NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018 (Expires 5/31/2012)

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1108

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Rialto Building

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 116 New Montgomery Street ☐ not for publication

city or town San Francisco ☐ vicinity

state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code 94105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Signature of certifying official — Date: 16 NOV 2010

State Historic Preservation Officer, California State Office of Historic Preservation

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official — Date

Title — State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action: 1·3·11

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- [X] private
- [ ] public - Local
- [ ] public - State
- [ ] public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- [X] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1		**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Business
Commerce/Trade: Department Store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Business
Commerce/Trade: Department Store
Commerce/Trade: Restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Renaissance Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick
Steel
roof: Asphalt
other: Terra Cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Rialto Building is located in the Financial District of San Francisco, at the intersection of New Montgomery and Mission Streets, just south of Market Street. The street grid parallels Market Street, which runs from northeast to southwest. Therefore, the New Montgomery Street (primary) façade of the Rialto building faces northeast; the Mission Street façade faces northwest; rear façade faces southwest towards the alley; and the Minna Street façade faces southeast. For clarity, in this nomination the site is described with New Montgomery Street to the east, Mission Street to the north, the alley to the west, and Minna Street to the south. The footprint of the Rialto Building completely fills its parcel and has no associated buildings or landscape features.

Designed in the American Commercial style with Renaissance Revival architectural details, the eight-story Rialto Building is topped by a penthouse and features an H-shaped plan with centered light courts above the first floor on its primary (east) and rear (west) façades. The steel frame building is clad in brick and terra cotta and its floors are organized into a base, shaft and capital design. The concrete base is delineated by a double-height first story that fills the rectangular parcel. The rusticated base is clad with horizontally grooved concrete which imitates courses of granite stone. The street is labeled on each building face. The grooved horizontal detailing of the base carries through to the shaft of the building, which contains the upper six stories of the building. The eighth story is the most ornately decorated, is clad with brick and terra cotta, and represents the capital of the three-part vertical composition. Originally constructed in 1902, and reconstructed in 1910 after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire in San Francisco, the building is in excellent condition and retains historic integrity for its period of significance from 1902 until 1910.

Narrative Description

(See Continuation Sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- [X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [X] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

A: Community Planning & Development

C: Architecture

Period of Significance

1902-1910

Significant Dates

1902: Rialto Building Constructed

1906: San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

1910: Rialto Building Re-constructed

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Meyer & O'Brien

Bliss & Faville

Period of Significance (justification)

The Rialto Building has a period of significance from its original construction date in 1902 to its reconstruction date in 1910. The office building is significant for Community Planning and Development efforts to reconstruct San Francisco's Financial District after the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. The building is also significant for its Architecture. Its unique H-plan and tripartite vertical composition are representative of buildings constructed during San Francisco's building boom at the turn of the twentieth century. The original 1902 building retained its façade and was reconstructed primarily with structural improvements in 1910.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Rialto Building is significant at the local level for the National Register under Criterion A for Community Planning and Development themes and under Criterion C as an example of a unique architectural type. Initially constructed during the building boom in San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century, the commercial office building featured a Chicago-inspired open plan and light courts and was designed by the San Francisco-based architecture firm of Meyer & O'Brien. The Rialto Building became symbolic of reconstruction efforts after the Earthquake and Fire of 1906 when its exterior shell remained, but the interior was gutted by fire. Prominently located at a major intersection in the newly expanded Financial District, the reconstruction of the building was encouraged by the City of San Francisco. Architects Bliss & Faville reconstructed the building in 1910. When the work on the Rialto Building was complete, the project was heralded as a transformative project that restored faith in the City. The reconstructed building, which retained its original 1902 exterior, was unique in a cityscape now dominated by modern buildings and skyscrapers constructed after the Earthquake and Fire to replace those buildings lost by the disaster.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

(See Continuation Sheet)

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

(See Continuation Sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____

Primary location of additional data:

____State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.37 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	552 900	418 2160	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The Rialto Building stands at 116 New Montgomery Street (APN 3722-071), a rectangular parcel on the south corner of the intersection of New Montgomery and Mission streets in San Francisco. Two buildings, 641 Mission Street (APN 3722-070) and 142 Minna Street (APN 3722 058), border the southwest parcel boundary. The commercial building at 641 Mission Street was built in 1907 and the industrial building at 142 Minna Street was constructed in 1910. The southeast parcel boundary is bordered by Minna Street. The Rialto Building is located in a neighborhood characterized by commercial buildings reconstructed immediately after the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundary is defined by the parcel on which the Rialto Building stands. The parcel boundaries coincide with the footprint of the building.

(See Continuation Sheet for Geographic Documentation: Boundary Justification Map)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Meg Glynn, Preservation Planner

organization Page & Turnbull, Inc. date 8/16/2010

street & number 2401 C Street, Ste. B telephone 916.930.9903

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

  A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

(See Continuation Sheet, Additional Documentation: Historic Photographs)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

(See Continuation Sheet, Additional Documentation: Photograph Log)

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Steven Firtel, Esq., representing the partnership between Broad Street San Francisco and CWR (116)

street & number 261 S. Linden Dr. telephone 310.292.0554

city or town Beverly Hills state CA zip code 90212

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Narrative Description

Primary (East) Façade
The primary façade is comprised of eight (8) bays: three bays in the southern portion of the building; two central bays that contain the primary entrance at the base, which is capped by the open light court; and three bays in the northern portion of the building. The base contains commercial storefront windows and the formal building entrance, and is topped by a decorative beltcourse. The first, southernmost, bay contains a steel frame three-light window topped by a three-light transom. The second bay is identical to the first, but includes centered, wood frame, fully glazed double doors. The third bay has been modified to include a glazed storefront system that does not parallel the street, but angles inward toward the building. The three bays in the northern portion of the base contain modern steel frame six-light storefront windows. The formal building entrance at the center spans two bays and features a central, arched opening flanked by slightly smaller arched openings. The central opening contains fully glazed, bronze double doors flanked by side lights and surmounted by a multi-light arched transom. The flanking entrances contain modern steel frame, fully glazed double doors that are surmounted by multi-light, arched transoms and topped by arched awnings. A terra cotta cartouche flanked by the roman numerals MDCCCCI [1901] AD is centered above the entrance. The date reflects the year the cornerstone of the Rialto building was laid. A balustrade with the building's name, "Rialto," is supported by decorative terra cotta brackets above. The entrance is topped by a roof patio in the light court.

The brick-clad shaft of the building features rusticated piers between bays and slightly recessed spandrels. The shaft is consistently treated on the primary façade and the east façade of the east light court. The portions north and south of the center light court each contain three groups of three wood-sash, double-hung, one-over-one windows. The central window of each group is slightly wider than the flanking windows. The north and south sections of the recessed light court feature two paired windows per floor. All windows are framed by decorative concrete sills and lintels. On the seventh floor, the window lintels are more elaborately decorated and feature medallions centered above each window.

The eighth floor, or capital, is clad with terra cotta and features a high level of ornamentation on the primary façades. Cartouches on decorative panels are centered above each group of windows and Classical details are located between each bay. The eighth story of the light court is clad with terra cotta, but lacks additional architectural details. The building terminates in an elaborate cornice that contains dentil molding and medallions.

Mission Street (North) Façade
The Mission Street façade features the same architectural ornamentation as the primary façade. The façade is comprised of five (5) bays and articulates base, shaft, and capital components. Like the primary façade, the base of the building is clad with concrete that has been scored on the piers between the structural bays and contains modern commercial storefront windows. The easternmost bay contains a modern storefront with steel frame, fully glazed double doors flanked by side lights and surmounted by a three-light window. The three central bays contain modern steel frame six-light storefront windows and the westernmost bay features a commercial storefront glazed with opaque glass and pedestrian doors.

The brick-clad shaft portion of the building is detailed in a similar manner to the New Montgomery Street façade: rusticated brick piers are located between each of the five bays, which contain slightly recessed spandrels. With the exception of the center bay, which contains wood sash, one-over-one windows separated by brick framing, all other bays contain three wood sash one-over-one windows separated by concrete framing.

The eighth floor, or capital, on Mission Street is finished identically to the New Montgomery Street façade.

Rear (West) Façade
The rear or west façade is comprised of painted brick and is unadorned. The fenestration on this side features

wood sash three-over-three windows.

Minna Street (South) Façade
The Minna Street façade is similar to the primary (east) and Mission Street (north) façades, but is less ornamented. The base of the building contains modified commercial storefronts and is clad in smooth concrete. The shaft features groups of three windows framed by brick jack arches and sills. The 8th floor, or capital, is clad with terra cotta but lacks the architectural flourishes and detailing of the primary façades. The medallioned cornice that tops the New Montgomery Street façade wraps the corner, but does not continue on Minna Street.

Alterations, 1910 - 2010
Few alterations were made to the Rialto Building since it was reconstructed in 1910. In 1949, a reinforced concrete steel frame mezzanine floor was installed at the rear of the main lobby of the store at 138 Minna Street to hold displays for an adjacent store. The ground floor served as a sandwich shop.[1] In 1970, a new five foot, glazed, set-back entrance was constructed and an awning installed on the Minna Street façade.[2] In 1974, the commercial storefront windows on the building's primary façade were altered.[3] In 1981, the main lobby and corridors were restored and fire systems were installed. The terra cotta cornice and brick parapet were also temporarily removed and replaced on the north and east façades.[4] In 1982, the east and north parapet walls were braced with steel, and the following year, the south and west parapets were braced.[5] In 1990, four existing doors were removed and replaced with three handicap approved entry doors.[6] The following year, a permit was issued for repair of the brick exterior.[7]

Historic Integrity
The Rialto Building is characterized by its H-shaped plan; eight-story, rectilinear massing; concrete, brick, and terra cotta cladding; fenestration placement and materials; and terra cotta architectural detailing. Designed by Meyer & O'Brien and constructed in 1902, the concrete, brick, and terracotta cladding remained largely intact after the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906; the interior of the building, however, was gutted and the fenestration destroyed. In 1910, architects Bliss & Faville rehabilitated the building's exterior and restored its interior. Since reconstruction, few alterations have been made to the building. The commercial storefront windows at the base were replaced in the 1960s and 1970s, but the location and size of the fenestration at the first story remains largely intact. Most subsequent alterations to the building were completed to strengthen it structurally or restore its original features. Therefore, the building retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The building remains in its original location and continues to stand in the expanded Financial District of San Francisco, in the South of Market neighborhood. Thus, it retains integrity of location and setting. The building continues to function as a commercial office building, and through its materials and workmanship, reflects the architecture of a commercial building constructed in the San Francisco's building boom at the turn of the twentieth century. Reconstructed after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, the building retains integrity of feeling and association related

[1] San Francisco Building Permit #115017.
[2] San Francisco Building Permits #378460; #381198.
[3] San Francisco Building Permit #388860.
[4] San Francisco Building Permits #469387; #475935; #478642.
[5] San Francisco Building Permits #810998; #497185.
[6] San Francisco Building Permit #628899
[7] San Francisco Building Permit #9000959.

to its ongoing function, as well as the efforts made to restore confidence in the City of San Francisco and rebuild after this devastating event. The Rialto Building therefore, retains its historic integrity.

Statement of Significance

San Francisco's business district initially developed on Portsmouth Square, the financial district concentrated on Montgomery and California Streets, and the shopping district was on Grant Avenue. Development, however, soon spread to the south, and by the late 1850s, the intersection of Montgomery, Post, and Market Streets had become one of the most important commercial and financial intersections in the City. In response to the demand for additional office buildings in the 1880s, newer and larger buildings were constructed south of Market Street and centered on Mission and New Montgomery streets. Planned as an extension of Montgomery Street, New Montgomery Street was the southern expansion of the commercial corridor through the financial district.[8] Buildings constructed on New Montgomery Street were characterized by large footprints that often occupied entire blocks, monumental massing, and fine terracotta and stone detailing.

The most valuable real estate in the newly expanded Financial District bordered Market and New Montgomery Streets. Much of this land was owned by wealthy investors, family estates, and realty companies. Formed in 1885 by Francis G. Newlands, the Sharon Estate Company owned several buildings. Hartland and Herbert Law were prominent developers in the area. The Law brothers purchased much of their property from the Sharon Estate Company, renovated the existing buildings or constructed new buildings, and then sold the buildings via Thomas Magee & Sons brokers. The "Movement of Real Estate in and about San Francisco: Review of the Prevalent Conditions and Some of the Big Sales During the Past Week" section in the *San Francisco Call* records that the brothers owned a number of buildings on or in the vicinity of the intersection of New Montgomery and Mission Streets.[9]

By the early 1900s, San Francisco was the fourth largest city in the United States, and had a number of skyscrapers that rivaled those in New York and Chicago.[10] The expanded Financial District reflected this development, and the Law brothers financed the construction of several office buildings in the area. The following article in the *San Francisco Call*, dated May 1902, reports that the Law brothers purchased several properties in the vicinity of New Montgomery Street, which was heralded as the new commercial corridor through the Financial District:

> "A year ago H.E. Law bought the southwest corner of Mission and New Montgomery Streets. An eight-story steel office structure is now being erected on that site, which will be second to no building west of Chicago. Mr. Law's brother, Dr. Hartland Law, seeing that there was a keen demand for offices in this section , has just purchased the old Wells-Fargo [sic] building, on the northeast corner of Mission and New Montgomery Streets and running from Jessie Street to Mission Street, 160 feet front by a depth of 140 feet. This building was erected by William Sharon for the Wells-Fargo [sic] Express Company, which formerly occupied it. Wells, Fargo & Co. before leaving tried to buy this property, but failed. Before Mr. Huntington's death the Southern Pacific considered the purchase of this property for their general offices. Now Dr. Law has secured the property, and he proposed to add two stories immediately and turn the building in to a class A building for offices.
>
> New Montgomery Street appears to these gentlemen to be the Dearborn Street of San Francisco. It is the natural continuation of Montgomery Street and of Post Street, and its legitimate name is Montgomery Street South. These gentlemen believe that it will be just such a street as

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[8] San Francisco Planning Code, Article 11, Appendix F.
[9] "Movement of Real Estate in and about San Francisco: Review of the Prevalent Conditions and Some of the Big Sales During the Past Week," *The San Francisco Call.* 3 February 1901.
[10] Charles Hall Page & Associates, Inc. *Splendid Survivors.* San Francisco: California Living Books: 1979.

Montgomery Street in the character of the business that will be carried on there."[11]

In October 1902, construction of the Crossley Building, located on the parcel on which the old Wells Fargo building stood, was complete. That same year, Herbert Law financed construction of the Rialto Building, which was designed by architects Meyer & O'Brien and included work from Steiger Terra Cotta and Pottery Works.[12] Named after a commercial center in Venice, Italy, a *rialto* is an exchange or mart.

The architectural partnership of Meyer & O'Brien operated between 1902 and 1908 and was prolific in the Financial District. The Law brothers employed their services for a number of buildings, including the Crossley and Rialto buildings. Their buildings were characterized by a massive scale, tri-partite vertical composition, and fine terra cotta detailing. During their partnership, Meyer & O'Brien designed some of San Francisco's most prominent buildings, including the Monadnock Building, 637-687 Market Street (1906); the Humboldt Bank Building, 793-785 Market Street (1906); the Hastings Building, 180 Post Street (1908); the Foxcroft Building, 68-82 Post Street (1908); and the Cadillac Hotel, 380 Eddy Street (1909).[13]

The Rialto Building featured several innovative design features that were new to San Francisco. The building featured an H-shaped plan, which reflected an early use of a light court in this building type. The interior lacked dividing partition walls, so tenants could rent large floor areas that could be configured according to their needs. This feature was common among many Chicago-style buildings, and reflected the influence of a recent trip to Chicago by Frederick Meyer, one of the original architects. The façade accommodated the lack of interior partition walls by providing a large space between the window mullions. This allowed partitions to be erected between the windows once floors were leased.[14]

In March 1906, Mrs. Hermann Oelrichs (nee Teresa Alice Fair) sold the Fairmont Hotel to the Law brothers in exchange for the Rialto Building. Mrs. Oelrichs and her sister, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Jr. (nee Virginia Fair) were daughters of Senator James G. Fair of Nevada. James G. Fair was part of the Big Bonanza, the Consolidated Virginia Mining Company which developed the mother lode of the Comstock silver mines. His daughters lived with their husbands in New York City but owned several buildings in San Francisco.[15] The sale of the Fairmont for $6,000,000 was the largest to date in the State of California. It was reported that Mrs. Oelrichs exchanged the Fairmont, then under construction, for the income-producing Rialto Building to support her lifestyle. The United Railroads of San Francisco, the Standard Oil Company, the California Gas and Electric Corporation, Milliken Bros. (steel corporation) , and the Standard Electric Corporation held offices in the Rialto Building.[16]

The Earthquake and Fire of 1906

On April 18, 1906, a major earthquake struck San Francisco and the coast of Northern California. The quake ruptured gas mains and over thirty fires raged through the city. To combat the fires, the fire department attempted to demolish buildings in the path of the fires and create fire breaks using dynamite. Unfortunately, these controlled burns further destroyed properties in the already ravaged city. Before reconstruction could begin, wrecked buildings had to be demolished and the ruins carted away, insurance claims settled, title questions resolved, land resurveyed, building permits acquired, and materials and contractors secured. Owners of buildings that had been damaged but not entirely destroyed had to decide whether to salvage the remaining structures or build anew.[17]

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[11] "Real Estate Market Active: Demand for Offices," *The San Francisco Call.* 25 May 1902.

[12] "Builder's Contracts," *The San Francisco Call.* 1 October 1902.

[13] "The Work of Smith O'Brien, Architect," *Architect and Engineer,* Vol. 32, No. 1, February 1913.

[14] San Francisco Architectural Heritage, vertical file: 116 New Montgomery.

[15] "Hermann Oelrichs Dies on a Liner at Sea: His Work in the San Francisco Earthquake Hastened his End." *New York Times.* 4 September 1906.

[16] "Laws Buy the Hotel Fairmont: Business Property is Exchanged for it; Rialto and Crossley Buildings go to Mrs. Oelrichs," *The San Francisco Call.* 3 March 1906.

[17] VerPlank, Christopher. New Montgomery, Mission & Second Street Historic District. Unpublished. 23 June 2008.

Only the shell of the Rialto Building, which was comprised of steel, brick, and concrete, remained in place after the Earthquake and Fire, and the steel in the exterior walls had twisted and were severely damaged. The interior of the building was gutted. The *American Architect* would later report that the exposed concrete floors of the Rialto, as well as the Sloan and Aronson buildings, were destroyed by fire.[18] On April 20, 1906, the Rialto, described as a "modern office structure," was judged a loss, as the interior was completely destroyed and the building was no longer functional.[19] By July of that year, Mrs. Oelrichs had entered negotiations with brokers Thomas Magee & Sons to restore the Rialto Building. The *San Francisco Call* stated that the building would be "on the same lines as the original structure and no expense will be spared to make it what it was—one of the best structures on the Pacific Coast."[20] Bliss and Faville of San Francisco and the Mahoney Brothers Contractors were to reconstruct the building for $350,000.[21]

Unfortunately, Mrs. Oerlichs did not restore the Rialto Building, as planned, in 1906. On September 4, 1906, her husband, Mr. Hermann Oerlichs, died. Oerlichs was the head of Oerlichs & Company in New York, which represented shipping, import and export firms. A resident of both New York City and San Francisco, Mr. Oerlichs had conducted relief work in San Francisco after the Earthquake and Fire. More than likely, the death of Mr. Oerlichs both absorbed the attention of Mrs. Oerlichs and placed financial strain upon her, as she did not follow through on her earlier declarations to restore the Rialto Building.

In 1908, more than two years after the Earthquake and Fire, Mrs. Oerlichs and her attorneys and brokers began to negotiate the sale of the ruined Rialto Building. Her plan was to sell the Rialto property back to the Law brothers, again in exchange for the Fairmont Hotel, which had been completed and was a functional, income-producing property. To sweeten the deal, she proposed to deed to the Laws ten blocks of filled land at the northern foot of Fillmore Street in addition to the Rialto property. Her negotiations were in part prompted by a law suit for $10,000 which was brought against her by Edward W. Howard, who claimed that tenants had deserted his building on Mission Street because of the dangerous state of the neighboring Rialto Building.[22] The potential sale of the property was cheered by the *San Francisco Call*, which noted that the dilapidated building, which now stood in the midst of new, reconstructed buildings, was to pass again to the Laws, who were credited with possessing the monetary resources to restore it.[23] In February 1908, the Law brothers deeded the Fairmont Hotel to Mrs. Oerlichs in exchange for "twelve blocks (40 acres) of water front land at the foot of Webster, Fillmore and Steiner streets, lying north of Chestnut street, with 1,000 feet harbor frontage, the only water front land in the entire city front which is in private ownership."[24]

Reconstruction of the Rialto Building

Reconstruction of the Rialto Building was celebrated by San Franciscans, as the building stood on one of the most important corners in the City.[25] The building permit, dated September 28, 1910, noted that the Class A building would feature brick walls, a terracotta cornice, reinforced concrete floors, metal and plaster partitions, and an oak

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[18] "A Final Report on the San Francisco Disaster: Conclusions as to Earthquake Damage," *The American Architect.* Vol. XCI. No. 1624. 20 April 1907.
[19] "Beautiful Buildings that Lie in Ruins: Structures Famous the World Over Destroyed," *The New York Times.* 20 April 1906.
[20] "Mrs. Oelrichs Will Rebuild: Rialto to be Reconstructed on its Former Handsome Lines; Mrs. Vanderbuilt to Erect Large Office Structure Here," *The San Francisco Call.* 3 July 1906.
[21] "Realty Market Brisk," *The San Francisco Call.* 9 August 1906.
[22] "Mrs. Oelrichs is Out of His Reach: Summons Server Waits in Hotel Lobby to Hand Her Notice of Suit," *The San Francisco Call.* 18 January 1908.
[23] "Mrs. Oelrichs to Regain Fairmont: Requires Income Property to Maintain Present Standard of Living; Rialto and Crossley Buildings Pass Again Into the Possession of Laws," *The San Francisco Call.* 19 January 1908.
[24] "Again Possesses Fairmont Hotel: Mrs. Oelrichs Regains the Ownership by Second Exchange with Laws; Retains Crossley Building, but Deeds Blocks of Reclaimed Land," *The San Francisco Call.* 9 February 1908.
[25] "Rialto Building to Be Restored to Its Condition Before Fire at Cost of $300,000," *The San Francisco Call.* 15 January 1910.

and marble interior finish.[26]

Earlier that year, Dr. Hartland Law hired the architectural firm of Bliss & Faville to devise plans and supervise the reconstruction of the Rialto Building, as Meyer & O'Brien were no longer architectural partners and Bliss & Faville had gained prominence. Bliss & Faville was among the most established architectural firms in San Francisco during the reconstruction period after the Earthquake and Fire. Influenced by their former positions with McKim, Mead & White, Water D. Bliss and William B. Faville moved to San Francisco and designed conservative buildings in historical styles, calculated to appeal to those seeking a respectable and solid image.[27] Based on the original design of Meyer & O'Brien, the Rialto Building was already designed in a historical style, and was easily developed upon by the experienced firm of Bliss & Faville.

The architectural firm of Meyer & O'Brien was noted frequently in the *San Francisco Call* as the architect of record for new buildings constructed at the turn of the twentieth century; however, it was not until the Rialto Building was reconstructed in 1910 that the paper highly praised the architects and the building's design features, which were attributed to Meyer:

> "Some of the first, as well as the best, of San Francisco's skyscraping office buildings were designed by Frederick H. Meyer, the well known architect, whose work has made him one of the most prominent architects on the Pacific coast. The modern ideas of the east's great buildings were combined with Mr. Meyer's originality to good effect in producing buildings that permitted good lighting in every room, economical spacing and unusual advantages to tenants.
>
> When Harland Law departed from the beaten path and selected New Montgomery and Mission streets as the site for his Rialto building he chose Frederick Meyer to design the structure that became known as one of the models of the best in modern office buildings. A plan encountered in the east by the architect was improved upon here, and the corridors so arranged that every room facing on a street had a depth of 25 feet. The column center in the opposite direction was made as great as permissible with economical construction. The window openings on the exterior were numerous and in all cases were provided with a wood or brick mullion wide enough to receive a dividing partition.
>
> The Humboldt Bank building, Columbus Savings Bank building, Bank of Bakersfield, Crossley building, Marin County bank, Foxcroft, Hastings, Monadnock, Kohler & Chase and Galen buildings are some others designed by Frederick Meyer."[28]

In June 1910, the *San Francisco Call* newspaper included the following article, which described the Rialto, which was under reconstruction:

> "The reconstruction of the old Rialto building at the corner of Mission and New Montgomery streets has begun. Dr. Hartland Law, the owner, is preparing to spend about $500,000 in rebuilding it on a handsomer plan than the original structure. The old building was erected in 1901 at a cost of $650,000.
>
> The great fire left it a complete wreck. The walls have stood, but the steel frame was so bent and twisted most of it has had to be taken out. New steel columns have been put in from basement to

[26] San Francisco Building Permit #31973.
[27] Information compiled from San Francisco City Directories and available at San Francisco Heritage Archives, 2007 Franklin Street, San Francisco, California 94109-2996.
[28] "Skyscrapers Designed by Frederick H. Meyer," *San Francisco Call.* 20 February 1910.

roof. All the steel is being fireproofed with cement this time, instead of with terra cotta, as previously. The fireproof flooring is already in on the two upper stories.

All the reconstruction work will be of class A quality throughout. The outer brick work will be cleaned and treated in some way to brighten it up and make it look like an entirely new building.

The corridors will be wainscoted with marble and will have a flooring of mosaic tiling. They will be wider and brighter than in the old building.

The woodwork of the building will be of oak. Metal doors probably will be put in.

Special attention is being paid to the plumbing equipment. There will be a vacuum cleaning system and compressed air supplied to all the offices. There will be four high speed elevators, the contract for putting them in having already been let. The light, heat and power for the building will be supplied from a plant being constructed on a lot adjoining the main building. A special feature will be equipment for sterilizing water for drinking purposes. After the heating process it will be cooled and distributed to every suite in the building by faucets. In this and other ways Doctor Low [sic] has studiously endeavored to make the new building thoroughly modern and up to date in every particular.

McDonald & Kahn have general engineering charge of the whole reconstruction work and are letting all the contracts. Bliss & Faville are the architects."[29]

Ownership, 1910 - 2010
In 1945, Dr. Hartland Law died and the building was held by a trust in his name. The Rialto changed ownership several times after 1950, when the estate of Dr. Hartland Law was transferred to Jules H. Agostini for $881,650.[30] In 1955, Morgan-Peacock Properties Corporation, a syndicate headed by Roger Lacey Stevens, real estate promoter and theatrical producer, owned the Rialto. In 1958, industrialist Lloyd A. Johnson, the former president of National Motor Bearing Co., Inc. and a past president of the California Manufacturer's Association, obtained ownership of the Rialto.[31] Today the building is owned by a partnership between Broad Street San Francisco and CWR (116). The building has always functioned as an office building.

Criterion A Significance
The Rialto Building is significant at the local level for the National Register under Criterion A. It represents the theme of Community Development and Planning in San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century when the Financial District was expanding, and during reconstruction of the City after the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. The commercial office building was constructed on New Montgomery Street, just south of Market Street, which functioned as the primary extension of Montgomery Street in the Financial District. Initially developed in the 1880s, construction on the New Montgomery Street corridor was extensive at the turn of the twentieth century. The Rialto Building was constructed in 1902, contemporaneously with buildings on neighboring blocks. Completion of the building was not reported with much fanfare by newspapers at the time because there was so much construction occurring in the City, especially in the vicinity of the New Montgomery Street/Mission Street intersection.

After the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, the Rialto became symbolic of both the destruction of the disaster and representative of efforts in the City to rebuild. The formerly profitable building remained vacant for four years after the Earthquake and Fire as its ownership passed from socialite Mrs. Hermann Oerlichs back to the Law brothers,

[29] "Rialto Building is Being Rebuilt," *The San Francisco Call.* 11 June 1910.
[30] "Rialto Building Sold for $881,650," *San Francisco Chronicle,* May 29, 1946: 4.
[31] "Mission St. Building Sold for $2 Million," *San Francisco Chronicle,* August 15, 1958: 6.

who commissioned the original construction of the building. The Rialto Building was the feature of numerous newspaper articles during the reconstruction period because of the prominent transfer of ownership, its highly visible location at the intersection of New Montgomery and Mission streets, and because the building shell had remained intact and highly visible.

Reconstruction of the Rialto Building in 1910 was heralded by the City as a sign that recovery was well underway and that the Financial District had regained its former strength. Rehabilitation was symbolic of reinvestment and confidence in the City. Therefore, the Rialto Building is significant under Criterion A for its role in both the original expansion of the Financial District south of Market Street and its publically lauded reconstruction following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

Criterion C Significance
The Rialto Building is also significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C. When reconstructed in 1910, the design of the Rialto Building was highly praised. Originally designed by the architectural firm of Meyer & O'Brien, who were commissioned to work on a number of projects between 1902 and 1908, the building reflected a Renaissance Revival architectural style with design innovations. The modern commercial office building featured an H-shaped plan with light courts to naturally light the offices within. The grouped windows in the building were specifically designed to accommodate cubicle office walls, allowing for flexible floor plans.

Remarkably, the exterior shell of the Rialto Building survived the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. The interior of the building was gutted by fire, but the shell of the building, which was comprised of a steel structure and featured decorative brick and terra cotta cladding, became a rare example after the Earthquake and Fire of the buildings that expanded the Financial District into the South of Market at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Rialto Building is not as significant for its association with original architects Meyer & O'Brien or reconstruction architects Bliss & Faville, who were both prolific architecture firms in the Bay Area. The building is significant under Criterion C. for its high style and its distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction, representing the rare office building constructed at the turn of the twentieth century that survived the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

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Online Archives of California
Page & Turnbull, vertical files
San Francisco Architectural Heritage, vertical files
San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Center and Historical Photograph Collection

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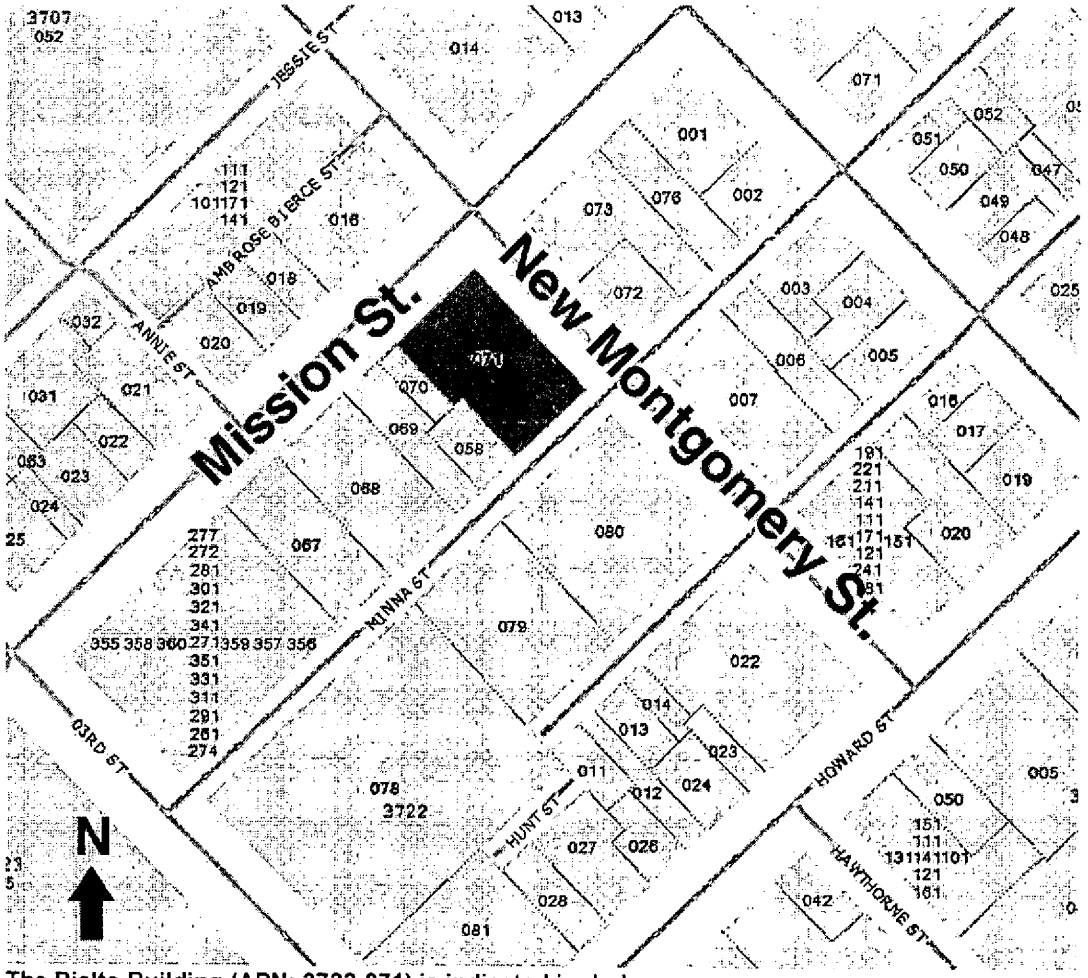
Geographical Documentation: Boundary Justification Map



The Rialto Building (APN: 3722-071) is indicated in dark grey.
(Map Courtesy of the San Francisco Assessor Parcel Viewer; modified by Page & Turnbull, 2010.)

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Additional Documentation: Historic Photographs

Rialto Building after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.
Photograph Courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph Collection.

Rialto Building, six months after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.
Source: Online Archive of California, http://www.oac.cdlib.org/search.findingaid.html

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Rialto Building, 1911.
Image Courtesy of the *San Francisco Call*, December 23, 1911, pg. 18.

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Rialto Building, 1958.
Photograph courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph Collection.

Rialto Building, 1964.
Photograph courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph Collection.

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Photograph Log

Name of Property: Rialto Building

City or Vicinity: San Francisco

County: San Francisco **State:** CA

Photographer: Page & Turnbull, Inc.

Date Photographed: July 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Photo #1 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0001)
East façade (left) and north façade (right), camera facing southwest.

Photo #2 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0002)
South façade (left) and east façade (right), camera facing northwest.

Photo #3 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0003)
East façade, primary entrance and light court, camera facing west.

Photo #4 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0004)
South façade (left) and east façade (right) façade, camera facing northwest.

Photo #5 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0005)
West façade (left) and south façade (right), camera facing northeast.

Photo #6 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0006)
North façade (left) and west façade (right), camera facing southeast.

Photo #7 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0007)
Interior, lobby, camera facing northwest.

Photo #8 (CA_San Francisco City_Rialto Building_0008)
Interior, lobby, camera facing southeast.

Photo #9 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0009)
Interior, lobby, camera facing northwest.

Photo #10 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0010)
Interior, stairwell, camera facing south.

Photo #11 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0011)
Interior, 2nd Floor office, camera facing southeast.

Photo #12 (CA_San Francisco County_Rialto Building_0012)
Interior, typical office, camera facing east.

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