

## **Building 101 Overview (Main Office/Administration Building)**

### *Physical Description*

Building 101 stands at the corner of 20th and Illinois Streets, marking the corner and the entry to the shipyard. An iron perimeter fence frames the entrance to this building and originally extended down both 20th and Illinois Streets; this fence is still partially intact and described as a separate resource. Designed by preeminent San Francisco architect Fredrick H. Meyer and built in 1917, the building is Classical Revival in style.

This Classically detailed, three-story-with-basement concrete and brick building is “L” shaped in plan with a wide bevel at the outside corner of the “L”. It measures 140’-6” long, by 51’-10” wide, by 72’-0” high, and contains 56,268 square-feet. Stucco clads the exterior, and is rusticated at the first floor. The roof is flat. At the beveled corner, granite steps lead to an elaborate, recessed entry. A keystone with egg and dart molding, and an oval cartouche caps the entry arch. The primary window type on all elevations is one-over-one, double-hung, wood sash with lamb’s tongue details and operable transoms. Windows on the first floor are paired. A wide string course encircles the building between the first and second floors, with projecting balustraded window sills over the entry and at both end bays of the street-facing façades. These window sills are concrete and are supported by curved brackets with acanthus leaf ornamentation. Two-story fluted Doric pilasters ascend from the stringcourse, dividing the primary façades into bays. Set within each bay on the second and third floors, windows are in threes, with ornamental spandrel panels between the second and third floors. As seen on the west façade, these spandrel panels originally were ornamented with low relief floral patterns, though all of these have been lost on the south façade. A wide, simple entablature tops the building, with a projecting cornice band and solid parapet.

This building has three approximately 11,000 square-foot primary floors over a basement and sub-basement, with a partial 1,512 square-foot fourth floor and penthouse. Double-loaded corridors access offices at the three primary floors and the basement.

The octagonal main lobby features cast stone walls over pink marble wainscoting and a pink marble floor. Centered on the coffered ornamental plaster ceiling is an octagonal bronze and glass pendant light fixture. The elevator, with Art Deco doors and a pink marble door surround, is along the south wall.

The lobby leads to the circular main stairhall. Extending to the third floor, it has marble steps and landings and an ornamental metal railing. The walls above the third floor level are ornamental plaster; those below are ashlar-patterned granite. Low marble walls divide the stairhall from the lobbies at each floor. An ornamental plaster ceiling tops the space.

The first floor corridor has a marble floor and marble wall cladding, which extends up from the ground approximately seven feet. The marble cladding is topped with oak picture rails. Above the oak railings are wood and glass clerestories and plaster wall finish. Cove moldings ring the plaster ceilings. Executive offices are located at the first floor. Rooms 116 and 117, exhibit herringbone-patterned wood flooring and floor-to-ceiling wood paneled walls with dentiled cornices.

Like the first floor corridors, the second and third floor corridors feature clerestories over wood moldings. Third floor corridor walls have c.1950 blond wood paneling, patterned vinyl asbestos tile (VAT) flooring, and glue-up acoustical tile ceilings. Two types of staff offices occur at the second and third floors. Second floor staff offices include resilient sheet flooring, plaster walls and ceiling, wood wainscot, profiled wood door and window trim, and heavy wood crown molding at the ceiling.

The flooring is generally in poor condition, and walls and ceiling are in fair condition. Third floor staff offices include plastered ceilings covered by glue-up acoustical tiles, resilient sheet flooring, gypsum board walls, wood baseboards and chair rails, and simple wood door and window trim.

A small theater at the fourth floor features wavy wall cladding. At the ceiling, an enclosed former skylight is now surrounded by wavy paneling and a series of wavy glass panels interrupt its reveal.

Vandals have stripped the vacant building of the ornamental metal railing from the first floor stairs and most of its door hardware and light fixtures. Water damage has occurred in several of the offices on the second and third floors.

#### *Historic/Current Use*

Building 101 was designed as a new main office building in 1917, to accommodate the “enormously increased business of the Potrero plant and its branch across the bay,” in Alameda, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Architect Frederick H. Meyer told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in January 1917 that the building, then under construction, would be the largest and best equipped private office building in the West, accommodating 350 clerical, professional and executive staff:

The Union Iron Works company is constructing an office building at its plant in the Potrero, this city, at a cost of \$250,000....Work on the building is to be rushed in order that the various departments to occupy it may have the space already needed....The present brick building at the entrance to the Potrero works, large as it is, does not accommodate the office forces which are scattered through the works in other buildings, and when the new structure is occupied the present one may be demolished to make room for the shipyards.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer’s building plan, described in the *Chronicle*, had executive offices on the first floor, clerical departments on the second floor, drafting and naval architects on the third floor, a basement floor with blue printing rooms and laboratories, and a sub-basement for storage and a service plant:

#### Strictly Class A

The big structure will stand at the corner of Twentieth and Illinois streets, on both of which streets it will have a frontage of 140 feet with a depth of fifty feet for each wing. It will be of class A type, which calls for steel frame with concrete walls, floors and roof, and it will have three stories, a basement and sub-basement.

Brick and stone will be used in the exterior finish, and the interior will be done in hardwoods and marble, after the style of first-class office buildings. Special attention has been given the finish of the executive offices, which will be on the first floor. Specially designed rooms are provided for the president, general manager, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and cashier on this floor.

#### Entrance to Be Imposing

The second story will be laid out for various clerical departments, purchasing agents, estimating, etc., and also for a private dining-room, with kitchen, for the officers and department heads. The third floor will be used by the drafting forces and naval architects, with accommodations for 150 men. In the basement will be testing rooms, laboratories, and blue printing rooms, while the sub-basement will be used for storage and service plant.

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<sup>1</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1917, p. 11/3.

Approximately 350 persons will be housed in the building, including officials, clerical forces and drafting and scientific staff.

An imposing entrance and vestibule are designed in relation to the general interior plan. With maximum window space on fronts and backs of the building, the offices and other rooms will be flooded with light while careful provision has been made for ideal ventilation and heating, with efficiency the uppermost idea in the planning.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-1930s much of the office equipment was replaced during a site wide upgrade; some interior modification may have been made at this time.<sup>3</sup> In 1945 Building 101 was still the shipyard's main office building and still had executive offices on the first floor. One striking difference in 1945 was the expansion of vital functions into the basement and sub-basement floors, including a cafeteria and Navy dining room in the sub-basement:

In addition to the cafeteria and Navy dining room the sub-basement had a vault, boiler room, kitchen, storage, printing shop, janitor's quarters, file room, a small office, and a storage area.

The basement floor contained the office of the plant engineer, file room, cashier, purchasing department, blueprinting department, dark room, photostat room, dumb waiter, and women's and men's restrooms.

The first floor featured offices and a vault, the second had offices and restrooms, the third had a drafting room, offices, a vault, dumb waiter, and supply room. The penthouse had a drafting room a PBX room and a rest room. PBX stands for "private branch exchange," and refers to a telephone service for in-house use.<sup>4</sup>

The building is currently vacant.

### *Integrity*

Building 101 defines the entrances to the shipyard and conveys the prominence and success of the yard during WWI. It is a character-defining feature of the district that functions as the cornerstone to the promenade along 20th Street. The building expresses the growing role of management and administration in the shipbuilding process during WWI and WWII. Despite interior modifications on the upper levels and vandalism that resulted in the removal of character-defining light fixtures and hardware, Building 101 maintains a high degree of integrity and is therefore a district contributor.

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<sup>2</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1917, p. 11/3

<sup>3</sup> Plans of The San Francisco Yard, Bethlehem Steel Company, Shipbuilding Division 1944-1945, Sheets 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Plans of The San Francisco Yard, Bethlehem Steel Company, Shipbuilding Division 1944-1945, Sheets 16-17.