discussion

The remaining original Maritime Service Officer School buildings at the Alameda Federal Center, Building 1 and Building 2, are not good representations of the work of architect Harry A. Bruno, who provided professional services during construction of the design prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard; or Joseph Esherick, whose boiler room addition to Building 1 was demolished by 1977. These architects' contributions to the site do not rise to the level of significance required by Criterion 3 of the California Register or Criterion C of the National Register.

The buildings at the subject property which were constructed as part of the Maritime Service Officers School have previously been found historically significant for their contribution to the United States' Maritime Service during World War II, and as part of a cohesive campus of its era. As stated in our April 28, 2021 memorandum, Page & Turnbull agrees with previous findings that, while historically significant, the Maritime Service Officers School buildings at the Alameda Federal Center property lack sufficient integrity of setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to be eligible for listing as part of a district or as individual resources on the National Register or California Register, as City of Alameda Historic Monuments, or on the Alameda Historical Buildings Study List.