

# HISTORIC RESOURCE EVALUATION REPORT

**421 Cypress Avenue  
South San Francisco, California**

Prepared for:  
Peter Sodini

May 2021



Prepared by:



**Brad Brewster**  
**Brewster Historic Preservation**

141 Pierce Street | San Francisco, CA  
(415) 519-0254  
brad.brewster@brewsterpreservation.com

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# HISTORIC RESOURCE EVALUATION

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## 1. Introduction

This historic resource evaluation report provides a review of the potential historic significance of a commercial property at 421 Cypress Avenue (Assessor's Parcel Number 012-314-090), in South San Francisco, California, known locally as *Bertolucci's Restaurant*. The property is bounded by Cypress Avenue on the east, Lux Avenue on the north, and Tamarak Lane on the south. The one-to-two-story building has approximately 10,000 square feet of interior floor area on three lots that total 0.56 acres in size, including a surface level parking lot. The subject property was originally constructed in c.1926 as a two-story hotel called the Liberty Hotel with a ground floor restaurant, and was expanded in various phases from 1945 to 1972 to become *Bertolucci's Restaurant* comprising the entire ground floor.

The owner of the property is seeking to develop the property for multi-family housing which would require demolition of the present structure and adjacent parking lot. As the proposed project would demolish a building constructed more than 45 years ago, which is the minimum age threshold for potential listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, the City of South San Francisco requires an historic resource evaluation of the property as part of a development permit application. This report is intended to address this requirement.

This report provides an architectural description of the property, a brief history of the City of South San Francisco and the development of the subject property, and an evaluation of its potential historic significance under the criteria provided by the California Register of Historical Resources. Methodologies used to prepare the report included a pedestrian site survey to photograph and record the property, as well as historical research completed at the South San Francisco Historical Society, the City of South San Francisco, and numerous online sources.

This report was prepared by Brad Brewster, Architectural Historian and Preservation Planner with Brewster Historic Preservation, who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards for architectural history. Mr. Brewster's professional resume is provided in **Appendix A**.

The subject property has not been previously surveyed or evaluated for its potential historical significance. The closest designated historic resource to the subject property is the Bank of South San Francisco, located at the corner of Grand and Linden avenues, approximately 700 feet southwest from the subject property. The subject property is not located within or near a designated historic district.

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## 2. Building and Property Description

The following provides an architectural description of the current elevations, ornamentation, finishes, and visible alterations of the exterior of the property at 421 Cypress Avenue. The property description is based on a pedestrian site survey which occurred on May 7, 2021. The site visit included photographs of the subject property, shown in **Figures 1 – 8**, and surrounding properties, shown in **Figures 9 – 14**, beginning on page 4.

Initially built in c.1926 with additions and alterations completed in various phases between 1945 to 1972, the subject property at 421 Cypress Avenue is a one-and-two-story mixed-use commercial building with approximately 10,000 square feet of interior space on an approximately 0.25-acre lot (APN# 012-314-090), as well as two adjacent lots each 0.16-acre in size (APN# -070 and -080) which contain a surface parking lot. The building has an irregular plan with primarily flat roof forms constructed of wood framing and concrete block over a concrete foundation.

The front (east) elevation which faces Cypress Avenue is a one- and two-story volume with two recessed entries on the ground floor, one for *Bertolucci's Restaurant* on near the southern end of this elevation, and one for the second-floor residences near the northern end. The recessed entrance to the restaurant contains two solid wood double doors with glazed sidelights, a tiled and stuccoed surround, and a steel pipe and fabric awning above with a flared and striped design. A smaller, secondary entrance is recessed and covered by a metal security gate. This entrance also has a steel pipe and fabric awning above with an arched and striped design. The wall cladding on much of the ground floor elevation is comprised of a manufactured stone 'pebbledash' siding with decorative wood shutters located at regular intervals, while a smaller portion of this elevation on its northern and southern ends are clad in stucco.

The second floor of the east elevation is also clad in stucco, with two, three-part window bays, each bay containing a central fixed-frame vinyl window and two double-hung frame vinyl windows, with wood trim. The hip roof over each bay is clad in Spanish tile, while decorative cast plaster swags are located in the spandrel areas beneath each window. Two carved wood brackets can be found beneath the northernmost of the two bays. A smaller double-hung vinyl frame window can also be found on this elevation. The flat roof parapet consists of two rows of turned wood balusters, each row centered above the window bays, with a recessed portion of the parapet between them. A large steel frame sign with metal-ceramic panels and electric neon lighting about 35 feet wide and about 20 feet tall is located on the roof directly above this portion of the east elevation. The elevated roof sign reads "Italian Food" above "BERTOLUCCI'S" in larger, capitalized lettering.

The side (north) elevation facing Lux Avenue is a two-story volume clad in stucco, with four sets of paired, arched niches located toward the eastern end of this elevation on the ground floor. Three aluminum frame sliding windows covered by metal security grills and a wood framed utility door can be found toward the western end of this elevation. The second floor of this northern elevation is also clad in stucco, with a three-part bay on the far eastern end similar in design and materials to the bay on the northern elevation, with fixed and double-hung vinyl frame windows with a Spanish tile clad roof, and decorative cast plaster swags at the spandrel areas beneath each window. Two carved

wood brackets can also be found beneath this bay. Centered directly above the bay is a flat parapet with a single row of turned wood balusters, while the remainder of the parapet is lower and lacks this decorative element. The remainder of this second floor elevation contains a row of seven fixed and double-hung vinyl frame windows with wood trim. Decorative cast plaster swags are located directly above each of these windows.

The side (south) elevation facing Tamarak Lane is a single-story volume with flat roof and a combination of stucco cladding and painted concrete block walls. The eastern end of this elevation is clad in stucco and has three pairs of arched niches, niche with painted with scenes of Italy. A secondary (side) entrance can be found on this elevation as well, consisting of paired arched entryways covered by a decorative metal security grill. Projecting from the western end of this elevation is a two-car garage constructed of concrete block with a metal roll-up door. Off-street parking for four automobiles can also be found along this elevation. Both the off-street and on-street parking is accessed from Tamarak Lane. The second floor of the south elevation of the former Liberty Hotel is clad in stucco and has a row of double-hung vinyl sash windows with pipe and fabric awnings over them. Painted on this elevation are the words "Liberty Hotel."

The rear (west) elevation is a one- and two-story volume with a flat roof clad in stucco and painted concrete block walls. This rear elevation lacks fenestration, except for a rear entrance to the restaurant accessed through a metal security gate providing entry into an interior vestibule and courtyard. Located further to the west is a large surface parking lot surrounded by chain link fencing on its northern and southern boundaries. Access to this parking lot is gained from sliding gates located at Lux Avenue on the north, and Tamarak Lane on the south.

The subject property exhibits a mixture of styles based on the time periods in which they were built or expanded. The ground floor of the building is primarily Modern in style, with minimal references to the Spanish Revival style of architecture with its rows of arched niches on its northern and southern ends. The second floor of the building on the northeast corner of Cypress and Lux avenues is Spanish Revival in style, with its three-part bays, Spanish tile roof cladding, decorative plaster swags, and turned wood balustrade parapet.

## Visible Alterations

Visible alterations to the former 1920s-era, Spanish Revival style Liberty Hotel at the northeast corner of Cypress and Lux avenues are most apparent at the ground floor, where most of the fenestration was in-filled and reclad in stucco siding as a result of restaurant expansion and remodeling efforts, most of which were installed in the early 1970s. Alterations to the second floor of this portion of the building include replacement window frames with vinyl units, which appear to have occurred within the last 30 years. Other visible alterations include two major additions which occurred in 1962 and 1972 to the south of the former Liberty Hotel which in-filled the remainder of the lot with commercial restaurant uses. The most visible alteration to the former Liberty Hotel, however, is the large, steel frame neon sign that was added to the roof in phases between 1962 and 1967.



*Figure 1. East and partial north elevation, view looking southwest from Cypress and Lux avenues. Bertolucci's Restaurant on the ground floor, with residences above.*



*Figure 2. Partial east elevation, view looking northwest from Cypress Avenue*





*Figure 3. Detail view of entrance to Bertolucci's Restaurant on east elevation, view looking west across Cypress Avenue*



*Figure 4. Partial north elevation, view looking south across Lux Avenue.*



*Figure 5. North and partial west elevation, view looking southeast across Lux Avenue.*



*Figure 6. Partial south elevation, view looking north, showing secondary restaurant entrance on the left.*





*Figure 7. Partial south elevation, view looking northwest, showing garage addition.*



*Figure 8. West and partial south elevations, view looking northeast. Rear parking lot at lower left, Tamarak Lane in foreground.*



*Figure 9. Rear parking lot, view looking northwest.*



*Figure 10. Context view of Cypress Avenue and Tamarack Lane, view looking southeast towards new residential construction.*



*Figure 11. Context view of Cypress Avenue, view looking northeast towards new residential construction.*



*Figure 12. Context view of the intersection of Cypress and Lux avenues, showing residential buildings opposite Lux Avenue from subject property, view looking northwest.*





*Figure 13. Context view of residences across Lux Avenue from the subject property, view looking northwest*



*Figure 14. Context view of the intersection of Cypress and Lux avenues, showing commercial buildings diagonally across from subject property, view looking northeast*

### 3. Historic Context

#### History of South San Francisco

Except where noted, the following history of the City of South San Francisco has been excerpted and summarized from a number of historical articles available on the City's website.<sup>1</sup>

Once the home of the Ohlone Indians, also known as Costanoan, for thousands of years, the area that is currently the Northern Peninsula of San Francisco was part of a 14,000-acre Mexican-era land grant known as *Rancho Buri Buri*, which was granted to Don Jose Antonio Sanchez in 1835. His son and heir, Astro Sanchez, sold over 1,400 acres to Alfred Edmondson in 1853, who resold the same acreage to Charles Lux (1823-1887), an immigrant butcher, in 1856. Lux used the land to graze and fatten cattle before herds were driven to San Francisco via El Camino Real. Lux built his family a beautiful country home on his property and named the area Baden. In 1858, Lux partnered with Henry Miller (1827-1916), another successful immigrant butcher, to buy land and sell beef during the California Gold Rush. The two became wealthy land barons and later organized the Pacific Live Stock Company. In 1890, after Lux's death, his heirs sold the land to Peter Iler of Omaha, who was representing meat packer Gustavus F. Swift. Swift selected South San Francisco as the site of his West Coast stockyard and market place, similar to his operations in Omaha, Nebraska, and Chicago, Illinois.

Swift aligned with several Chicago capitalists and formed two joint stock corporations: South San Francisco Land and Improvement Company, and the Western Meat Company. The Land and Improvement Company attracted other industries and workers to South San Francisco, which led to the city's growth and incorporation on September 19, 1908. Major industries continued to locate in South San Francisco in the 1910s and 1920s, including many new steel foundries and metal production industries, which were built near the new train yards and Bayshore Boulevard (later Airport Blvd.). These included Pacific Coast Steel (later Bethlehem Steel) established in 1910, Shaw Batcher Steel (later United States Steel) in 1913, and Enterprise Foundry in 1914. Other steel production companies included Doak Sheet Metal (1910), Meese and Gottfried Co., makers of elevating and conveying machines (1911), Pacific Car and Equipment, manufacturing train carriages (1911-28), California Curb Bar Co. (1916), American Corrugated Culvert Co. (1916-18), California Iron Works, a scrap yard (1917-29), and Edwards Wire Rope Co. (1916-81).

During this period American Marble and Mosaic (1913-43) imported many skilled marble workers for the quarries of Carrara, Italy. These workers joined the growing community of unskilled Italian, French, Portuguese, and Greek workers that had recently come to work in the steel and meat-packing plants.

By 1920, the population of South San Francisco had reached 2,420 residents. New housing filled in the area of north Linden Avenue, and Martin School and Siebecker Park were built for those

<sup>1</sup> *History of the City of South San Francisco*, available online at <https://www.ssf.net/our-city/about-south-san-francisco/history/historical-articles>, Accessed May 17, 2021.



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new families. Parkway Terrace was developing along Palm, Magnolia, Commercial, and upper Orange Avenues in the mid-1920's. Orange Avenue Park was built on former marshland, and Magnolia School was completed in 1928 next to earlier elementary school buildings on the corner of Magnolia and Grand Avenues. A new city hall was dedicated in November 1920, and the "Industrial City" sign was whitewashed on Sign Hill in 1923. The present 60-foot concrete letters were constructed in 1929. The Bayshore Highway, which linked San Francisco with San Jose, was completed through South San Francisco between 1924 and 1929, located along the alignment of present-day Airport Boulevard.

The major industries in South San Francisco continued to be meat packing and steel industries during this period. New steel-related industries that were established in the 1920s included Metal & Thermit (1920), Wildbery Bros. Refinery (1920-81), Specialty Wire Co. (1927-30), Michel & Pfeffer Iron Works (1929) and Western Metal Co. (1929). Other new industries included Fontana foods-Macaroni (1922), McClellan Orchids (1926), Barrett Co. (1927), Morrill Ink (1927) Gueren Bros. (1927), and Pacific Gas and Electric Co. (1929). By the end of the 1920s, South San Francisco had gained a reputation as a wild town, with gambling, liquor, and prostitution added to the mix of growing residential neighborhoods and expanded industrial businesses.

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought little industrial and residential growth to South San Francisco and across the nation, with many businesses laying off workers. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), started in 1935, and had the most visible effect on South San Francisco. WPA workers made improvements to Orange Park, removed dirt from surrounding hills for San Francisco Airport bay fill, and built a new Post Office on Linden Avenue in the late 1930s. The 1930s also saw the opening of the Baden Kennel Club, a greyhound racing track, which opened in 1933. The track helped many families who had lost work in the factories, but also brought controversy, as some residents were concerned about the betting and criminal element associated with race tracks. By 1937, the state outlawed greyhound racing, and the Baden Kennel Club closed.

South San Francisco entered the 1940s as a small industrial town of over 6,600. A new post office was completed in 1940, and the city established a Parks and Recreation Department in 1941. World War II brought enormous changes to the town and its industries. Some industries changed their production for the war effort. Western Pipe and Steel built ships for the duration, and Swift & Company packed meat for the troops overseas. Other industries cut back production because of wartime shortages. By the mid 1940s the town's population had doubled in size to over 12,000 residents, with an influx of shipyard workers creating a housing shortage. Four government housing projects were built for workers, the largest being Lindenville, housing 4,200 people in 720 units. New subdivisions started with Paradise Valley in the early 1940s, followed by Parkway Terrace, and spreading to the areas surrounding El Camino Real.

By 1950, South San Francisco population had grown to over 19,000 residents, making the 1940s the fastest growth period in the town's history, and transforming it from a small town to a suburban community. Many new residential subdivisions were added to South San Francisco in the 1950s, which helped to balance the community of industrial and residential areas. The 1950's

saw the construction of Highway 101 through South San Francisco, located to the east of and parallel to Bayshore Boulevard/Airport Boulevard, as well as a number of modern industrial parks established further to the east of Highway 101, including freight forwarding, various light industries, and other airport related businesses.

By 1960, the population of South San Francisco had doubled once again to over 38,000 residents, creating a shortage of elementary and high schools for the post-war baby boom. New schools completed in 1961 were Parkway Intermediate School, El Camino High School, Ponderosa Elementary School, and Serra Vista Elementary. In 1966 and 1967, Monte Verde School, Foxridge Elementary School, and Skyline Elementary School all were built. Oyster Point Marina was developed in 1962 as a yacht harbor by Healy Tibbets Construction Company, and the South San Francisco Produce Mart opened next to the Bayshore Freeway that same year.

There was a general slowdown of heavy industrial production in South San Francisco and across the nation during this time. Bethlehem Steel began closing departments and cutting back production, finally ceasing production completely in the 1970s. The old stock yard and Swift meat packing plant also ceased production. Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes Industrial Park was developed on the site of the plant, opening in 1967.

A new era for South San Francisco began in 1976 with the founding of Genentech by venture capitalist Robert Swanson and molecular biologist Dr. Herbert Boyer, earning South San Francisco the title of “Birthplace of Biotechnology,” thus attracting other biotech and pharmaceutical businesses to the area. The city celebrated its centennial in 2008.

## History of the Subject Property

Located just north of South San Francisco’s downtown ‘old town’ neighborhood, the subject property at 421 Cypress Avenue was undeveloped open space until the mid 1920s, when in c.1926, the Liberty Hotel, a two-story, 15-room boarding house with shared bathrooms and a ground floor restaurant was constructed. Like other boardinghouses which were constructed in the area in the 1920s, the Liberty Hotel was built primarily to house and feed workers employed in the local industries as the population of South San Francisco rapidly expanded during the first three decades of the Twentieth Century.

In 1928, the property was purchased by Joseph and Tisbe Bertolucci, who ran the boardinghouse and restaurant for the next several decades. The Liberty Hotel officially opened on July 22, 1928, specializing in ‘home cooking’ by two female cooks, with special chicken and ravioli dinners on Sundays.<sup>2</sup> Less than three months after opening, however, Joe Bertolucci was arrested for violating the Wright Act, which prevented the sale of alcohol during Prohibition, and was fined \$500.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “New Opening of Liberty Hotel & Restaurant,” *The Enterprise*, July 27, 1928.

<sup>3</sup> “Arrests,” *The Enterprise*, October 19, 1928.

Joseph Bertolucci was born in Duncan Mills, California, in 1896, and by 1920, he was married to Tisbe Maria Puccetti, who was born in the Tuscan town of Lucca, Italy, in 1897. The couple had three children in the 1920s; Irene (1922-1942), Lawrence “Larry,” (1924-2010), and Lola (1925-2021), all of whom were born in California.<sup>4</sup> The Bertolucci’s ran the Liberty Hotel, while Joseph tended bar and Tisbe “Mama” Bertolucci cooked family style meals for workers employed in the local steel industries, many of whom lived upstairs in the boardinghouse. Mama Bertolucci’s hearty, Italian style dishes inspired by her homeland of Tuscany, serving Chicken Toscana, Canelloni, Veal Piccata, and Eggplant Parmigiana, along with an array of traditional pastas, grew to be very popular with the workers. The center of activity was *Joe’s Blue Room*, located on the ground floor of the Liberty Hotel and accessed from the corner of Cypress and Lux avenues, where Mama Bertolucci served up her Italian cooking and Joe tended bar.<sup>5</sup> A photo of the northeast corner of the building, taken in 1928, is provided on **Figure 15**, while an undated photo of Joe and Mama Bertolucci is provided on **Figure 16** on the following page.



*Figure 15. Historic Photo of 421 Cypress Avenue, 1928. Source: from the collection of Bertolucci’s Ristorante/Peter Sodini*

<sup>4</sup> *Bertolucci Family Tree*, available online at: [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed May 18, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Lola and Larry Bertolucci, *History of Bertolucci’s Restaurant*, undated.



*Figure 16. Joe and Mama Bertolucci, undated. Source: The Independent Newspaper, April 6, 2004.*

The 1940 US Census identifies not only the entire Bertolucci family as residing at 421 Cypress Avenue, but also 13 boarders, all of whom were unmarried men between the ages of 28 and 50, and were employed as laborers primarily in the steel industries but also for the Swift meat packing company.<sup>6</sup>

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of South San Francisco, published in 1950, shows the two-story Liberty Hotel at the northeast corner of Cypress and Lux avenues, with a bar and restaurant on the corner, and a series of single-story structures attached to the south of the hotel, including a 'barbeque kitchen' and storage buildings, with an open area for parking comprising the remainder of the lot (see **Figure 17** on the following page).<sup>7</sup>

Two other boardinghouses existed in the immediate area at this time, one to the west on Lux Street named the Oxford Hotel, and another to the north along Cypress Street named the Industrial Hotel. A row of detached, single-family dwellings was located along Lux Avenue opposite the Liberty Hotel, and attached, single-story dwellings were located on Cypress Avenue opposite the property.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of the Census, 1940, 421 Cypress Avenue. Available online at [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed, May 18, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map published in 1925 shows no development on the subject property and very little in the immediate area. As such, that map is not reproduced in this report.

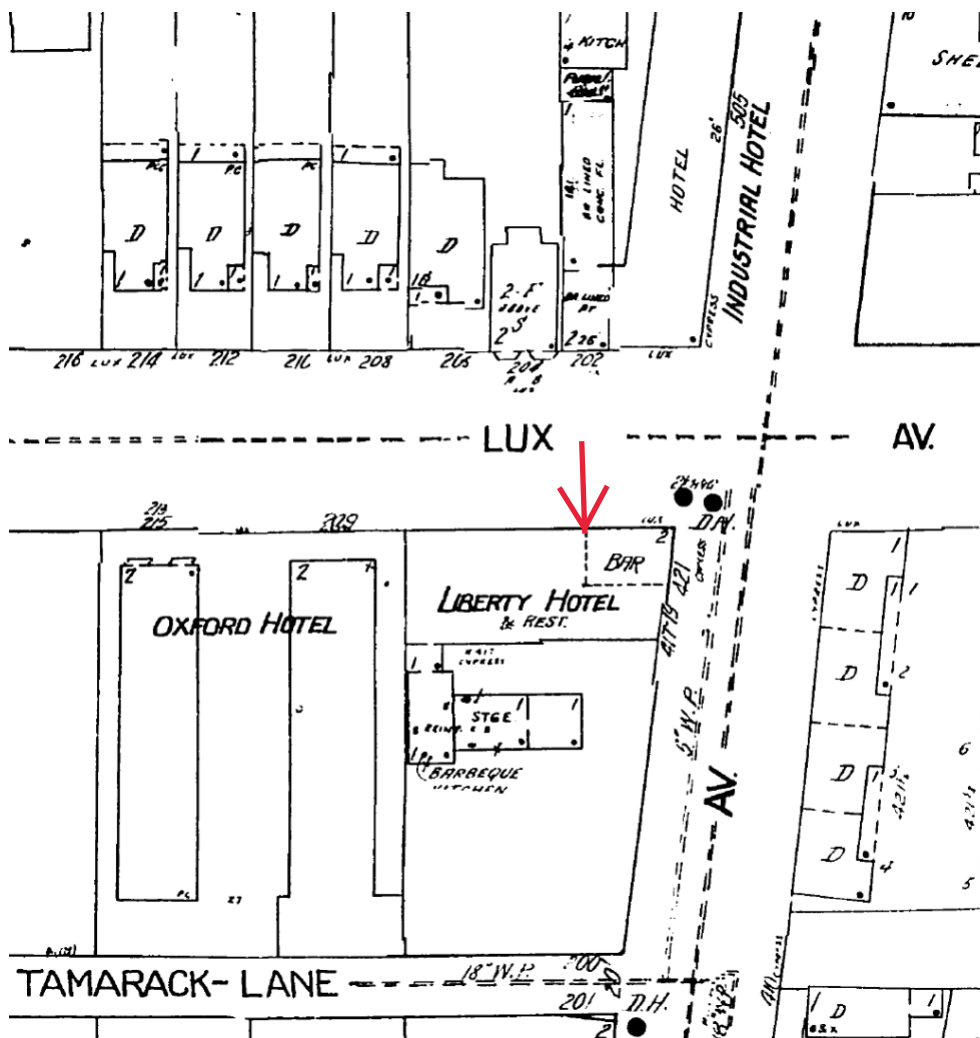


Figure 17. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1950. Former Liberty Hotel indicated with arrow.

Mama Bertolucci's hearty Italian cooking proved so popular with the local clientele that *Joe's Blue Room* could no longer accommodate the demand, so in 1962, Joe and Mama Bertolucci embarked on a major expansion of the dining room and bar. This expansion included an approximately 4,000 square foot, single-story addition to the south of the former Liberty Hotel, with numerous interior renovations to the ground floor of the former *Joe's Blue Room*. That same year, a large neon sign was added to the roof which was visible to motorists traveling on Airport Boulevard and Highway 101. It was at this time that *Joe's Blue Room* was renamed *Bertolucci's Restaurant*.<sup>8</sup> A detailed review of all available building permits from the City of South San Francisco is provided in **Table 1, Building Permit Information**, beginning on page 18.

<sup>8</sup> Lola and Larry Bertolucci, *History of Bertolucci's Restaurant*, undated.



Various other internal alterations and remodelings, as well as an expansion to the rooftop neon sign, occurred throughout the remainder of the 1960s. It was also around this time that the Bertolucci's purchased the two lots immediately west of the restaurant where the Orchard Hotel had been, and constructed a large parking lot at the rear of the building to replace and expand the parking that had once been located at the front of the lot along Cypress Avenue, but had to be relocated to accommodate the 1962 restaurant addition.

After the death of Joseph Bertolucci in 1969, Mama Bertolucci turned the business over to their children, Larry and Lola Bertolucci, who ran the restaurant for the next several decades. The popularity of the restaurant remained strong, providing the opportunity for yet another expansion. In 1972, new dining spaces and two new restrooms were added to the south and west of the building, nearly filling the entire street frontage along Cypress Avenue. The Modern design of the ground floor exterior along the Cypress Avenue elevation, with its flat roof, recessed entries, manufactured stone 'pebbledash' siding, decorative wood shutters, and repeating pairs of stuccoed arched niches, dates to this expansion effort from the early 1970s.

By this time the large Italian eatery had become a well-known establishment attracting diners not only from South San Francisco but throughout the Bay Area.<sup>9</sup> A review of newspaper articles from the South San Francisco Enterprise and Enterprise-Journal indicated that *Bertolucci's Restaurant* was also the site of numerous social events, including wedding receptions, wedding anniversaries, birthday parties, holiday parties, high school reunions, banquets, and luncheons, as well as occasional public meetings of the South San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and the South San Francisco City Council. Bertolucci's also occasionally provided free parking and bus transportation to 49ers football games held at nearby Candlestick Park to generate additional business before and after the games.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, the restaurant held a 75<sup>th</sup> birthday party for the former child star, Shirley Temple Black.<sup>11</sup>

Although Mama and Joe Bertolucci owned a home in Atherton, where Mama grew vegetables and fruit, Mama preferred to live above the restaurant to be closer to the business.<sup>12</sup> Mama Bertolucci died in 1990 at the age of 93, while Larry and Lola Bertolucci continued to operate the restaurant in the Italian tradition until 2003 when they retired. After 76 years of continuous operation, *Bertolucci's Restaurant* closed in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

In 2005, the building was purchased by Peter Sodini, who grew up working for his father's baker in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, and had fond memories of delivering bread to Bertolucci's.<sup>14</sup> Sodini had established Golden Boy Pizza in 1978, as well as Green Valley Restaurant in 1992, both in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood. Sodini remodeled the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Various articles, *South San Francisco Enterprise-Journal*, 1950 – 1990. Available online at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com). Accessed May 18, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> "Bertolucci's Restaurant," *South San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, Newsletter*, article by Evelyn Martin, 2010. Provided by the South San Francisco Historical Society.

<sup>12</sup> South San Francisco Historical Society, *Tisbe (Mama) Bertolucci (1886-1990)*, undated.

<sup>13</sup> "Bertolucci's Says Goodbye," *The Independent*, April 6, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> *History of Bertolucci's Restaurant*, available online at <https://sodinisbertoluccis.com/history>, Accessed May 18, 2021.

interior of the restaurant and bar while keeping its original style, and *Bertolucci's Ristorante* reopened on December 5, 2005.<sup>15</sup> Sodini operated the restaurant and bar until early 2020, after which operations ceased due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, and has remained closed since this time.

## Building Permits

A review of building permits available at the City of South San Francisco Department of Economic and Community Development identified 22 building permits that were issued for the subject property from 1945 to 2019, with the vast majority of them granted between 1962 and 1972 for the various expansions, remodelings, and signage placement which occurred during this period (see **Table 1, Building Permit Information**). Unfortunately, the original building permit for the c.1926 Liberty Hotel was not available. **Table 1** does not include the many electrical permits or building inspection permits that were granted. Finally, two building permits dated 1988 and 1989 provided by the City were illegible, and therefore are not listed in the table.

**TABLE 1  
BUILDING PERMIT INFORMATION**

Date	Permit No.	Description/Cost/Builder (if identified)
4/5/1945	A1859	12' X 13' storage room addition
10/22/1946	A2830	Alteration to the front of building
10/15/1952	A7197	14' X 22' garage addition
4/26/1956	00361	22' X 25' garage addition next to existing garage/\$1,250/built by owner
4/11/1961	03899	21' X 26' concrete block building addition/\$3,000/ J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors
2/4/1962	04280	4,140 sq ft addition to building for restaurant and bar/\$90,000/J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors
10/18/1962	04824	Construction of a walk-in cooler for restaurant/\$1,600/GE Lundberg Co.
6/20/1962	04539	Erection of a 6' X 33' illuminated sign 16' above roof/\$1,300/QRS Neon Sign Co.
7/15/1964	06277	Erection of a 2-sided sign 3' X 6' each section on SE area of roof/\$500/Apex Neon Sign Co.
10/11/1966	08373	Removal of partitions to expand bar area/\$2,500/William Botieff, Contractor
10/4/1967	09219	Erect 3' X 3' single face sign to SE side of building/\$150/ QRS Neon Sign Co.
11/6/1967	09299	Addition to existing electric neon sign and one new sign/\$650/QRS Neon Sign Co.
11/12/1968	10201	Interior alteration to add additional dining area/\$15,000/J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors
6/18/1970	11923	9' X 12' addition to house ice maker/\$1,000/J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors
1/13/1971	12541	Kitchen remodel and new windows/\$6,000/J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors
10/16/1972	15033	1,620 sq. ft addition to bar & lounge/\$22,000/J. Ragni & Sons, Contractors

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

9/1/2005	F05-1693	New hood and duct system – chemical fire suppression
9/12/2005	B05-1515	Reroof
9/12/2005	B05-1517	Remove & replace 3 HVAC units (rooftop)
9/9/2008	B08-1177	Reroof - modified bitumen
5/30/2014	E14-0125	Install new clean out and sidewalk
5/7/2019	B19-0704	New Golden Boy Pizzeria – remove 700 sq. ft. of sitting area

SOURCE: City of South San Francisco, Department of Economic and Community Development, *Building Permit History*, 421 Cypress Avenue, May, 2021.

## 4. Architect/Designer/Builder

As no original building permits or plans for the subject property from the mid-1920s are available, it is unknown whether the former Liberty Hotel was designed by a particular architect or built by a particular builder. The first permit to identify a designer or builder was in 1956, when a permit was granted for a garage addition that was built by the owner, Joseph Bertolucci. All the major additions to the property, including the 1962 and 1972 additions to the restaurant and bar, were built by J. Ragni & Sons, a general contracting firm based in Daly City. No architects were named in any of these permits. The rooftop neon sign was designed and built in two phases in the 1960s by QRS Neon Sign Company of San Francisco.

## 5. California Register Significance Evaluation

The following provides an evaluation of the subject property for its potential individual significance for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) by applying criteria A/1 through D/4.

### Evaluation of Individual Significance

#### Criterion A/1 (Associations with Historic Events)

There is little information found as a result of this HRE to indicate that the subject property at 421 Cypress Avenue in South San Francisco is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States from an individual standpoint. Originally built in c.1926 as a two-story boardinghouse with a ground floor restaurant, the former Liberty Hotel was constructed during a period of rapid growth of the City of South San Francisco as many laborers were drawn to the city for employment in the growing industries such as steel manufacturing and meat packing during the first three decades of the Twentieth Century. Later expansions of *Bertolucci's Restaurant* after World War II, and particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, reflected not only the rapid commercial and residential growth of the City of South San Francisco and the Bay Area in general during this period, but also by the popularity of the restaurant itself, which featured a hearty, family style Italian menu. While *Bertolucci's Restaurant* was certainly a locally well-known and long-lasting establishment, the business would be considered a more typical reflection

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of commercial growth in the city and region that catered to particular local tastes, rather than one that would be considered historically significant on an individual level. There is little information to indicate that the operation of a large-scale Italian restaurant and bar at the subject property would be considered uniquely important in the commercial or economic history of the City of South San Francisco or the State of California. Rather, the construction, expansion, and long-term operation of the business appears to be more typical of commercial development in this location on the San Francisco Peninsula near Airport Boulevard and Highway 101 during the post-war period. Finally, no mention of *Bertolucci's Restaurant* is made in any of the written histories of provided by the City of South San Francisco, the City of South San Francisco General Plan, or is identified as one of the City's landmarks or historical sites. For these reasons, the subject property at 421 Cypress Avenue does not appear eligible for listing under Criterion A/1 as an individual resource.

### **Criterion B/2 (Associations with Historic Persons)**

There is little information found as a result of this HRE to indicate that the building at 421 Cypress Avenue is directly associated with persons important to local or state history. The property is primarily associated with Joe and Tisbe "Mama" Bertolucci, and secondarily with their children, Larry and Lola Bertolucci, who collectively owned and operated the business from 1928 until 2004, some 76 years. While the Bertolucci family members were relatively well known in South San Francisco for their long-term ownership and operation of *Bertolucci's Restaurant*, and Mama Bertolucci, in particular, was well-known for her hearty Italian cooking, the couple would be considered more typical members of the city's business and civic community rather than ones who were particularly or uniquely important to local or state history to the extent that the property would be considered individually eligible for listing under this criterion. While the long-term ownership and management of the restaurant by two generations of the same family is somewhat rare, but is not entirely unheard-of, where multigenerational ownership and management of family-run businesses, and particularly restaurants serving ethnic cuisine, does occur with some frequency in the Bay Area. For these reasons, the subject property at 421 Cypress Avenue does not appear eligible for listing under Criterion B/2 as an individual resource.

### **Criterion C/3 (Architecture and Design)**

There is little information found as a result of this HRE to indicate that the property at 421 Cypress Avenue would be individually significant for its architecture, as expressed by intact stylistic features, forms, or construction methods. The subject property exhibits a mixture of architectural styles based on the time periods in which they were built or expanded. The subject property was completed in c.1926 in a Spanish Revival style of architecture, as exhibited by its three-part bays, Spanish tile roof cladding, decorative plaster swags, and turned wood balustrade parapet which remain evident on the north and east elevations of the second floor. The property was expanded multiple times between 1945 and 1972 which resulted in a more Modern style of architecture, particularly on the east elevation facing Cypress Avenue, exhibited by its flat roof, recessed entries, manufactured stone 'pebbledash' siding, and decorative wood shutters placed at regular intervals. Portions of the north and south elevations also have minimal references to the

Spanish Revival style of architecture with its repeating pairs of stuccoed arched niches, all of which were added in the early 1970s. These later additions and alterations resulted in the loss of the materials and fenestration of the original ground floor elevations of the Spanish Revival style building at the corner of Cypress and Lux avenues, which has reduced its integrity. The addition of the large rooftop sign in the 1960s has also reduced the integrity of the original Spanish Revival style of this building. The rear (west) and side (south) elevations with its concrete block walls and nearly windowless facades exhibit a more utilitarian design.

Due to the many additions and alterations which occurred during the post-war period, the subject building would not be considered the embodiment of either the Spanish Revival or Modern styles of architecture, but rather a more typical or standard application of these styles for a commercial restaurant constructed during this period on the San Francisco Peninsula, nor would it be considered a particularly good example of an eclectic mixture of styles. The large neon sign on the roof of the building was once a visible landmark for motorists traveling on Airport Boulevard and Highway 101, but is now obscured from these public views by recent construction of a seven-story, multi-family apartment building immediately east from the subject property. The alteration of the setting has eliminated the original purpose of the sign, which in turn has reduced its integrity as an individual feature.

As no records exist of the building's original construction in c.1926, it is unknown whether it was designed by a particular architect or built by a particular builder. The first records to identify a designer or builder was in 1956, when a permit was granted for a garage addition that was built by the owner, Joseph Bertolucci. All the major additions to the property, including the 1962 and 1972 additions to the restaurant and bar, were built by J. Ragni & Sons, a general contracting firm based in Daly City. No architects were named in any of these permits. The rooftop neon sign was designed and built by QRS Neon Sign Company of San Francisco. Research has not revealed either firm to be considered master builders or designers. For these reasons, the property at 421 Cypress Avenue would not be considered individually eligible for listing under Criterion C/3.

### **Criterion D/4 (Information Potential)**

Criterion D/4 refers to a property's information and research potential in terms of its historic or prehistoric values. There is no information found as a result of this HRE to indicate that the subject property would yield information important to history or prehistory, or is an example of a particularly rare construction type.

## **6. Conclusion**

Although the property at 421 Cypress Avenue meets the minimum age threshold for potential eligibility, it does not appear to be individually eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources because it does not meet any of the criteria required for a finding of individual historic significance. Because the building would not meet the definition as a 'historical resource,' its potential demolition and replacement with a multi-family development would not be considered a significant impact under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).



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## 7. References

*Bertolucci Family Tree*, available online at: [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed May 19, 2021.

City of South San Francisco, Economic and Community Development Department, *Building Permit History*, 421 Cypress Avenue, May, 2021.

Historic Aerials by Netronline, 421 Cypress Avenue, available online at: <https://www.historicaerials.com>, Accessed May 19, 2021.

*History of the City of South San Francisco*, available online at <https://www.ssf.net/our-city/about-south-san-francisco/history/historical-articles>, Accessed May 17, 2021.

*History of Bertolucci's Restaurant*, available online at <https://sodinisbertoluccis.com/history>, Accessed May 18, 2021.

Lola and Larry Bertolucci, *History of Bertolucci's Restaurant*, undated.

South San Francisco Historical Society, Tisbe (Mama) Bertolucci (1886-1990), undated.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, *South San Francisco*, 1950.

US Department of the Census, 1940, 421 Cypress Avenue. Available online at [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed, May 18, 2021.

### Newspaper Articles or Advertisements

Various articles regarding *Bertolucci's Restaurant*, *South San Francisco Enterprise-Journal*, 1950 – 1990. Available online at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com), Accessed May 18, 2021.

“New Opening of Liberty Hotel & Restaurant,” *The Enterprise*, July 27, 1928.

“Arrests,” *The Enterprise*, October 19, 1928.

“Bertolucci's Says Goodbye,” *The Independent*, April 6, 2004.

“Bertolucci's Restaurant,” *South San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, Newsletter*, article by Evelyn Martin, 2010. Provided by the South San Francisco Historical Society.

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## **APPENDIX A**

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### **Preparer's Qualifications**

## W. Brad Brewster

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141 Pierce Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117  
(415) 519-0254  
email: brad.brewster@brewsterpreservation.com

### SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Brewster Historic Preservation, San Francisco, CA  
*Principal and Founder*

*January 2017 - Present*

- Consulting architectural historian and preservation planner, preparing historic architectural evaluations and multi-property surveys under CEQA and NEPA/Section 106 for public and private clients in the Bay Area.

Environmental Science Associates (ESA), San Francisco, CA  
*Senior Architectural Historian, Manager*

*September 2004- August 2016*

- ESA's Senior Architectural Historian and Manager within the Bay Area Cultural Resources Group
- Specializing in historic architectural resource surveys and evaluations under CEQA and NEPA/Section 106
- HABS/HAER documentation specialist
- Significant marketing goals and management responsibilities

Carey & Co. Inc., Architects, San Francisco, CA  
*Senior Project Manager, Preservation Planning*

*February 2003 – September 2004*

- Senior Project Manager for historic preservation products under CEQA and NEPA
- Specializing in historic building surveys and evaluations, as well as cultural resource sections under CEQA and NEPA/Section 106
- Experience with implementing mitigation measures, such as historic documentation (HABS/HAER) and public interpretation efforts
- Experience managing architects, architectural historians and materials conservators
- Significant marketing responsibilities

EIP Associates, San Francisco, CA  
*Senior Project Manager, Environmental Planning*

*March 2001 - February 2003*

- Senior Project Manager for environmental review documents under CEQA and NEPA
- Specializing in EIRs for large and complex urban in-fill projects in San Francisco and the Bay Area
- Experienced in managing large project teams with numerous subconsultants and accelerated schedules
- Specific expertise in historic-architectural resources
- Extensive marketing experience, including managing and writing proposals, attending interviews

EDAW, Inc. San Francisco, CA and Seattle, WA  
*Project Manager, Environmental Planning*

*July 1996 – January 2001*

- Managed numerous EIRs under CEQA for various municipalities and private developers, as well as EISs under NEPA for various federal agencies (DoD, BLM, FERC, etc.)
- Specializing in historic architectural resource surveys and management/treatment plans, Section 106 review
- Directly involved with proposal writing and other major marketing efforts

## W. Brad Brewster

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The Bentley Company, Moffett Field, CA  
*Environmental Planner*

*March 1993 – June 1994*

- Contract Planner for NASA Ames Research Center (now NASA Research Park) at the former Moffett Naval Air Station
- Co-author of the *Moffett Field Comprehensive Use Plan* to guide NASA development at Moffett Field

Brady and Associates (now LSA), Berkeley, CA  
*Environmental Planner*

*July 1992 – March 1993*

- Contributed significantly to numerous Initial Studies and EIRs for California cities and counties
- Wrote various general plan elements for California communities

## EDUCATION

1994- 1996	Master of Urban Design and Planning, with Certificates in Urban Design and Historic Preservation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
1987-1992	Bachelor of Science in City and Regional Planning California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA

## AFFILIATIONS

California Preservation Foundation (CPF)  
National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP)  
Society of Architectural Historians (SAH)