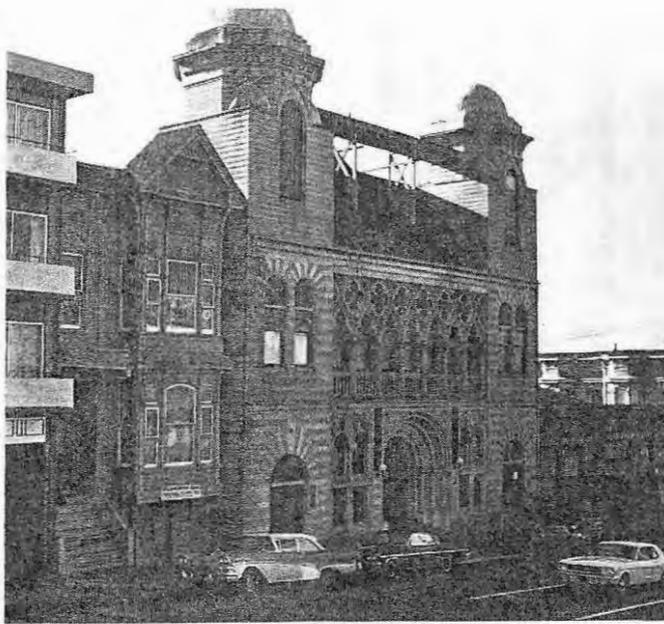


“We are protected from within”



Originally built as a synagogue, Sokoji Temple at 1881 Bush St. is now the religious and social center for the Zen Soto Mission's active Caucasian and Oriental members.

text and photos by Joan B. Mayer

■ The purpose of Zen is to teach men to live with serenity and fulfillment by developing an inner strength based on the realization of the oneness of existence. It is an intensely practical and practicable religion, a way of life that results in an enlightenment which allows man to enter the stream of life with perfect control, and yet, freedom and spontaneity.

Since Zen insists that enlightenment is an *experience* which can only be imparted by *direct experience* within the relationship of student and Zen master, it is absolutely necessary for a person wishing to be trained in the Zen life to obtain a qualified leader. An increasing number of San Franciscans are taking advantage of the presence among us of one such Zen master, Rev. Shunryu Suzuki, and of the facilities to study and practice Zen at the Zen Soto Mission at 1881 Bush Street. There are only three other locations in the continental United States where such instruction can be obtained directly from a Zen master: Los Angeles, Monterey and Chicago.

Rev. Suzuki is the sixth of the Zen masters sent by the Soto School to lead San Franciscans in the ways of Zen. Housed for approximately the last 30 years in the Sokoji Temple (*Soko* means San Francisco; *ji* means temple), an edifice originally built as a Jewish synagogue, the membership consisted entirely of people of Japanese ancestry until his arrival a little over five years ago. The official temple roster now numbers approximately 30 contributing and uncountable Caucasian members as well as more than 100 Japanese.

Because of this phenomenal growth, the Japanese headquarters of the Soto School sent Rev. Dainin T. Katagiri to assist Rev. Suzuki in February 1964. A handsome,



bottom

Rev. Suzuki, San Francisco's Zen master (left). Rev. Katagiri, assistant priest and missionary from Japan, leads kinhin (walking meditation) practiced during sesshin (all day meditation) (right).



April 8, Buddha's birthday, is celebrated with a procession through Nihon Machi (Japan town) [SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 1964], carrying Buddha to Sokoji Temple (left). Every member files to the Buddha placed in front of the ornately decorated altar and pours sweet tea over it (right).



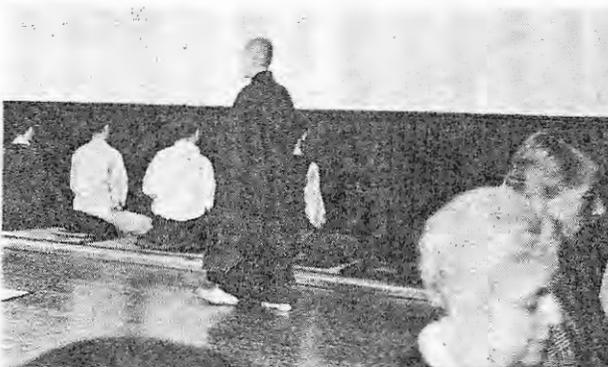
Leading kinhin is Grahame Petchey, the first Caucasian ever to be permitted in the Eiheiiji order in Japan.

likeable, gentle young man in his early thirties, Rev. Katagiri, in true missionary spirit, has left his wife and tiny daughter in Japan for the duration of his stay here. As Zen teaches acceptance of all of life. Zen priests are allowed to marry. Rev. and Mrs. Suzuki have four grown children, three of whom have remained in Japan.

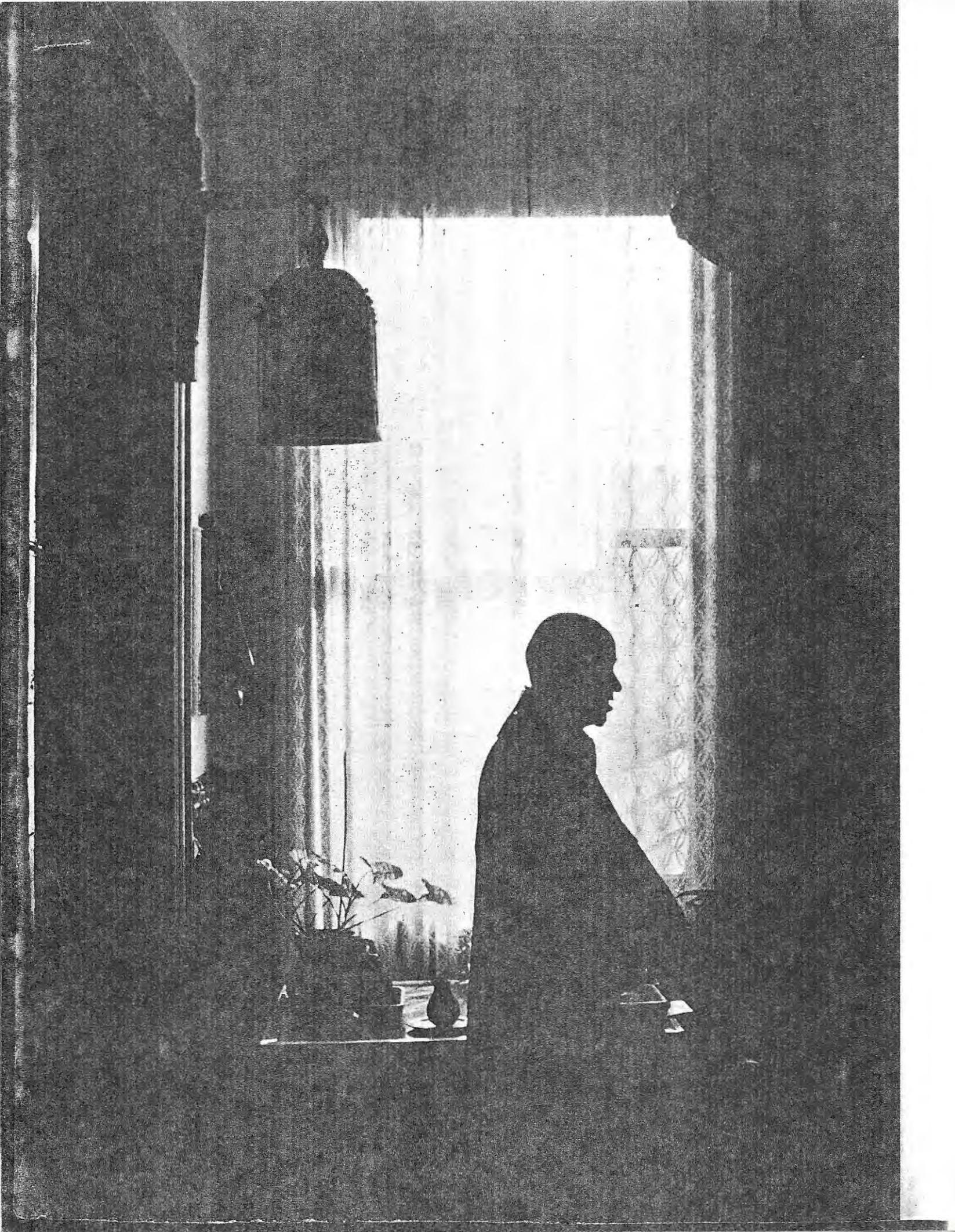
Although Rev. Katagiri assists Rev. Suzuki in all his various duties, his foremost obligation is to help him conduct the periods of *zazen* (sitting meditation), which are held regularly Monday through Friday and during *sesshin* (all day meditation).

Because of the generally mistaken association of Zen with "devil-may-care beatniks" many Americans will be surprised to learn that the serious Zen student is highly disciplined. He rises in the early morning to sit cross-legged on a cushion, facing a blank wall. By regulated breathing and concentration on calmness of mind, he hopes to achieve enlightenment. Strict practice of *zazen* trains a person in the "teaching of one's own strength in order that he may realize the Buddha's paradise in his own mind even in this life." Whereas other religions basically teach some form of future salvation, Zen Buddhism has been teaching for more than 1000 years that, "We are protected from inside. Do not expect to be protected from outside!" (Dogen Zenji.) Yet lest it be mistakenly understood that the practice of *zazen* can be discontinued after the Zen experience (enlightenment) has been achieved, Zen teaches that such practice remains essential and that all of life then becomes *zazen* or right practice.

Both Rev. Suzuki and Rev. Katagiri speak excellent English so one need not hesitate to call (FI 6-7540) or come by to speak to them at 1881 Bush Street. You will find the traditional Japanese hospitality well-practiced there. □



Rev. Katagiri walks to his place at the start of *zazen* (sitting meditation), held daily in the early morning and late afternoon. Both men and women, composing about half the membership, remain in one position for at least an hour.



Unwanted synagogue becomes hot propo

By Donald Canter
Urban Affairs Writer

An old ornate Western Addition synagogue, which the Redevelopment Agency had been trying to sell for years without success, has suddenly become a hot property.

Moslems, Jews, Japanese Americans, the Hare Krishna monks, and a theatrical group named the Angels of Light are now vying for the right to buy and restore the Moorish Victorian structure at Bush Street near Laguna.

Though the \$59,000 offered by the Hare Krishna turned out to be the high bid, the Angels appeared to have the edge for acquiring the elegant building whose facade is considered one of the finest wood replicas of Venetian architecture in the Bay Area.

The Angels, though having bid only \$40,000, claim the right to the property because their offer was submitted by an actor member who used to live in the Western Addition renewal area.

The brochure in which the Redevelopment Agency offered the building and four other Victorians said specifically that bids from holders of residential certificates of preference will have priority.

Pamela Ross, an attorney for the Legal Assistance Foundation, pointed out that Angel of Light Ralph Sauer in whose name the bid was made had been issued such a certificate by the agency itself.

Arthur Evans, the agency's executive director, insisted however that a residential certificate offers no priority in the case of a building that will be used for commercial purposes.

Though the Angels of Light said they plan to use part of the building as living quarters its main use would be as a community theater.

Their claim that a donor who wants to remain anonymous has pledged to put up not only the purchase price but also some \$125,000 to restore the building has not yet been checked out by the agency.

That is because Evans said that on second thought he determined that putting the building, now used as a Zen Soto Mission, out to bid was a mistake.

For that reason Evans recommended that all bids be rejected and the agency instead seek another way to find a buyer with "the best ability to retain it."

Agency member James Silva didn't buy this approach. After being told that after the bidding period expired more offers to buy the building had come in from such varied groups as the Islamic Society, a Jewish museum organization and the San Francisco Center for Japanese American Studies, Silva moved to postpone a decision on the sale for two weeks.

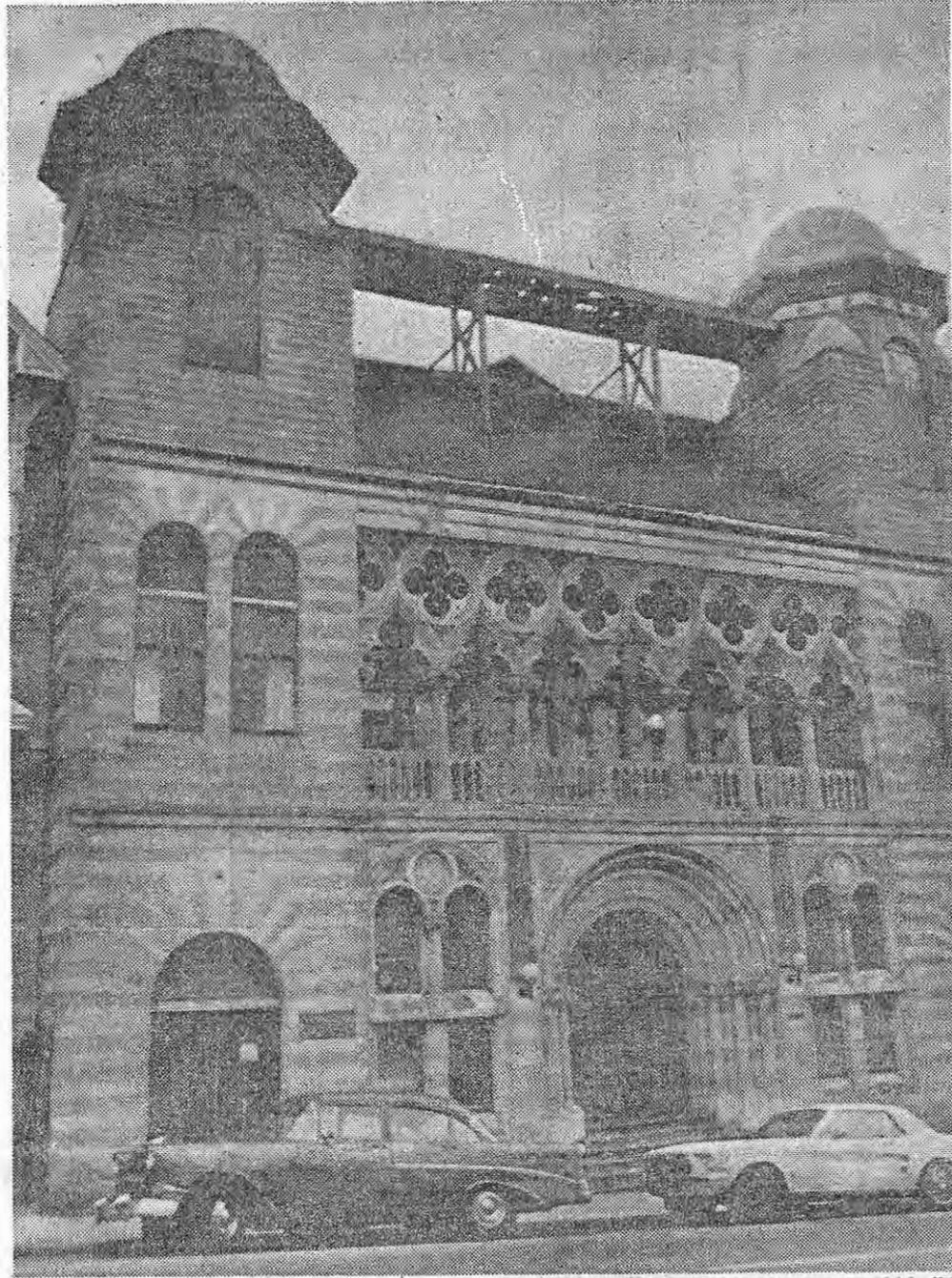
Silva indicated strongly that if during that time the Angels of Light can prove their financial ability to buy and restore the building, he'll vote that it be sold to them.

In another flurry of confusion over bidding, agency members unanimously ignored a recommendation by their staff that a security guard contract for the Western Addition be awarded to the Cal State Patrol Service even though this organization was not the lowest bidder for the job with an offer of \$112,161 for a one year contract.

That was \$6,000 higher than the lowest bid by a company owned by Albert and Henry Gage.

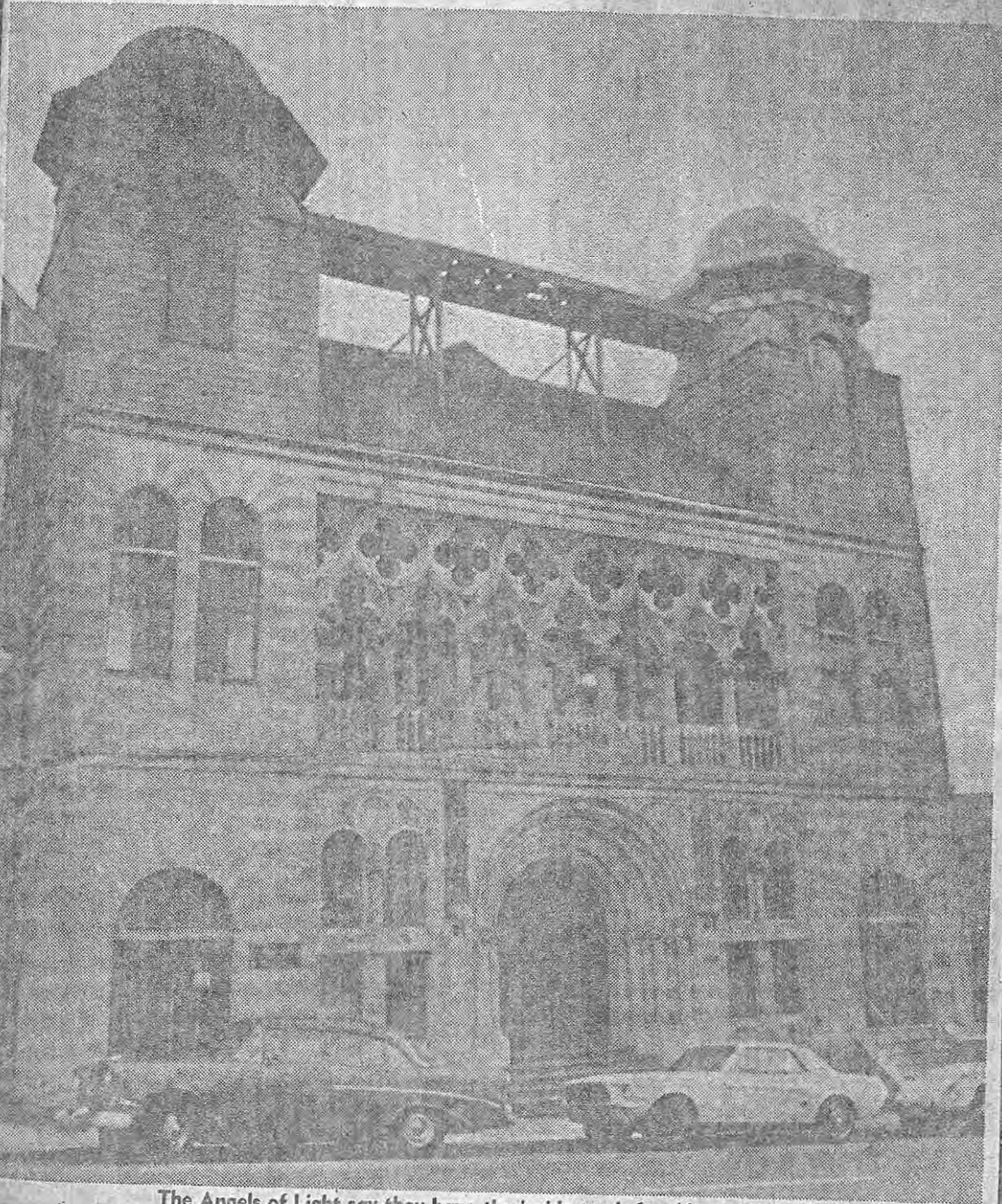
Despite the price difference the staff felt the contract should be given to Cal State on the basis of its good performance during the past year in which it had the guard job in the area.

Deciding to go strictly by the lowest bid, the agency members awarded the contract to the Gage brothers.



The Angels of Light say they have the inside track for this ornate old build

gogue becomes hot property



The Angels of Light say they have the inside track for this ornate old building

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of
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case



Photos by Gary Fong

A sign in Japanese on the door (left) and the American Legion decal on the window (right) are among the accumulated adornments of the religious structure at 1881 Bush street

A Sanctuary in Search of a Sect

The curious landmark at 1881 Bush street reveals its history through clues, like some cross-cultural puzzle.

Its faded facade is a mock-Moorish wonder of wood, elaborately scored and carved to simulate stone. On the tarpapered side walls, grime-caked windows reveal Jewish stars. Newer signs at the front door are in Japanese.

And now, the Redevelopment Agency has added its "For Sale" sign to the Zen Soto Mission, a relic on Bush between Laguna and Octavia streets.

Anyone with a minimum offer of \$39,600 — and money to pay a fix-up bill likely to top \$100,000 — can buy the mission from Redevelopment and decide its next cultural revolution.

The Moorish styling was chosen in 1898 by the mission's original building, Temple Ohabi Shalom, one of early San Francisco's first Jewish congregations. Small windows with the Star of David and Hebrew lettering on a cornerstone are the only visible signs of that first life.

An American Legion decal adorns one window pane.

Signs in Japanese and English flank the great arched main door, clues to the mission's purchase by a Zen Buddhist congregation in 1934.

The Zen mission will be forced to find another location if Redevelopment finds a buyer for the building, but so far the mission's rituals continue there.

Incense wafts through a room on the second floor, where meditation for 70 regular members of the congregation is led by the Rev. Kyoin Sujikawa, a priest in shaved head and black robes.

Downstairs, the big main sanctuary of the original synagogue is dark and musty, with simple white cloth draped over its walls. The downstairs auditorium

is used only when bigger crowds gather for eight special Buddhist rituals a year.

The youthful fad for Buddhism had the temple overflowing a few years back, but tensions between generations grew and young, white practitioners were exiled to another location by the Japanese and Korean-American elders of the Zen Mission.

In a small room next to the main sanctuary, the San Francisco Go Club meets daily across rows of tables to play a game several thousand years old.

"We've been in this building since 1936," said Go Club president Shinji Dote. "The Zen religion has always cultivated this game."

Several hundred members drop by the room, several at a time, to play the intricate game with black and white chips moved across a grid on a lacquered board.

After 39 years of Go tournaments, the club soon might be sent looking for a new meeting room.

There has been talk at Redevelopment of selling the mission to another church or to an organization that would turn it into a community center.

But prospective buyers might be frightened off by the \$100,000 estimate of needed repairs to the old building, a big enough bill so that it convinced the Zen Mission to sell the temple to the Redevelopment Agency several years

"We just threw up our hands," said George Hagiwara, vice president of the congregation.

If the building is sold — or razed by Redevelopment for lack of a buyer — the Zen Mission plans to seek temporary quarters, then build a new temple at Laguna and Sutter streets, where an old garage is slated for demolition by Redevelopment's omnipresent wrecking ball.

Guy Wright



2 cultures clash

AT FIRST glance it's just another squabble over real estate. But underneath it's a clash between two cultures, each seeking a haven for its heritage.

Ninety-two years ago a Jewish congregation built a synagogue on Bush Street in what became the Fillmore District. Although the building still stands, it long ago ceased to be a synagogue, as the Jews moved up and out.

Next the neighborhood became Japantown, an enclave so lively and yet so strange that the strangeness became a wall to most San Franciscans of that day.

Japantown ceased to exist shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although most of its residents were American citizens, they were herded into detention camps for the duration of the war. When they returned, they found their old neighborhood dominated by blacks and soon to be devastated by Redevelopment's bulldozers.

Through all these vicissitudes the old synagogue survived, serving many purposes — for awhile it was a Zen Buddhist Center — and pass-

ing through many hands before Redevelopment took it over.

Now both the Jews and the Japanese want it back, but neither as a house of worship.

The Japanese have been trying to recreate Japantown, a painful task with success still uncertain. Many internees didn't bother to come back, and of those who did, many in the younger generation have melded into the mainstream.

Japanese worried by the erosion want to turn the synagogue into an Asian-American theater to help keep their culture alive.

They have reason to worry. The Kokusai theater is now a Denny's restaurant, and the Kabuki theater

'Jews, Japanese want the building back, but not for house of worship.'

was dying until it became a movie house. It's possible that San Francisco's Japanese community has shrunk beyond the point of no return.

On the other hand, a Jewish group says the former synagogue is the logical site for a museum devoted to Jewish life in the early West. That institution, the Judah L. Magnes Museum, has outgrown its home in Berkeley.

These two appeals have common threads. Both groups have experienced discrimination. Each must struggle to keep cultural pride alive in a land where minority status is a

fact of life.

Cultural pride and cultural survival form the bedrock of a shared concern, and it's unfortunate that this mutual interest led to a conflict.

If you'll permit a digression, for a long time I've felt we don't pay enough attention to the role that cultural pride and cultural survival play in our lives. Many actions that we ascribe to bigotry would be better understood in those terms.

Most cultures are tolerant of newcomers up to a point, the point being when the indigenous culture feels its survival is threatened. Apparently that's a universal reaction, and I see nothing intrinsically wrong with it. The person who feels his culture isn't worth preserving must be a sorry specimen. Without pride in one's culture there can be no self-respect.

Somehow these verities become blurred when those defending their culture belong to the majority. The picture is clearer when two minorities, the Jews and the Japanese, lock horns. Neither is a villain, but each wants that old building as its own cultural haven.

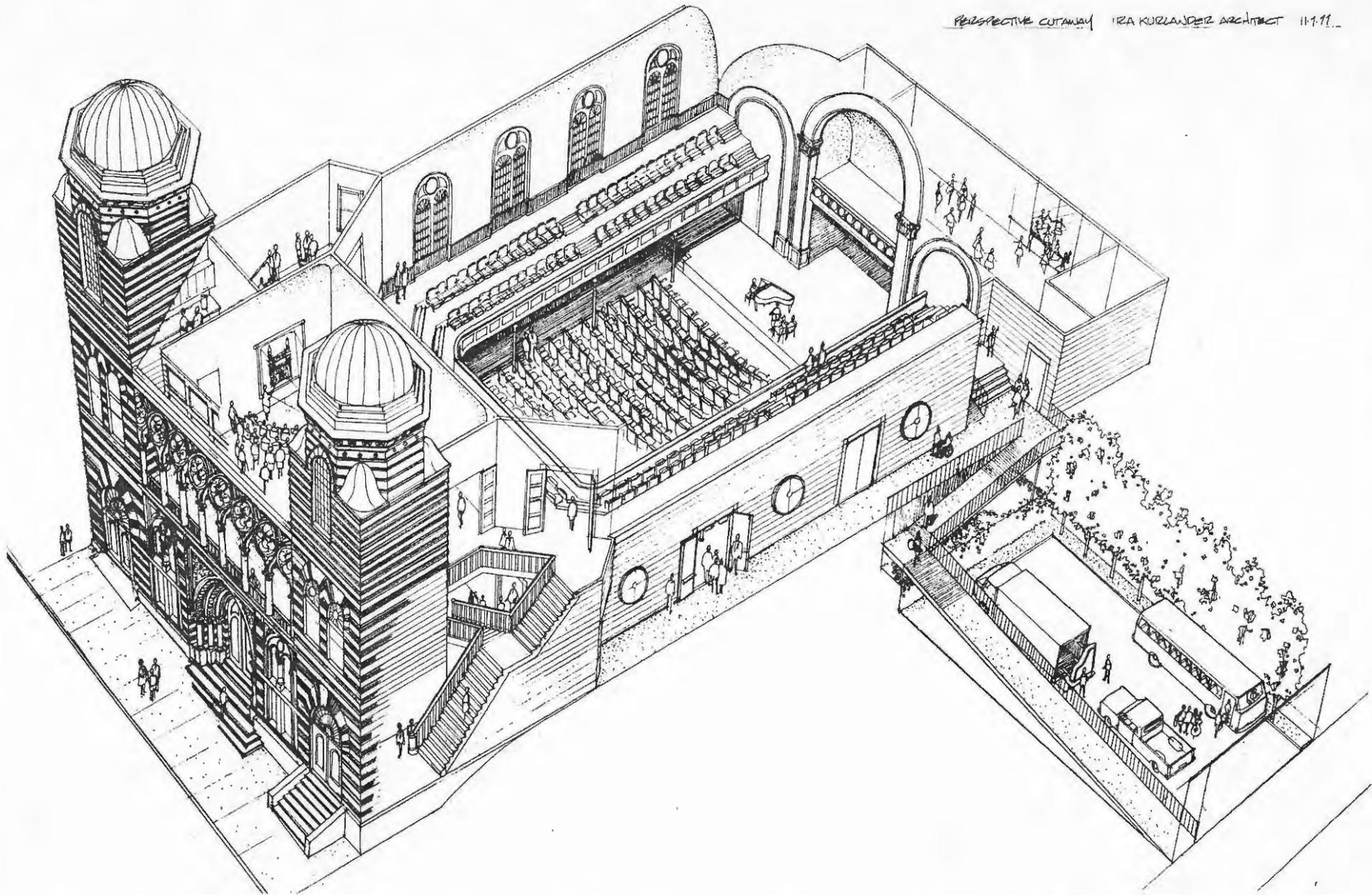
If you were the umpire in this dispute, to whom would you give the nod?

Redevelopment based its decision on money. If felt the Jewish group was more likely to come up with \$2 million needed for repairs and gave it a three-month option to raise that sum.

I have no argument with that decision, but if this were a piece of fiction I would invent a happier ending. Somehow the Jews and Japanese would find a way to share.

Guy Wright is an Examiner columnist.

PERSPECTIVE CUTAWAY IRA KURLANDER ARCHITECT 11.11.



PACIFIC HALL San Francisco

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
Final Case Report ----- October 27, 1975

BUSH STREET TEMPLE
(Soto Mission)
1881 Bush Street

OWNERS: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

LOCATION: This lot has a frontage of 162.8 feet on the south side of Bush Street, between Laguna and Octavia Streets; being Lot 13 in Assessor's Block 674.

HISTORY: Until recently the headquarters for the Soto Mission of San Francisco, this structure was originally designed by Moses J. Lyon in 1895 to serve as a house of worship for the third congregation of San Francisco Jews. While commonly known as the Bush Street Temple, its Hebrew name was Ohabai Shalome, which translates into "Lovers of Peace".

The structure was actually the second home of the congregation which was organized by a group of about fifty dissenters from Congregation Emanu-El, who in the week preceding November 6, 1864, published the following in San Francisco newspapers:

NOTICE

All members of Congregation Emanu-El who are in favor to organizing a new Congregation are invited to meet at the MINERVA HALL, corner Kearny and California Streets next Sunday morning, November 6th at 9 o'clock. (sic)

The impetus for the meeting was the introduction of a revised ritual at Emanu-El; those who attended the meeting at Minerva Hall were opposed to the change. Apparently, the initial congregation attracted other sympathizers, for their first temple, consecrated September 16, 1865, to the site of the present Native Sons Hall at 414 Mason Street, had a seating capacity of 630. Contemporary newspaper accounts reveal it to have been well appointed.

The establishment of this congregation underscores the sizeable interest in conservative Judaism which made itself heard in late 19th Century San Francisco. In the decade preceding the founding of Congregation Ohabai Shalome, under the vigorous leadership of Rabbi Elkan Cohn, Congregation Emanu-El was pursuing a course of religious reform. Although the philosophy which underlay this national reform movement sought to adapt traditional worship and observances to the spirit of the times, there was considerable opposition from sectors of the local Jewish community to these changes.

The consecration of the Bush Street Temple was held on September 15, 1895 - 30 years to the day after the consecration of the first temple on Mason Street. It had a seating capacity of 1,000. The Congregation appears to have left its Mason Street structure prior to the erection of the new temple for the 1893 City Directory indicates that their services were being held at Golden Gate Hall on Sutter Street. Additionally, a newspaper item of September 15, 1895, notes that the newly selected rabbi of Congregation Ohabai Shalome (Rabbi Julius Fryer), preached in Golden Gate Hall; a subsequent item noted that he would be installed and the new temple dedicated on September 15, 1895.

HISTORY
(Continued)

For many years the temple was the center of great activity; it was one of the focal points for Zionist causes in the Bay Area. However, membership in the congregation began to wane and in 1934, the building was sold to Teruro Kasuga, a follower of Zen. According to one source, after the sale, the dwindling congregation continued to meet on Clement Street, but with the death of its rabbi in 1940, went out of existence.

Mr. Kasuga and about 20 others, mostly natives of Japan, were followers of the Zen priest Hosen Isobe. The building was held in Mr. Kasuga's name until 1939 when the Soto Mission was incorporated.

With the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese congregation of some 40 members was forced to vacate the building as a result of being interned in relocation camps for the duration of the war. During this interval, the building was used by a Christian group.

During the decade of the 1950's, the following of the Mission grew to 250 although it has since declined. For a brief spell in the 1960's, the Soto Mission shared its space with the Zen Center, a training center for Zen priests oriented to the non-Japanese.

The property was purchased by the Redevelopment Agency in January 1973; its re-sale to the Zen Center and the American Victorian Museum was recently announced. The new location of the Soto Mission is the southwest corner of Laguna and Sutter Streets; the Zen Center is at 100 Page.

ARCHITECTURE:

As seen today, the most prominent feature of the Bush Street Temple is the delicate, and undeniably Venetian, tracery which screens a loggia occupying the central position of the facade. Further Venetian influence in the arrangement of facade design elements is its tripartite division, both vertically and horizontally. In this report, for purposes of nomenclature only, the vertical divisions and their arrangement are referred to as tower, nave, tower; the horizontal divisions or levels, beginning with the lowest, are ground, gallery and attic.

But it is not only Venetian influence which appears in the facade; the elements of the Romanesque and the Moorish are also introduced to create a lively ensemble, a feast for the eyes, about which more will be said later.

It should first be noted that although this is a frame structure, the facade elements were treated to simulate Siennese marble, an aspect which has been somewhat diminished by the effects of weathering over the years.

At ground level, below the tracery, principal entry to the temple is provided through a deeply-set, Romanesque arch which also encloses steps leading to the doors. At the springline, the vault is supported on each side by three piers. The surfaces of the piers, the mouldings forming the receding vault of the arch, and the spandrels are sculpted with a variety of rich ornamentation. On either side of the entry, in the space below the tracery and above the height of the springline of the entrance arch, are small, paired, arched windows separated by an engaged column. They are encompassed by a larger arch, with sculpted spandrels and other infill above the paired windows. Their sills are comprised of a sloping horizontal member below which are found rectangular paired windows.

ARCHITECTURE:
(Continued)

Doors located at the ground level of the towers provide secondary entrances to the temple. Consisting of simple rounded arches, they are reached by steps projecting forward from the facade. The arches are embellished by striated, imitation stonework forming a vault whose voussoirs increase in length from the springline to the keystone, thus adding a Moorish effect.

At gallery level, the inspiration for the Venetian Gothic tracery screening the loggia -- the width of the nave between towers and the full height between the ground and attic levels -- might have come directly from either the Ca d'Oro or the Ducal Palace. The most distinguished feature of the facade, the tracery is composed of six columns, with intricate floral capitals, about half the height of the opening. Their flamboyant vaults divide the opening into seven archways infilled at their bases with a delicate railing. Directly above the columns, in the space between the vaults of the arches and the architrave supporting the attic, are circles with openwork quatrefoils. These circles are tangential to the concave haunches which form the points of the arches, and to the architrave.

In the towers at this level are paired arched windows repeating the Moorish embellishment given the entrances below.

At attic level the towers are square in plan and between them there is a sloping roof which recedes from the tracery of the loggia. The towers are surfaced with striations thinner in their vertical dimensions than those found below. Centered in each tower is a rounded arched window whose overhead facade treatment reflects a variation of the Moorish theme in the arches below.

At the springline of the window the square plan of the tower evolves into an octagonal plan with a decorative course atop the arch. Above this course, a cornice ensembles the octagon and supports a shallow dome.

A curious feature -- a remnant of the original design of the temple -- is found between the towers of the attic. This appears to be a platform, extending between the octagons, which is supported by trusswork rising from the sloping roof. When originally constructed, this feature was not visible as it served only as bracing for an intricate display of Judaic symbols, including tablets representing the Ten Commandments, which occupied the attic space between the towers and gave a more solid appearance to the facade at this level.

Examples of the Moorish influence in the towers have been cited, but those features which contributed most significantly to that aspect of the temple have long since disappeared, possibly as long as 60 years ago.

These were the spires, now shrunken to small domes, which originally rose high above the towers. Minaret-like in appearance when seen on the horizon, they lent the temple its most exotic expression. And when seen as a unit with the facade below, they created a vertical thrust so powerful as to render the horizontal divisions, now prevalent, almost unnoticeable.

ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORY:

Although in its present state the underlying Venetian influence of the building is most apparent, photographs of the structure with the towers intact place primary emphasis on the Moorish characteristics noted above.

From a local point of view, the Moorish influence seen here is heightened by virtue of its being part of a national movement which could be said to have had both its origin and demise in San Francisco. The source cited for this information is a book by Rachel Wischnitzer entitled Synagogue Architecture in the United States. Miss Wischnitzer cites Temple Kenseth Israel in Philadelphia, completed in mid-1864, as the first in which an oriental motif was recognized in a synagogue, and in that temple only to a very minor degree by virtue of its having small bulbous cupolas at the extremities of an "attenuated Romanesque" facade. However, she credits the impetus for what became a wave of Moorish influence in American synagogue design to one begun later that same year.

That synagogue was the second home of Temple Emanu-El, which stood where the Four-Fifty Sutter Building now stands and whose cornerstone was laid on October 25, 1864, only twelve days prior to the meeting at Minerva Hall which resulted in the establishment of Congregation Ohabai Shalome. Miss Wischnitzer also notes that the introduction of oriental -- which includes the Moorish -- influence into synagogue architecture was part of a wider movement which found its way into all types of buildings in the United States. She further notes the underlying German composition of Emanu-El membership and the likelihood that some members were familiar with an already-existing oriental synagogue in Germany.

Regarding Temple Emanu-El, she states:

The "golden globes" of the San Francisco Temple Emanu-El inaugurated a new era in American Architecture.

... the minaret-like finials of the buttresses pointed ... to Saracenic ideas.

Never before was such lavish use made of Jewish symbols in the exterior of a synagogue.

The last structure cited in Miss Wischnitzer's book as representative of the Moorish trend was erected in 1891. There undoubtedly were later ones (including Ohabai Shalome) which are not cited; nevertheless, the Bush Street Temple constructed in 1895 may have been the last.

Finally, an overview of Mr. Lyon's design. Looking back over eight decades, it appears that the design may have been a compromise -- unrealized or not. Congregation Ohabai Shalome was conservative in its outlook and it is not unlikely that it would have selected a "tried-and-true" design for its new temple. In the United States, in 1895, that would have been one of Moorish character even though that style was declining or even no longer in vogue. Concurrently, the architectural world had just witnessed the Columbian Exposition in Chicago with its grandiose display of neo-classic forms which set off an architectural revolution producing structures running the full gamut of eclectic style and degrees of quality. In that same city, and with less flamboyance, the Romanesque had been making in-roads; this movement reached San Francisco in 1891 with the construction of the Mills Building

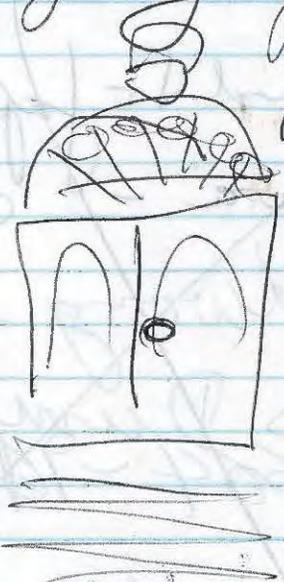
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORY:
(Continued)

with its still admired Romanesque entrance. Lyon's Venetian Gothic tracery does not appear to be attributable to any influence other than a then-prevailing backward look at eclectic style. One might say, however, that Mr. Lyon's design for the Bush Street Temple was truly a product of its time and place, and this adds to its significance.

Sokoji

1281 Bush St.

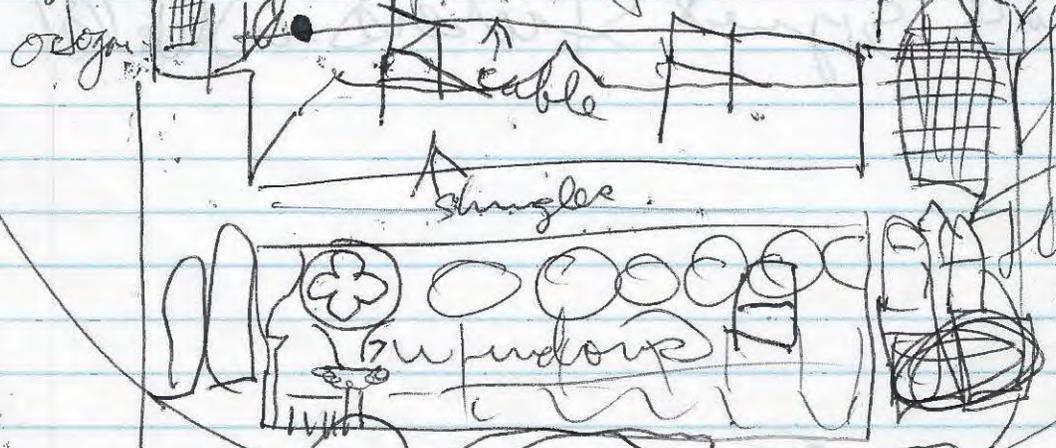
Redevelopment agency of City + County of SF



← 5' height

grass on roof above balcony between towers

what of other tower?



5' height

this side boarded up now



Me - Show one Of you or mentions - parties
mention are 8

JP + Korean elders? of Zen Church?! - Kato
60 - thousands yrs old, 1936
Zen/60 connection (several hundred members)
"always cultivated"

B+W
chips
grid
tagged but

downtown - a tube cloth over walk
When did JP cony use downtown 50s - 70s

So Koji used by husband group during war

delicate Venetian freely screen / oggia
- most from Italy

divided into 3's vert + horiz [Romanesque, Moorish]
an architect's "feast for the eyes"

simulate Chinese Marbles - diminished though weathering
deeply set Romanesque arches
arches gone

Facade

get old photo!
Landmarks Des Moines Road

Pre war Egyptian district
Disappeared during war
Returned to Hak neighborhood

get photos
from Egypt
file

We are protected from W. side
more than 100 ft. ^{moorish} monument [Est-250] Crown 8/30/75
P. 7 C. 1

Faded facade a Moorish wonder of
wood elaborately scored and carved
to simulate stone. On the tapered
side walk grime-carved windows reveal
Swiss Gons

Left side board
up

Signs at front doors in
American Legion local adorns
one window pane

Temple Chabi Shalom - one of SF's 1st
Temples & synagogues

Small windows w/ Star of David - Hebrew letter
on a corner

Signs in Jp + Eng flank great
arched main door -

Fought in 1934
8 rituals a year

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