

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Sinton House
other names/site number Lanza House



2. Location

street & number 1020 Francisco Street
city or town San Francisco
state California code CA county San Francisco code 075 zip code 91409

| | |
|-----|---------------------|
| N/A | not for publication |
| N/A | vicinity |

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ 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 ___ 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 ___ local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

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 _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

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

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 2 | | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 2 | | Total |

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL/
Italian Renaissance

foundation: Concrete
walls: Stucco

roof: Asphalt
other: Wrought Iron

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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

Located on a .1-acre parcel on Russian Hill overlooking San Francisco Bay, the Sinton house, completed in 1927 and altered in 1955, is a 30-by-52-foot, two-story-with-basement-and-penthouse residence in the Italian Renaissance style. Significant features include stucco-clad walls scored to resemble erusticated masonry blocks of differing widths and heights, a flat roof with a continuous projecting boxed cornice, and casement windows and French doors opening out onto wrought-iron balconies. The house is in excellent condition, but the original appearance of the front elevation was altered somewhat during its period of significance by the replacement of divided-light windows with solid glazing and the removal of a few classical decorative stucco elements. The introduction of a subterranean garage occurred after the residence's period of significance. At the rear of the property is a three-level secondary building, originally constructed as a garage. Also in excellent condition, it is a frame-and-stucco building following the design vocabulary of the main house. In terms of integrity, the Sinton house has retained its original location and setting. The blend of materials, workmanship, feeling, and association of both periods of significance has remained largely intact since 1955.

Narrative Description

The four-bedroom, three-bathroom, 4,275 square-foot residence in the Italian Renaissance style measures approximately 30 by 52 feet. The house has a concrete foundation, wood-frame walls clad in stucco, and a flat roof covered in composition material. There is a hipped parapet and a continuous projecting boxed cornice where the roof-plane meets the house. The stucco on the walls has been scored to resemble erusticated masonry blocks, the courses alternating between shorter and taller heights and arranged in a stretcher bond pattern. Most windows are casements and, along with French doors, are arranged singly or in pairs.

The entrance to the house is positioned at the easterly end of the southerlyⁱ (front) façade. The front porch is deeply recessed behind an arched opening approached by a flight of eight marble treads and risers with a metal hand-rail at each side. The industrial-style door consists of five joined metal plates. On the east wall of the porch are two arched niches designed to hold plants or statuary. To the west of the entrance on the front façade a set of French doors occupies an arched opening and is flanked by single-light casement windows, similarly arched. All three openings have solid glass transoms. The central set of French doors opens out to a wrought-iron balcony with a decorative motif of four thin horizontal rods mixed with vertical rods in an opposing arch pattern. The balcony is supported by three highly-filigreed brackets. Due to current building codes and safety considerations, the balcony railing was raised at some point by the installation of additional horizontal rods fashioned in a complementary but differentiated way. Below these openings is an entrance to a basement-level garage. Its newer tilt-up door is approached from the street by a steeply descending driveway. The paneled door is made of light weight aluminum material and has a row of four small Palladian windows along its top. The second floor of the front façade is symmetrical, with two sets of French doors with wrought-iron balconies on both ends and a small arched hopper window in the center. The transoms of the French doors are solid plaster. Where the roof-line meets the walls is a projecting boxed cornice with a parapet-hipped roof detail consisting of composition shingles. Just beneath this is a continuous wood fascia board on top of a stucco cornice molding displaying an egg and dart pattern.

The westerly and easterly sides of the house are mostly large expanses of wall, but scored in the same masonry pattern. The easterly wall is joined to the shorter house next door, but there is enough space above the roof-line of the other house for several rectangular windows on the second-floor level of the Sinton house. The westerly wall is separated from the neighboring residence by a narrow driveway and pedestrian path. There is a side entrance to the house and several rectangular windows along this façade.

ⁱ For the purposes of describing direction in the Narrative Description, the terms easterly, southerly etc., will be used as this accurately describes an intercardinal compass direction that is neither true east nor true south.

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Because of the building's hillside site, the northerly (rear) façade's basement level is fully accessible from the back garden, making this elevation three stories tall. A two story glass-walled projection is centered on this elevation. Its top forms a terrace for the rooms at the third-story level.

At the center of the roof is a one-room flat-roofed penthouse approached from the upper floor of the house by an enclosed outdoor staircase. Large vertically-oriented plate-glass windows occupy the penthouse walls, positioned to take advantage of the panoramic views to be had from this level of the house: a 180-degree vista of San Francisco Bay from the Golden Gate Bridge to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, with the tower of Ghirardelli Square prominent in the near distance. Surrounding the penthouse are outdoor seating areas.

At the rear of the parcel is a three-level secondary building measuring approximately 20 by 36 feet. It appears to be one-story when viewed from the south but, because of its hillside location, actually encompasses two stories and a basement. This building is accessed both via a driveway from the street and a serpentine concrete path among lush landscaping leading from the first floor of the house. Built originally in 1927 as a garage, it was converted into an art studio/office space, guest quarters, and a wine cellar, beginning in 1955. This building is basically in a simple two-car garage format that follows the design vocabulary of the main house. It has frame-and-stucco walls, a parapet-hipped roof (designed to emulate the Italian Renaissance style of the main house) covered in composition shingles on its front façade only, and wood multi-paned casement and fixed windows. The southerly (front) façade retains the original two-car garage door opening with four horizontal paneled metal elements. There is a matching four-paneled door on its easterly end which has a side-light to the immediate west. To the east of the door is a narrow three-paneled casement window. The rear of the building is dominated by a very large window, giving the office/studio a panoramic view of San Francisco Bay.

Due to the property's shallow minimal set-back, publicly viewable landscaping is minimal. Street-front landscaping includes a specimen pine tree (topped) and climbing ivy which canopies the main arched entrance. The vines cover the easterly upstairs balcony and the wrought-iron fencing that surrounds the front yard on three sides. The small open patch between the front door and driveway has ground-cover. There are also three olive trees which align the driveway. Rear landscaping includes a much more lush configuration. Among the features is an original concrete sloped and stepped serpentine path descending from the main house to the studio. Plantings include mature oak, elm and maple specimens. The garden itself is a landscaped bed including camellia, fern, calla lily, trumpet vine, agapanthus, bay laurel, bamboo, fuchsia, hydrangea, and pittosporum.

The area immediately surrounding the house is a mixed single-family and multiple-unit neighborhood. Most of the buildings are at least two stories in height and range in styles from English Tudor Revival to Contemporary.

Alterations:

The main house is in excellent condition but has undergone some renovations. The interior was completely changed from its 1927 appearance beginning in 1955 when living and dining rooms were relocated to the second floor and bedrooms were moved down to the first floor by architect William Wurster.ⁱⁱ Partitions were changed and most of the original interior finishes were removed. In 1971, the exterior of the house underwent its greatest and most significant modifications during the Sinton residency—changes that are still very evident on the front and side façades. A historic photograph from ca. 1968 (Figure 1) indicates the exterior had largely retained its 1927 appearance up to that point. In 1971, portions of the stucco were removed from the front wall of the house. The new stucco matched the original in design, color and materials, including erustication. In so doing, some ornamentation was removed, including: Corinthian-style pilasters and medallions between the first-story window openings and a classical molding below the sill of the hopper window. In addition, new glazing was installed in the existing openings. However, the new glazing was single-light in design which did not replicate the original divided lights in the windows, French doors, and transoms. Mrs. Sinton's children confirmed that their mother changed the glazing in the windows of the front elevation to have more light enter the house for better illumination of her art work.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1998, a subterranean garage was added to the westerly end of the front of the house which required the installation of a driveway and garage door at the basement level. That year's alterations also included the replacement of the original

ⁱⁱ City of San Francisco Building Permit No. 172870 issued 08/02/1955.

ⁱⁱⁱ City of San Francisco Building Permit No. 61368 issued 10/08/1971.

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front door with one of steel in a post-industrial style, the addition of rooms and glass-enclosed porches on the rear façade, and the widening of the window openings in the artist's studio/guest quarters.^{iv}

Integrity:

The exterior of the house remains largely as it was during the second period of significance. The location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association of the property are still intact with only minor alterations to the property as a whole and one intrusion (the garage). According to building permit records, except for the exterior replacement of the front door and the introduction of the garage, no further changes have been made to the front of the house since Mrs. Sinton lived there. Its overall integrity is such that Mrs. Sinton would recognize it forty years later because it retains its original erusticated façade elements; original window locations, size, shape and jams; its original marble entry stairs and niches; its original roof details of parapet fascia and molding elements; and the original wrought-iron details on the balconies and entrance hand rails. Although the exterior and interior show the alterations instituted by Mrs. Sinton, the building retains a high percentage of original exterior details and materials as well. The house now incorporates the feeling of an Italian Renaissance residence designed by the important Italian-American architect John Porporato for a prominent Italian-American family mixed with a modernization project by William Wilson Wurster reflecting the esthetic standards of an artist of the 1950s. The surrounding Russian Hill neighborhood retains much of its original setting.

Conclusion:

While the house has been altered, the minor changes were mainly instituted by Nell Sinton under consultation with architect William Wilson Wurster. With the exception of an intrusive addition of a subterranean garage and the modification of the front door, both done in 1998 after Sinton's residency, the house remains largely intact from its period of significance.

^{iv} City of San Francisco Building Permit No. 860496 issued 09/17/1998.

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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.)

- 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.
- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Art (Criterion B)

Architecture (Criterion C)

Period of Significance

1927;1955 (Criterion C)

1955-1981 (Criterion B)

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Sinton, Eleanor W.

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Porporato, John A.

Wurster, William W.

Lindberg, C.

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.

Period of Significance

The Sinton House is significant in the years 1927 and 1955 because of its association with two important architects: John (Giovanni) Porporato and William Wurster, respectively. In addition, the property is significant for its association with Nell Sinton from 1955 to 1981 during the time she created her most important works and established her career as a significant female artist.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Nell Sinton's significance as an artist continued to develop beyond 1961 into the 1970s. The culmination of her career occurred in 1981 with a 30-year retrospective exhibition.

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

The Sinton house is significant under National Register Criterion B at the local level of significance for its association with the artist Eleanor (Nell) W. Sinton as her residence for 44 years and the property in which she created some of her best-known works. Mrs. Sinton is recognized as one of California's earliest prominent female abstract expressionists and found national fame over the years for both her paintings and her later assemblages and collages. Criteria Consideration G: Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years applies because Nell Sinton's significance as an artist continued to develop beyond 1961 into the 1970s. The culmination of her career occurred in 1981 with a 30-year retrospective exhibition. She was also a major force in the promulgation and teaching of the arts in the Bay Area. The Sinton House was designed and built in 1927 and remodeled in 1955. It is significant under National Register Criterion C for its association with two noted architects: the original designer John (Giovanni) A. Porporato (1877-1965), a lifelong resident of San Francisco and a premier Italian-American designer; and William Wilson Wurster (1895-1973), an architect strongly associated with the regional contemporary styles of the Bay Area, who was responsible for the major interior alterations to the house in 1955 under Mrs. Sinton's direction. Porporato's distinctive architectural stylings engaged a classical vocabulary borrowing on the traditions of European architecture, particularly Italian Renaissance Revival. Each building type he produced notably displayed a highly resolved period revival rationale. Wurster's milieu, on the other hand, was to consider a holistic approach to the total built environment. The constraints of an interior rehabilitation of an Italian Renaissance Revival residence would neither preclude his architectural sensibilities nor confound them. His tempered methodology regarding the Sinton House rehabilitation conceded that the primary interior public spaces would be rearranged in order to maximize view, light, and circulation yet not betray the basic character-defining features of Porporato's work on the exterior. The totality of Wurster's approach to a then-modern rehabilitation of a period residence served not only as a precursor to his later essays in modernism, but was a model for blending the ideals of California living in the 1950s with those of an earlier era.

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

Criterion B:

In 1926, Anthony N. Lanza (1896-1986), a native of Italy, purchased the lot on Russian Hill from John A. Scannavino and commissioned San Francisco architect John A. Porporato to design a residence in an Italian Renaissance style. C. Lindberg was the builder. Lanza was in the real estate business. Living with him were his wife Tonina, his daughter Rose, and his son Francesco (Frank) Lanza, a fruit broker, and Frank's wife Catherine. The Lanzas later established the Lanza Wine Company on Washington Street in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, a center of Italian-American life at the time. The Lanza family occupied their Francisco Street home until 1943.

The next owner of the house was Marjorie Finocchio who shared it with her husband Joseph Finocchio. Mr. Finocchio (1897-1986), born in Italy, had a somewhat notorious reputation as owner of a female-impersonator nightclub located on Broadway. Between its founding in 1936 and its closing in 1999, Finocchio's became a North Beach institution, a favorite among tourists, attracting over 300,000 customers a year. Between 1950 and 1954, the house was owned by Herbert W. and Ethel M. Beck.

In 1954 Stanley Henry Sinton, Jr., and his wife Eleanor (Nell) Walter Sinton became the owners of the house. Eleanor Sinton, usually referred to by the nickname "Nell," was a member of one of San Francisco's prominent Jewish-American families who had been residents of the City since 1851. Born Eleanor Walter on June 4, 1910, she was the daughter of John I. Walter, a businessman and art patron, and Florence (Schwartz) Walter, who would become a bookbinder of international renown.^v Neither parent considered art (or for that matter any career) appropriate for a young lady of that era—marriage, a family, some civic involvement, and perhaps a hobby were all she should aspire to.^{vi}

Nell, who early on thought of herself as a rebel, received her earliest education at the Katherine D. Burke School, graduating in 1918. In 1922 she began cultivating her interest in art by attending Saturday morning classes at the San

^v Margot Sinton Biestman, conversation with authors, 8 June 2011.

^{vi} Social Development of an American Female, Duane Thompson, 1976, videotape.

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Francisco Art Institute (then called the California School of Fine Arts) which met at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. By 1925, she was attending full-time, studying under such well-known artists as Maurice Sterne, Spencer Mackay, Lucien Labaudt, and Ralph Stackpole.

Nell married Stanley Sinton Jr. in 1930. They would have two daughters and one son. Stanley Sinton, Jr. (1908-1982), a native of Boston, was the son of a stockbroker who had been born in San Francisco. A graduate of Yale, Sinton, Jr. was chairman of the board of the D. N. & E. Walter Company, a wholesale fabric and upholstery firm owned by his wife's family. He also served as president of the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR). He was remembered as a philanthropist and as a visionary in the movement for orderly development of the City.^{vii}

In the 1940s, Mrs. Sinton returned to the San Francisco Art Institute for further instruction with Maurice Sterne. By then, it had become the flourishing center of the local abstract expressionist movement. The era from 1949 to 1954, sometimes referred to as "the brilliant period," coincided with Mrs. Sinton's first recognized artistic creations. The first exhibits of her work occurred in 1947 at the Raymond & Raymond Gallery in San Francisco and at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. These were followed in the later 1940s and 1950s by exhibits of contemporary art at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Bolles Gallery of San Francisco and New York City in which she was one of just two women participants. The Bolles Gallery purchased some of Mrs. Sinton's pieces for its permanent collection. Other exhibits were mounted at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Stanford Research Institute, the Oakland Art Museum, the Vancouver Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York which gave her an award in 1956. In later years her work was seen at the Smithsonian Institution, the Chicago Art Institute, the National Museum of Women's Arts in Washington, DC, the Denver Museum, the American Academy of Arts in New York, the Los Angeles County Art Museum, the Claremont Colleges, the University of California at San Francisco, Louisiana State University, and the University of Illinois. Several of these exhibits focused on the Bay Area's emerging abstract expressionist movement and included not only works by Nell Sinton but by such artists as Richard Diebenkorn and Ralph DuCasse.^{viii}

It is no coincidence that Mrs. Sinton's impressionist artwork flourished in the 1950s. She had begun to embrace an independent spirit not only in her life but also in the type of dwelling that she preferred to live in. In 1952, family accounts indicate that Mrs. Sinton had been feeling "disquieted."^{ix} The early 1950s were a time of change as Mrs. Sinton found herself moving from the role of mother/socialite to "empty nester." Her rather cold, formidable Tudor Revival residence at 2520 Divisadero Street with no studio space was viewed as being "restrictive and archaic." She desired something more light and modern with expansive views that would surround her with a more positive environment.^x When the Sintons sold their Pacific Heights residence they left the august neighborhood of Pacific Heights for the somewhat more Bohemian-flavored Russian Hill.^{xi}

In 1959 Mrs. Sinton was acknowledged as one of the Ten Most Distinguished Bay Area Women and her work had been reviewed in such acclaimed publications as *ArtForum*. In addition to producing her art, Mrs. Sinton served from 1958 to 1963 on the San Francisco Art Commission (from which she was to receive an Award of Honor in 1984). Beginning in 1966 she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the San Francisco Art Institute, a position she held until her death. As one of the few practicing artists on the Board, she appears to have been particularly concerned with the welfare of the Institute's students. She not only contributed generously to the Institute, but, in fact, purchased the works of many of the students, believing in giving them a hand-up rather than charity. She also provided them space at her summer home at Lake Tahoe, in exchange for their helping out with such chores as housework and childcare for her grandchildren.^{xii} Mrs. Sinton went on to become San Francisco's leading female art patron, as well as an artist in her own right and mentor to several promising artists including Carlos Villa (1936 -).

In 1969, Mr. and Mrs. Sinton divorced. By all accounts, Mr. Sinton had always been supportive of his wife's work and "loved what she did."^{xiii} Mr. Sinton later re-married, Mrs. Sinton did not, devoting herself more fully to her art, and teaching

^{vii} Anne Bloomfield and Arthur Bloomfield, *Gables and Fables: A Portrait of San Francisco's Pacific Heights* (San Francisco, Bloomfield, 2007), page 158.

^{viii} Dr. Phil Linhares, conversation with authors, 9 May 2011.

^{ix} Biestman.

^x Biestman.

^{xi} Bloomfield, page 157.

^{xii} Ruth Braunstein, conversation with authors, 18 May 2011.

^{xiii} Braunstein.

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at various universities throughout the country as an artist-in-residence. It was a double pleasure for her to leave home and to teach at the university level which, due to family and societal pressures and responsibilities, she had never attended as a student.^{xiv}

Mrs. Sinton had two productive periods—abstract expressionist paintings in the 1950s and 1960s and constructionist feminist works and parodies beginning in the 1970s.^{xv} Mrs. Sinton began her career in the 1940s producing figurative family scenes and representational cityscapes but, by the 1950s, she had moved to abstract oils and watercolors. Using traditional pigments at first, by 1964 her preferred painting material was acrylic on canvas. She was considered to be a beautiful colorist. Some of her paintings included collages. Such works as “Vertical Landscape” (1958), “Orange Landscape” (1959), and “Mount Ida” (1964) incorporated bold colors and shifting shapes, while others, like “Greenhouse” (1961) were boldly defiant in their abstraction—a rare feature in women’s art at the time. In fact, works by women were largely ignored by the male-dominated art world of the 1960s, a fact brought to light by protesting groups of women, such as the “Guerilla Girls” who staged protests at art shows clad in gorilla masks. Though Mrs. Sinton helped finance some of these protest groups, the participants tended to be a generation younger.^{xvi} Mrs. Sinton’s female contemporaries, including Ruth Armer and Adaline Kent, were inclined to be much more conservative, their works less vibrant and issue-oriented than those of Nell Sinton. Mrs. Sinton was known for taking risks. Her work illustrated the powerful, dynamic, and vibrant qualities of her nature, as well as providing social commentary – very different from her colleagues. For example, her works documenting the social development of the American woman would include nudes of robust, overweight females meant as a parody of the “ideal” femininity embraced by the culture of the 1950s and ‘60s.

Later, collages, scrolls, boxes, and other constructions depicting varied subject matter, from the traditional figurative to almost surreal, dominated Mrs. Sinton’s work. Blending drawing, writing, and painting, they tended to be very expressive of her life experiences, not only her feelings of being ignored as a woman artist, but also the constant tension she felt between her wealthy art-patron family background and her desire to be recognized as an artist in her own right. Her scrolls could be as long as thirty feet, often telling longitudinal stories, such as “Under the Table at the Donner Party: A Dining Room Frieze” and “A Social Development of an American Female,” begun in 1974. In the 1970s Mrs. Sinton became known for her assemblages and boxes—containers filled with unusual ephemera that were positioned with “delicate harmony” and appealed to the “cross-harmony of different senses.” Her “Sterilizer” was a wood-and-glass orange cabinet containing cotton and other materials. When opened it exuded “the forgotten odor of an old-fashioned doctor’s office.” Sight and sound combined eerily in “Pyramid Lake”—a boxed rock that looked like a petrified brain accompanied by a music box playing “Swan Lake.” “It spoke of the closeness between high civilization and basic mythical impulse.”^{xvii}

According to Dr. Phil Linhares, Chief Curator of Art, The Oakland Museum of California, Nell Sinton’s later works “reflected current thinking on women’s liberation” and equaled or exceeded her earlier pieces in importance and quality. In his view, Mrs. Sinton was never an “old” person and always lived in the here and now. This made her a “very adaptable artist who did not settle on a particular image to define her work.”^{xviii}

Grace Morley, art critic and the first director (1934-1958) of the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, said of Sinton that “among artists of her own locality she is well-known and she has a sure place nationally. Her works speak directly to the sensitive viewer on their own terms. She is deeply receptive to the possibilities of her medium, for her art, whatever its style, has been marked by a sensitivity in which external stimulus for the work and the means of its execution have both played their part, along with her intimate feelings. She has been an innovator in her own development as an artist, very aware of the evolution of today’s art as represented in the work of her contemporaries. She has valued her own development, and is sympathetic to the movements of her time. It is the breadth of her personal curiosity and excitement that one feels strongly in reviewing Nell Sinton’s work through the years.”^{xix}

^{xiv} Biestman.

^{xv} Linhares.

^{xvi} Braunstein.

^{xvii} Henry Seldis, “A Critical Guide to the Galleries,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1972.

^{xviii} Linhares.

^{xix} Grace Morley, “Nell Sinton,” *Rehistoricizing the Time Around Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1950s-1960s*, San Francisco Museum of Art, http://www.rehistoricizing.org/nell_sinton (accessed 20 Feb. 2011).

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Many of Mrs. Sinton's later works are still owned by the family, but her earlier paintings occasionally come on the market. San Francisco was not a big collecting town in the early days of abstract expressionism and women's art was not commercially viable. However, Mrs. Sinton's work has experienced an increasing value and popularity as women's roles in the early abstract expressionist movement in San Francisco, in which she played an integral part, have become more recognized and appreciated in recent years.^{xx}

In the mid-1970s, Mrs. Sinton taught at the San Francisco Student League and at Oakland's Institute for Creative and Artistic Development and was an instructor in painting and drawing at the College of Marin. She also served as a guest artist and lecturer at the University of California at its Berkeley and Irvine campuses, the University of Hawaii, Mount Holyoke College, the University of Massachusetts, and Smith College. She was an art juror and a published art critic. Other institutions presenting her with awards included the De Young Museum (1956) and the Oakland Museum (1958 and 1961).

Mrs. Sinton's works are found in the permanent collections of the Quay Gallery, American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T), the University of California, Chase Manhattan Bank, Lytton Savings and Loan Association, and Mills College. In 1981, Mills College held a thirty-year retrospective of her work. Her own collections (which she began at the age of 18 and which filled her Francisco Street house) included Pre-Columbian pottery and contemporary American and European paintings and sculptures. She was an associate of Richard Diebenkorn and owned several of his works. They sometimes exchanged paintings.^{xxi}

Nell Sinton actively stopped producing art in 1995 according to family accounts. Her studio was used solely as her space to produce art. By the early 1990s she began to experience advanced dementia (Alzheimer's Disease) and stopped producing art methodically. Her last work, completed in 1995, a piece in which Sinton had lost the ability to draw perspective, is untitled and in family ownership.^{xxii}

Nell Sinton died on October 23, 1997 at the age of 87, having lived her entire life in San Francisco. An oral history, recorded in 1992, is in the collection of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Mrs. Sinton's papers and a shorter 1974 oral history are housed at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art.

The Sinton house has had three owners since the Sinton family sold it in 1998: the Poundstone Trust (Brad and Kristina Rotter) from 1998 to 2000; Todd and Diane A. Blake from 2000 to 2003; and the current owner Sonja Moelleken O'Brien since 2003. In 1998 the Rotters made the most recent changes to the exterior of the front façade: the addition of a subterranean garage and the replacement of the original front door. Other post-Sinton alterations included the addition of rooms and glass porches on the rear façade and the widening of window openings in the artist's studio/guest quarters.

Criterion C:

John A. Porporato (1877-1965), who early in his career used the first name Giovanni, was a fairly prolific Italian-American architect. A lifelong resident of San Francisco, he was often hired by residents of San Francisco's Italian community to design Mediterranean-inspired domestic and commercial buildings. After serving as a draftsman in the office of Maxwell G. Bugbee for two years, Porporato established his own practice on Pine Street in 1899. From 1927 until his death he lived with his wife Mary M. Porporato at 1938 Leavenworth. He had retired by the early 1960s. Besides the Lanza residence, some of his other works include the Porporato Mausoleum in Colma (1904), said to be the first indoor mausoleum in the United States; the Italian Athletic Club on Stockton Street (1936); and post-earthquake apartment buildings constructed throughout the city between 1906 and 1915, including rows of Mediterranean-inspired three-story bay-windowed flats on Union and Leavenworth Streets between the north and south slopes of Russian Hill. Porporato is perhaps best remembered for serving as the co-architect with Charles Fantoni of the landmark twin-spired St. Peter and Paul Church at 666 Filbert Street.

The original residence designed by Porporato for the Lanza family in an Italian Renaissance style displays overall traditional architectural elements expressed through preserved classic embellishments and materials. It represents the

^{xx} Braunstein.

^{xxi} Biestman.

^{xxii} Biestman.

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growing implementation of Mediterranean-inspired domestic architecture during the period revival movement of the 1920s which can be attributed in San Francisco to the social and economic emergence of the Italian-American community.

In 1955, Mr. and Mrs. Sinton engaged William Wurster of the San Francisco firm of Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, to make alterations to the interior of the property. Those changes established an internal reorganization of the living spaces within the structure, relocating the public rooms to the upper floors and the private rooms to the ground floor. The new interior space plan respected the exterior, but realigned the building's original interior sensibilities so that it could fill many purposes: a showcase for art, an entertainment space for entertaining artists and potential patrons, and a retreat for the developing career of Nell Sinton.

William Wilson Wurster (1895-1973), a native of Stockton, California, was strongly associated with the Bay Area and its regional style. He designed hundreds of residences in the 1920s through the 1940s (some of which are now considered prototypical ranch houses) before returning to academic training at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Between 1945 and 1950 he served as the dean of the architectural and planning school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1950, Wurster was named dean of the Architecture School of the University of California, Berkeley, where he served until his retirement in 1963. One of his accomplishments was the creation of the University's College of Environmental Design. Wurster Hall is named in his honor. He was elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1954 which awarded him a Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in 1969. Among Wurster's designs were Case Study House #3 in Los Angeles (1949), Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University (1954), and the campus plan for the University of Victoria in British Columbia (1962). Mrs. Sinton may have chosen Wurster as the architect for the alterations to her residence because she was familiar with his work as the designer of her mother's new home just a few streets away. Wurster would later create the adaptive reuse plan for Ghirardelli Square which Mrs. Sinton's house overlooks. One of William Wurster's contributions to California modern architecture was the introduction of humility. He always looked at the totality of a design, integrating architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning to create a total environment.

Porporato's distinctive architectural stylings engaged a classical vocabulary, borrowing on the traditions of European architecture, particularly Italian Renaissance Revival. His buildings tended to be richly ornamented, with arched openings, erusticated embellishments, parapet-hipped roofs with clay tiles and highly decorative brackets and other features. These distinctive characteristics are found among his surviving work in residential, commercial as well as institutional commissions. Each building type he produced notably displayed a highly resolved period revival rationale. Wurster's milieu, on the other hand, was to consider a holistic approach to the total built environment. The constraints of an interior rehabilitation of an Italian Renaissance Revival residence would neither preclude his architectural sensibilities nor confound them. His tempered methodology regarding the Sinton House rehabilitation conceded that the primary interior public spaces would be rearranged in order to maximize view, light, and circulation yet not betray the basic character-defining features of Porporato's work on the exterior. The totality of Wurster's approach to a then-modern rehabilitation of a period residence served not only as a precursor to his later essays in modernism, but was a model for blending the ideals of California living in the 1950s with those of an earlier era. In summary, Wurster's work on the Sinton house demonstrates a sensitive design framework that preserved architectural and esthetic values of the past while integrating into them a sensible, tempered approach to modern residential design.

The Sinton house is located in a distinguished neighborhood of early 20th century residences and is prominent within the context of houses of the Russian Hill area. The property appears on the City of San Francisco's Historic Resources Inventory of 1976 and is part of a Conservation District, but it has not yet been intensively surveyed or inventoried by the City.

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Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Historic Context of the property: Russian Hill

Russian Hill is a natural topographic feature that in today's San Francisco is bounded by Bay Street on the north, Pacific Avenue on the south, Taylor Street on the east and Van Ness Avenue on the west. Due to the views it affords and its relative proximity to downtown, the neighborhood has always been attractive as a residential neighborhood to the socially discriminating. However, those same views have also been inspirational to artists over the years who did not seem to mind the steep inclines that had to be ascended to get to them. The resulting population was a mixture of the wealthy and the bohemian—an ideal environment for Nell Sinton who came from wealth but aspired to join the artistic community.

The first development of the area, however, was commercial in nature. In 1864, the Pioneer Woolen Factory first occupied one of the brick buildings that now forms the Ghirardelli Square complex. In 1893, Domingo Ghirardelli purchased the property as a home for his chocolate factory. Uphill from the Ghirardelli plant, Russian Hill came to be dotted with mansions and smaller houses, many built or lived in by artists such as Alexander Edouart and Bruce Porter and writers like Ina Coolbrith and Charles Dobie. Refusing to be dynamited even though in the path of the fire that followed the 1906 earthquake, early owners were able to preserve their homes, many of which still exist today. Those that were destroyed were quickly replaced, although the northerly side of the Hill (in which the Sinton house is located) did not really begin to develop until after 1906. In the 1960s tall apartment blocks began to replace some of the older residences, while the Ghirardelli area became a draw for tourists with the addition of the Cannery, Aquatic Park, and the Hyde Street Pier. New zoning laws reflecting a new-found philosophy of historic preservation have limited the demolition or insensitive alteration of Russian Hill's earliest homes. They represent architectural styles of all types, including Victorian, Shingle, Craftsman, and Period Revival, and the work of well-known architects such as Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, and Willis Polk.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Who's Who of American Women, 9th edition (1975-76). Chicago: Marquis, p. 821.

Los Angeles Times:

March 10, 1968, p. P45: "Art News: Works of 50s, 60s in Show"

March 17, 1972, p. H8: Seldis, Henry J. "A Critical Guide to the Galleries"

March 24, 1972, p. G10: "Art Walk: A Critical Guide to the Galleries"

June 17, 2011, p. D12: Thomas, Kevin. "Feminist Art and Its Early Artists."

San Francisco Chronicle:

July 24, 1965, p. 17: "Porporato, John A. [obituary]"

February 26, 1982, p. B11: "Stanley H. Sinton [obituary]"

January 15, 1986, p. 4: "Finocchio Dies—Impresario of Female Impersonators"

April 24, 1986, p. 27: "Lanza, Anthony N. [obituary]"

June 27, 1997, p. ?: "Time-Faded Images/Nell Sinton's Early 60s Paintings Mattered More Than"

October 24, 1997, p. D6: "Nell Sinton—Respected S. F. Abstract Painter"

November 4, 1999, p. A1: "What a Drag: Finocchio's to Close"

Websites (all accessed on February 20, 2011):

Ask/Art: The Artists' Bluebook: www.askart.com/askart/s/nell_sinton

Calabi Gallery: www.calabigallery.com/artists/nell-sinton/

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Morley, Grace. *Nell Sinton* (for the San Francisco Museum of Art, April 1970) in *Rehistoricizing the Time Around Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1950s-1960s*: www.rehistoricizing.org/nell_sinton

Archival Material:

Wurster, William, plans and specifications, Stanley Sinton, Jr., Residential Project, 1955, Wurster Collection, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

Personal Interviews (conducted by Matt Dillhoefer and Tim Gregory):

Biestman, Margot Sinton. Eldest daughter of Eleanor and Walter Sinton. Oral Interview conducted on June 8, 2011.

Braunstein, Ruth. Founder, Braunstein/Quay Art Gallery. Recognized as San Francisco's longest continuing art galleries established in 1961. Ms. Braunstein was Nell Sinton's longtime friend and business associate. Oral interview conducted on May 18, 2011.

Linhares, Dr. Phil. Chief Curator of Art, The Oakland Museum of California. Curator of 30-year retrospective of Nell Sinton. Oral interview conducted on May 9, 2011.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: San Francisco Public Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .10
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Block 0476, Lot 002C, Assessor Volume No. 4

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries conform to the historic property. The block & lot number have remained the same since the house was built.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tim Gregory DBA The Building Biographer & Matt Dillhoefer, MGDEnvironmental Design
organization _____ date August 8, 2011
street & number 400 East California Blvd., #3 telephone 626-792-7465 or 626-792-5480
city or town Pasadena state CA zip code 91106
e-mail timgregory@sbcglobal.net mgdarch@aol.com

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.)

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.

Name of Property: Sinton House
City or Vicinity: San Francisco
County: San Francisco
State: California
Photographer: Tim Gregory and Matt Dillhoefer
Date Photographed: September 2010

Number of photographs:18

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 0001 Main house, south (front) façade, looking north
- 0002 Main house, south (front) façade, west end, looking north
- 0003 Main house, south (front) façade, looking northeast
- 0004 Main house, east and south (front) façades, looking northwest
- 0005 Main house, front door, south (front) façade, looking north
- 0006 Main house, front door, south (front) façade, looking north
- 0007 Main house, front door, south (front) façade, looking northeast
- 0008 Main house, first-floor window detail, south (front façade), looking north
- 0009 Main house, first-floor balcony detail, south (front façade), looking northwest
- 0010 Main house, second-floor window detail, south (front façade), looking north
- 0011 Main house, second-floor window detail, south (front façade), looking north
- 0012 Main house, second-floor window detail, south (front façade), looking north

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- 0013 Main house, south and west facades, looking northeast
- 0014 Main house, north (rear) façade, looking south
- 0015 View from penthouse, looking north
- 0016 View from penthouse, looking northeast
- 0017 Studio/living quarters, south (front) façade, looking north
- 0018 Studio/living quarters, window detail, south (front) façade, looking north

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Sonja Moelleken

street & number 1020 Francisco Street telephone 415-321-4674

city or town San Francisco state CA zip code 94109

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.

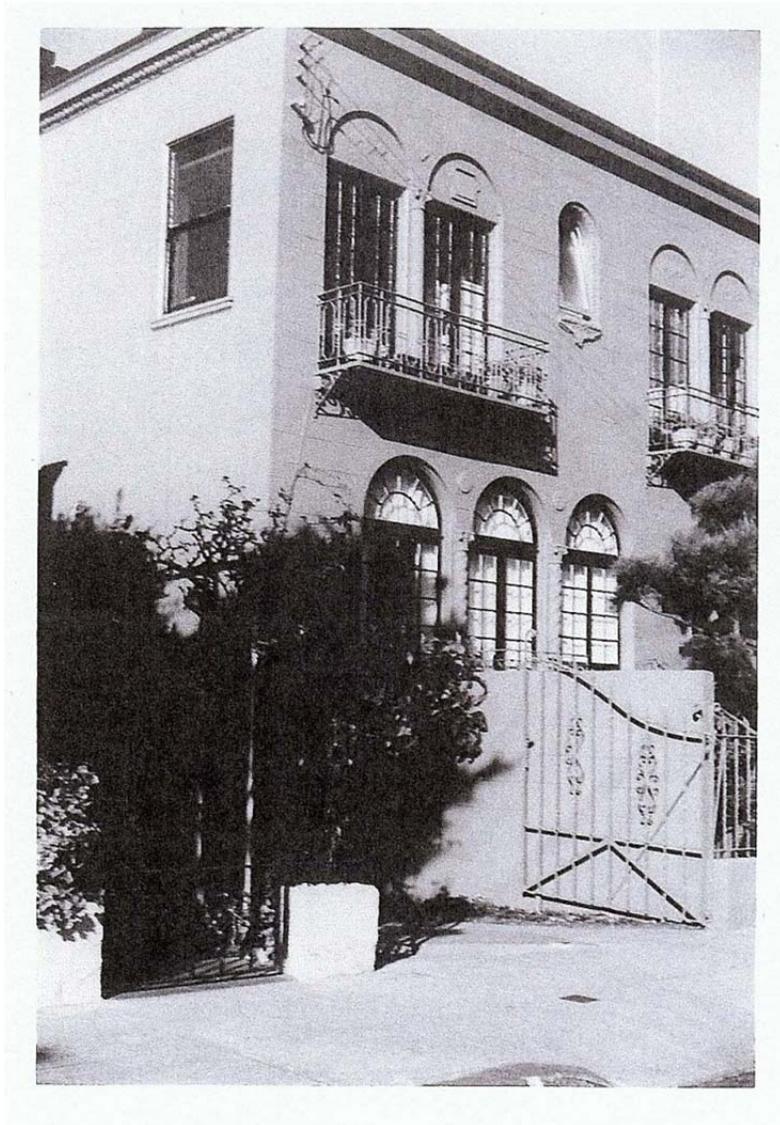
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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|------------------------------------------|
| Sinton House |
| ----- |
| Name of Property |
| San Francisco CA |
| ----- |
| County and State |
| N/A |
| ----- |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

Section number Additional Documentation Page 1

Figure 1
Historic photograph: From the Junior League's *Here Today* research file at the San Francisco Public Library; undated, but probably taken before 1968, the year *Here Today* was published.



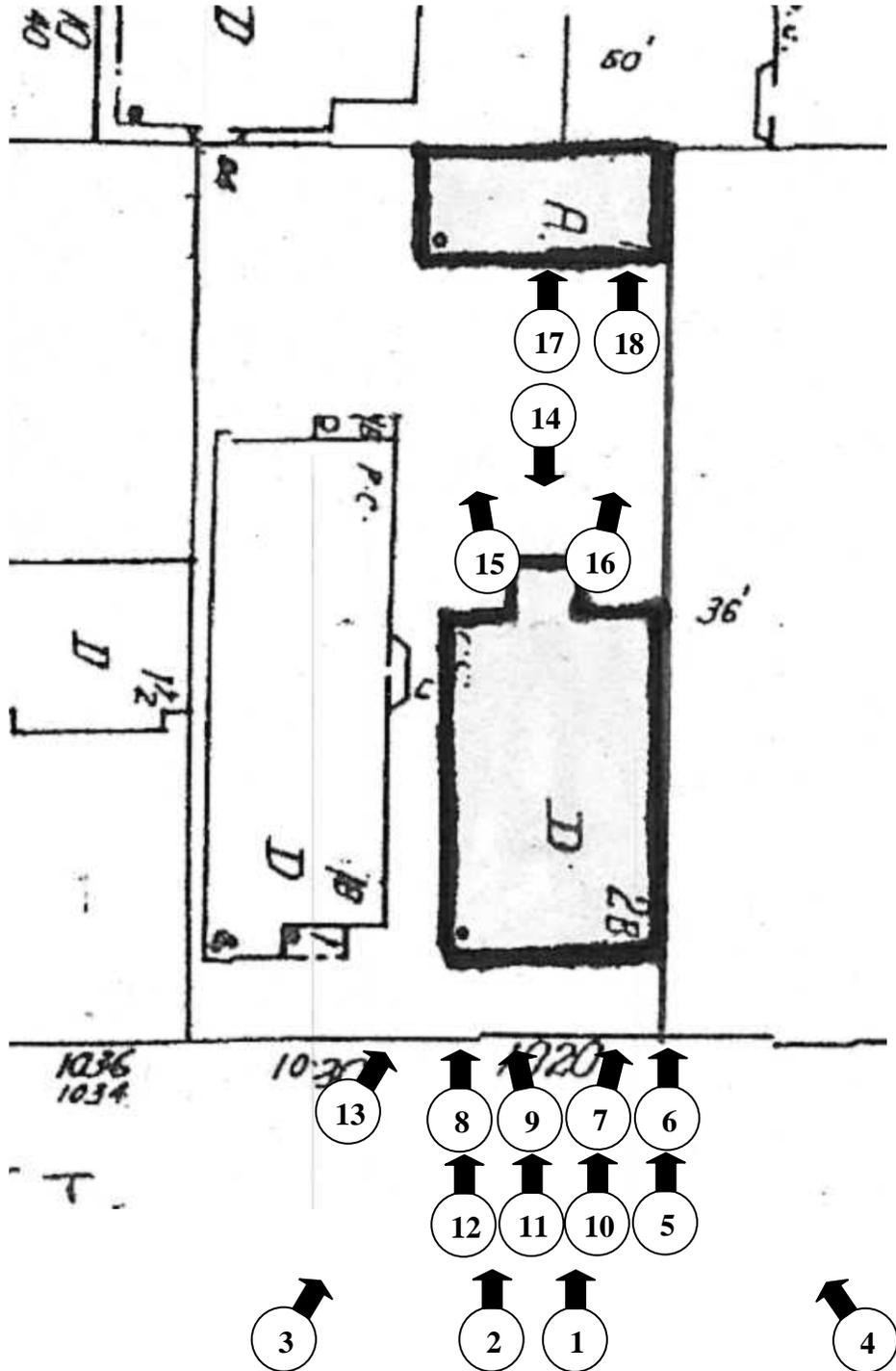
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

| |
|------------------------------------------|
| Sinton House |
| Name of Property |
| San Francisco CA |
| County and State |
| N/A |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

Section number Additional Documentation Page 2

SKETCH MAP



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

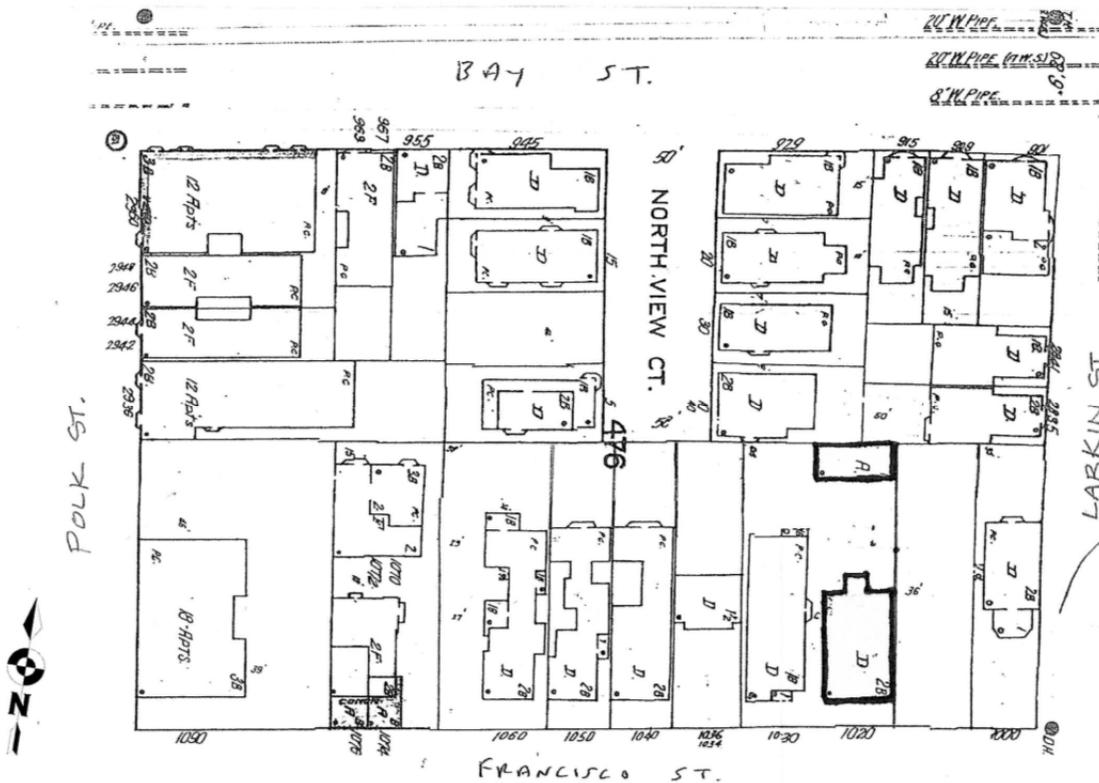
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

| |
|------------------------------------------|
| Sinton House |
| Name of Property |
| San Francisco CA |
| County and State |
| N/A |
| Name of multiple listing (if applicable) |

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Sanborn Map

SCALE 1" = 80'



Sanborn Map 1913-1928
Volume 2