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The role of federal disaster relief assistance to local communities for historic preservation

JORGE ALFARO [¶]

Immediately after the 17 October 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, the City and County of San Francisco began the preparation of a local bond proposal which would give San Franciscans the opportunity to recover from the earthquake damage to city-owned buildings much quicker than other surrounding communities. In June 1990, the voters of San Francisco passed a US\$332.4 million General Obligation Bond Issue to fund the repair of city-owned buildings and seismically upgrade some of them in preparation for the next major earthquake.

The effort of putting together and passing bond proposals for the seismic upgrade of city buildings was nothing new to San Francisco. In 1987 and 1989, two separate bond proposals had already funded the seismic upgrade of police stations, fire stations, museums and hospital infrastructure facilities. Later on, in 1992 and 1994, two other bond proposals were approved for the seismic upgrade of more fire stations and one museum. All these funding commitments by the voters made San Francisco a leader in preserving the heritage of public infrastructure built in the early part of the century. Thus, when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California's Office of Emergency Services entered the picture after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, the City was ready to move on with the repair and upgrade projects.

[¶] Chief of Staff, Department of Public Works, San Francisco, California, CA 94102, USA



Figure 6.1. The historic school building at Merizio, Guam, severely damaged during Typhoon Ross in September 1992. The lack of funding to restore the structure saw the continued decay of a historically significant building. (Photo: Dirk Spennemann 1994).

The City's relationship with FEMA and the Office of Emergency Services during the recovery period was collaborative as well as typically bureaucratic. A massive paper trail was needed to keep hundreds of projects on target with a high rate of success unforeseen in prior disaster recovery efforts. Two good examples of the collaborative effort between FEMA & Office of Emergency Services and San Francisco for the preservation of historic structures were the US\$3.1 million seismic upgrade of the 1895 Spreckels Temple of Music in Golden Gate Park and the US\$24 million seismic upgrade and expansion of the 1924 Palace of the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park.

The Bureau of Architecture of the Department of Public Works designed and managed the Spreckels Temple of Music project. Page and Trumbull did initial preservation feasibility studies while Carcy and Company provided consultation to the Bureau of Architecture during design and construction. The project required the complete realignment of colonnades while reinforcing the main central structure. What was unique about this project, besides being the recipient of multiple awards, was that FEMA & Office of Emergency Services reimbursed the City for almost 100% of the project costs and the building was restored in time for its centennial celebration.

Barnes and Cavagnero designed and oversaw construction of the Palace of the Legion of Honor project. As opposed to the Spreckels project, given the fact that the Loma Prieta damage was limited to cracks in concrete beams, scagliola-finished stairways and the displacement of sixteen marble non-structural columns, FEMA & Office of Emergency

Services only funded approximately 1% of the cost of construction. Nevertheless, there was high level of scrutiny by State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), FEMA and the Office of Emergency Services of the entire upgrade and expansion 'undertaking' even though Federal disaster assistance was very minimal. In the end, the building was restored and expanded within SHPO's guidelines and its re-opening was a big success from every viewpoint.

In summary, regardless of FEMA & Office of Emergency Services funding commitments following a natural disaster, local communities have an obligation to take the lead in procuring for themselves the resources needed to preserve the cultural heritage and protect historically significant public buildings. In addition, historic buildings should be preserved not to become museum pieces in the urban landscape, but to be enriched by human activity and purpose. In San Francisco's case, every building which is preserved is being used to its fullest and will continue to do so for the next century. Together with the community, the Bureau of Architecture makes every effort to preserve San Francisco's character and its historic civic architecture for the 21st century.



Figure 6.2. The historic school building at Merizio, Guam, severely damaged during Typhoon Ross in September 1992. Note the decay at left brought about by the loss of the roof and subsequent exposure to tropical sun and rain. (Photo: Dirk Spennemann 1994).



Figure 6.3. Mission Kampanayun Malessu at Merizio, Guam, severely damaged by an earthquake which occurred during Typhoon Ross in September 1992. The lack of funding to restore the structure and the wind-damaged roof saw the continued decay of a historically significant building. (Photo: Dirk Spennemann 1994).