

# Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

HEARING DATE SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

## MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

*Application No.:* LBR-2018-19-052  
*Business Name:* Mechanics' Institute  
*Business Address:* 57 Post Street, Suite 504  
*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Taryn Edwards, Strategic Partnerships Manager  
*Nomination Date:* April 15, 2019  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

The Mechanics' Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization governed by a 16-member Board of Directors. The Mechanics' Institute is the oldest surviving library in California designed to serve the general population, and the oldest chess club in the nation. It was conceived on December 11, 1854, by a group of mechanics (artisans, craftsmen and laborers) who were dissatisfied with San Francisco's lack of libraries and dearth of educational opportunities for adults. On March 6, 1855, the Institute was formally arranged as a membership organization with a constitution, slate of elected officers and bylaws. The plan was to host a library, to offer classes and lectures that would teach new skills, to welcome everyone regardless of race or gender and to cost the user as little as possible.

By June 1855, the Institute was renting a room in the Express Building, and for the next 10 years it operated at several addresses before purchasing its current location on Post Street in 1866. The institute built a three story building on there that functioned as the Institute's offices, lecture hall, library and chess room for the next 40 years. That building was destroyed on April 18, 1906. On May 2, 1906, ground was broken at Larkin and Grove, on land the Institute owned, to build a temporary space to house donations of books made by concerned citizens to replace the Institute's library. By September 1906, the Institute's library and chess tables were back in business. By October, it had resumed offering lectures. In 1908, the Institute hired architect Albert Pissis to design the Institute's current home at 57 Post Street – a nine story building that was finished in July 1910. The building was declared a local landmark in 1981.

The business is located on the south side of Post Street between Kearny and Montgomery streets in the Financial District neighborhood.

### **CRITERION 1: Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?**

Yes, Mechanics' Institute has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

- Corner of Montgomery Street and California Street from 1855 to 1856 (1 year)
110 California Street from 1856 to 1858 (2 years)
82 Montgomery Street from 1858 to 1863 (5 years)
529 California Street from 1863 to 1866 (3 years)
31 Post Street from 1866 to 1906 (40 years)
99 Grove Street from 1906 to 1910 (4 years)
57 Post Street from 1910 to Present (109 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, Mechanics' Institute has contributed to the history and identity of San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is associated with the library and chess traditions.
The property is SF Landmark No. 124 and is a Category I property within Article 11 of the Planning Code. It has a Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its local designations. Mechanics' Institute is one of the state's earliest educational institutions, and the building is an excellent example of a mixed use building whose internal functions are expressed in external design. The building was designed by master architect Albert Pissis (1852-1914).
Mechanics' Institute has been mentioned in many newspaper articles, historical documents, dissertations and other treatments of local history over the last 160 years. Most recently, Porter Shreve described the Institute has "a vibrant cultural oasis in a landscape of glass and steel skyscrapers," and Adam Johnson was quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle stating that "The Mechanics' Institute is the first chamber in the beating heart of San Francisco's literary scene," adding that the library is "filled with books, history, rich programming, and writers and readers of all walks."

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, Mechanics' Institute is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Mechanics' Institute qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Library, Events, and Chess departments.
The landmark building and its character-defining features.
Traditions of independent learning, grassroots community building, social responsibility and cultural exploration.





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**CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS**

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Library and cultural center.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Mechanics' Institute currently located at 57 Post Street, Suite 504 in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo, Program Manager  
Legacy Business Program



# Small Business Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

*Application No.:* LBR-2018-19-052  
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*Business Address:* 57 Post Street, Suite 504  
*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Taryn Edwards, Strategic Partnerships Manager  
*Nomination Date:* April 15, 2019  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

## ADOPTING FINDINGS APPROVING THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION FOR MECHANICS' INSTITUTE, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 57 POST STREET, SUITE 504.

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included in the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on September 23, 2019, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore







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OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Mechanics' Institute in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Mechanics' Institute:

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Library, Events, and Chess departments.
The landmark building and its character-defining features.
Traditions of independent learning, grassroots community building, social responsibility and cultural exploration.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Mechanics' Institute on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Library and cultural center.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on September 23, 2019.

Regina Dick-Endrizzi
Director

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

- Ayes -
Nays -
Abstained -
Absent -





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS  
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

**Legacy  
Business  
Registry**

# Application Review Sheet

*Application No.:* LBR-2018-19-052  
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**CRITERION 1:** Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?       X       Yes                      No

- Corner of Montgomery Street and California Street from 1855 to 1856 (1 year)
- 110 California Street from 1856 to 1858 (2 years)
- 82 Montgomery Street from 1858 to 1863 (5 years)
- 529 California Street from 1863 to 1866 (3 years)
- 31 Post Street from 1866 to 1906 (40 years)
- 99 Grove Street from 1906 to 1910 (4 years)
- 57 Post Street from 1910 to Present (109 years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?       X       Yes                      No

**CRITERION 3:** Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?       X       Yes                      No

**NOTES:** N/A

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** August 19, 2019

Richard Kurylo  
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program



Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

**AARON PESKIN**  
佩斯金 市參事

April 15, 2019

Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi  
San Francisco Office of Small Business  
City Hall, Room 110  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Director Dick-Endrizzi:

It is my honor and privilege to nominate the Mechanics' Institute for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Since its founding in 1854, the Mechanics' Institute has contributed greatly to its community in the Financial District and across San Francisco as a library, event space and chess club. The Mechanics' Institute is the oldest library designed to serve the public in the state of California, and runs the oldest continuously operating chess club in the United States. Since the original collection was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, the library's collection has grown to some 165,000 volumes. Its current home, built for the institute in 1910, is a distinguished example of the work of Mexican-born architect Albert Pissis.

I hope for the Mechanics' Institute's continued success and hereby recommend it for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Aaron Peskin".

Aaron Peskin

# Section One:

**Business / Applicant Information.** Provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address, and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title, and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

<b>NAME OF BUSINESS:</b>		
MECHANICS' INSTITUTE		
<b>BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)</b>		
JENNIFER DESIDERI, ACCOUNTING MANAGER		
<b>CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:</b>		<b>TELEPHONE:</b>
MECHANICS' INSTITUTE 57 POST STREET, SUITE 504 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94104		((415))393-0108
		<b>EMAIL:</b>
		JDESIDERI@MILIBRARY.ORG
<b>WEBSITE:</b>	<b>FACEBOOK PAGE:</b>	<b>YELP PAGE</b>
MILIBRARY.ORG	MILIBRARY	

<b>APPLICANT'S NAME</b>	
TARYN EDWARDS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
<b>APPLICANT'S TITLE</b>	
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER	
<b>APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:</b>	
MECHANICS' INSTITUTE 57 POST STREET, SUITE 504 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94104	
<b>TELEPHONE:</b>	
(415) 393-0103	
<b>EMAIL:</b>	
TEDWARDS@MILIBRARY.ORG	

<b>SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:</b>	<b>SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):</b>
43154	94-1254644

<b>OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSB Staff</b>	
<b>NAME OF NOMINATOR:</b>	<b>DATE OF NOMINATION:</b>

## Section Two:

### Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS:	ZIP CODE:	START DATE OF BUSINESS
Express Building, Corner of Montgomery & California	94104	March 6, 1855
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	June 1855-March 1856	

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
110 CALIFORNIA	94104	Start: March 1856
		End: Nov 1858

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
82 MONTGOMERY	94104	Start: Nov 1858
		End: April 1863

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
529 CALIFORNIA	94104	Start: April 1863
		End: April 1866

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
31 POST	94104	Start: April 1866
		End: April 18, 1906

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
99 GROVE	94102	Start: May 3, 1906
		End: July 1910

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
57 POST	94104	Start: July 10, 1910
		End: present

## Section Three:

### Disclosure Statement.

#### San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified and a business deemed not current in with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for the Business Assistance Grant.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Taryn Edwards 6/7/19

Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:



## **MECHANICS' INSTITUTE**

### **Section 4: Written Historical Narrative**

#### **CRITERION 1**

**a. Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.**

The Mechanics' Institute ("Mechanics" or "the Institute") is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization governed by a 16-member Board of Directors. It was conceived on December 11, 1854, by a group of mechanics (artisans, craftsmen and laborers) who were dissatisfied with San Francisco's lack of libraries and dearth of educational opportunities for adults. On March 6, 1855, the fledgling Institute was formally arranged as a membership organization with a constitution, slate of elected officers and bylaws. The plan was to host a library, to offer classes and lectures that would teach new skills, to welcome everyone regardless of race or gender and to cost the user as little as possible.

By June 1855, the Institute rented a room on the 4th floor of the Express Building on Montgomery Street at California Street. For the next 10 years, it operated at several addresses before purchasing its current location on Post Street in 1866. There it built a three-story building that functioned as the Institute's offices, lecture hall, library and chess room for the next 40 years. That building was destroyed on April 18, 1906. On May 2, 1906, ground was broken at Larkin and Grove, on land the Institute owned, to build a temporary space to house donations of books made by concerned citizens to replace the Institute's library. By September 1906, the Institute's library and chess tables were back in business. By October, it had resumed offering lectures.

In 1908, the Institute hired architect Albert Pissis to design the Institute's current home at 57 Post Street – a nine story building that was finished in July 1910. The building was declared a local landmark in 1981. It is also a Category I Building according to the San Francisco Planning Department's "Downtown Plan" — the highest status possible — and has been evaluated as eligible for the National Register.

**b. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?**

The organization had a brief interruption of service after the earthquake of April 18, 1906, that destroyed its building. By October 1906, it had resumed full operation. It has since functioned without any interruptions in service.



**c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business.**

The business is a nonprofit organization and not a family-owned business.

**d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.**

Not applicable.

**e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.**

Documentation of the existence of the business verifying it has been in operation for 30+ years is provided in this Legacy Business Registry application.

**f. Note any other special features of the business location, such as, if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.**

The historic resource status of the building at 57 Post Street is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. According to the Planning Department, the building is a major landmark designed by Albert Pissis (1852-1914). It's an excellent example of a mixed use building whose internal functions are expressed in the external design. The ground floor with its commercial space and monumental entranceway is surmounted by two floors of well-lit library floors, with offices above that. The marble lobby is decorated with an Arthur Mathews mural<sup>1</sup> and is the endpoint of a very beautiful circular iron and marble stairway. The façade includes an arched, rusticated entry; a frieze; a metope (square space between triglyphs in a Doric frieze); arched windows with key consoles alternating with engaged ionic pilasters; a denticulated band course articulating the division between the second and third stories; a second band course;

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<sup>1</sup> The Mathews mural in the lobby is a single panel. It was commissioned and custom sketched for MI in 1906 to commemorate MI's merger with the Mercantile Association. Then the earthquake of 1906 happened and the project was put on hold. Arthur Mathews was then called around 1912 to head the art department of the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) so the project was further pushed back. It's believed Mathews didn't commence work on it until 1916 once his expo commitment was fulfilled. The piece was installed on the southeast wall of MI's lobby in the summer of 1917 per MI's board minutes. Some people think the mural was exhibited at the PPIE but that is not likely given its size.

keystones; and a shallow modillioned cornice. The lobby houses a bas relief bronze plaque on its northwest wall executed by F. Marion Wells.<sup>2</sup>

Albert Pissis is one of the most important early architects of San Francisco. Born in Guaymas, Mexico, of French parents, he came to California as a boy in 1858 and graduated from local schools. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and traveled extensively in Europe. He returned to San Francisco to become a leader in the western neoclassic revival on the Pacific frontier. He was one of five architects to serve on the advisory committee of the 1915 Pan American Pacific Exposition. He contributed significantly to San Francisco's architectural character. His designs are distinguished by their refinement and sophisticated restraint.

## **CRITERION 2**

### **a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.**

The Mechanics' Institute is the oldest surviving library in California designed to serve the general population, and the oldest chess club in the nation. In 1855, the Institute began to host free lectures on science, technology and popular culture making it one of the state's earliest educational providers.

Mechanics' Institute has served as a place to explore what it means to be a "citizen" of San Francisco since its earliest days, hosting forums on topics that rocked the day such as whether California should adopt paper currency, the 8-hour labor law and Chinese immigration. Today it continues to host several monthly public discussions on topics relevant to "life" in the San Francisco Bay Area. It further contributes to Bay Area culture through its myriad services such as writers critique groups, book discussion groups, lectures and providing a venue – via rental at a reasonable cost – of its meeting room spaces to various cultural groups that need space to hold their own programs. The Institute's 9-story building is also home to scores of nonprofits.

### **b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?**

In 1868, the Institute's president was tapped by the Governor to serve in an ex-officio capacity on the University of California's Board of Regents. The Institute heavily participated in the UC's first years, hosting classes for the School of Mechanic Arts at its Post Street location, helping develop the curriculum and sitting on the Board of Regents until 1974. Mechanics' Institute would continue to host classes taught by UC Berkeley faculty through the 1920s. At their peak, these classes saw 1,000 students per year – up to a third of which were women. The success of

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<sup>2</sup> According to MI's records, it commissioned this bust in late January 1896. The bust was cast using the same model that Wells had submitted to the contest in June of 1890 for the Pioneer monument outside City Hall (Sacramento Daily Union, 16 June 1890, p1). The bust was hung on MI's wall of its old building February 24, 1896. For more citations see: <https://tarynedwards.com/2014/02/24/james-lick-bust-at-the-mechanics-institute/>.

these classes held at the Mechanics' Institute ultimately led to the UC establishing its formal Extension program in 1891.

Between the years of 1857-1899, the Mechanics' Institute also hosted 31 Industrial Exhibitions that promoted the products of local business and inventors. These fairs bolstered California's infant economy, encouraged the demand for local goods and whetted the public's appetite for elaborate, multi-attraction fairs. Ultimately they lay the seeds for larger international fairs such as the California Midwinter of 1894, the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915 and the Golden Gate Exposition of 1939.

**c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?**

Mechanics' Institute and its myriad endeavors have been mentioned in innumerable newspaper articles, historical documents, dissertations and other treatments of local history over the last 160 years. Most recently, Porter Shreve described the Institute as "a vibrant cultural oasis in a landscape of glass and steel skyscrapers," and Adam Johnson was quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* stating that "*The Mechanics' Institute is the first chamber in the beating heart of San Francisco's literary scene,*" adding that the library is "*filled with books, history, rich programming, and writers and readers of all walks.*" Other recent articles about the Institute can be found on the organization's website: <https://www.milibrary.org/about/press>.

**d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?**

Thousands of Mechanics' founders and members are of historical and contemporary significance including philanthropist James Lick, father of the cable car Andrew Hallidie; the eccentric Emperor (Joseph) Norton; writers Jack London, Oakley Hall, Gertrude Stein and Gertrude Atherton; mayors Adolph Sutro and James Phelan; artists Arthur and Lucia Matthews; bankers Amadeo Giannini and William Ralston; architects Julia Morgan, Albert Pissis, Willis Polk and Bernard Maybeck; and photographers Eadward Muybridge, Carleton Watkins and Pirkle Jones.

**e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?**

Mechanics' Institute has a strong ethic of volunteerism and civic duty serving in advisory and planning roles for large civic events such as the yearly SF History Days at the Old Mint, the annual San Francisco Scholastic Chess Championship in Golden Gate Park, the 100th anniversary of the Panama Pacific International Exposition (2015) and offering free chess classes every weekend at the Institute and in 18 public schools in San Francisco.

**f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.**

Mechanics' Institute has a membership of near 5,000 people and a wider community of over 7,000, most of who live or work along the BART line. It is a favorite of readers, scholars, writers,

downtown employees and nomadic workers. Among the fastest growing segments of membership are persons under 40 years old. When surveyed, these younger members expressed interest in being part of an institution that has a sense of “authenticity” as represented in the history and beauty of the Mechanics’ Institute’s building and library.

**g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?**

The Mechanics’ Institute building, designed by prolific local architect Albert Pissis, is San Francisco Landmark #134, designated in 1981. The building houses a unique cast iron spiral staircase, a Tennessee pink marble clad lobby and a one-of-a-kind mural by Arthur and Lucia Mathews on the southeast wall. In addition, the Library’s collection contains thousands of other items of cultural significance including a gold-framed portrait of Andrew Smith Hallidie, a bronze bust of James Lick, an extremely rare wall-sized map of the city circa 1854 and hundreds of photographs, books, objects and archival records related to its own and San Francisco history. It also has a world renowned collection of books and ephemera related to chess and fairs and expositions.

**h. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?**

The community would be irrevocably changed if the Mechanics’ Institute was sold, relocated or shut down. The Mechanics’ Institute’s presence on Post Street over the last 153 years has served as a driver of Bay Area culture and a touchstone of San Francisco’s history and essence as a city.

**CRITERION 3**

**a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.**

The Mechanics’ Institute is made up of three departments: the Library, Events and Chess of which the Library is the largest. It maintains a general interest collection of some 150,000 volumes in print that is particularly rich in the areas of literature, California and western United States history. It also maintains digital collections of e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and databases and a rich calendar of writers and technology classes, book group and craft activity meetings. The Library’s services are characterized by a highly curated collection, activities relevant to its clientele’s interests, and personalized service.

The Events department hosts approximately 100 programs a year including history lectures, panel discussions, new book launches, food and wine tastings, play readings, open mic poetry, and costumed activities. The Mechanics’ Institute’s events are designed to be thoughtful and distinctive, covering a wide range of topics germane to the culture, civic, and living experience of the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Chess department offers 46 chess tables for casual play, regularly hosts tournaments, lectures and marathons including the Bay Area-famous Tuesday Night Marathon, offers free classes that are open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays and offers chess instruction to San Francisco public school children at 18 sites for free, plus nine sites in the wider Bay Area for a small fee. The Chess department's activities are colored by its overriding love of the game and the urge to teach those who play it how to think two steps ahead.

**b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)**

The Mechanics' Institute's mission since 1854 has been to contribute to the intellectual growth and creative achievements of its members and the wider community through its library collection and myriad services.

**c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).**

The Mechanics' Institute actively maintains its landmark building and the individual spaces that house the Library, Chess Club and events and activities. In 2018, it was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to help support efforts to raise funds to repair and restore the brick façades and steel framing of its Post Street building.

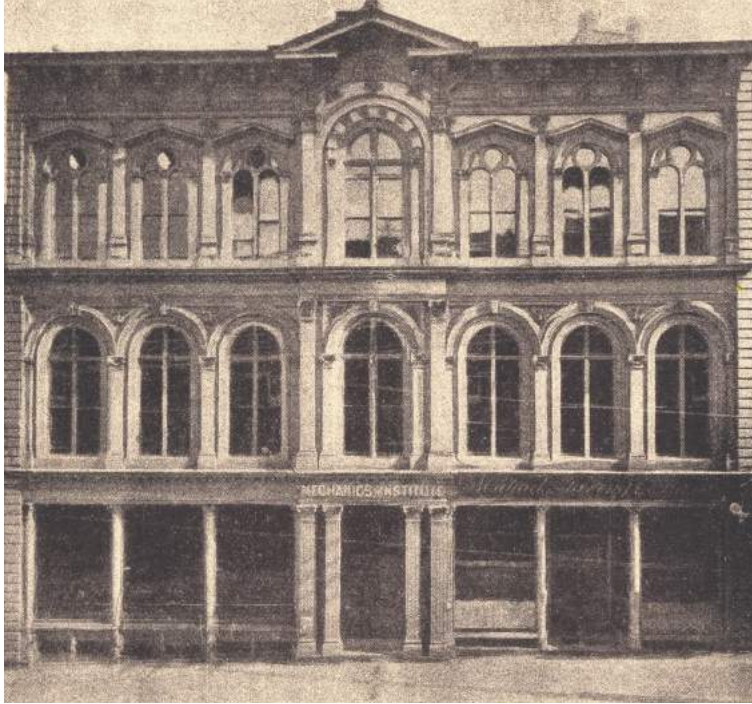
**d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.**

Though the notion of a mechanics' institute in the 21st century may seem quaint, the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco is anything but - carrying on the traditions for which it was founded: independent learning, grassroots community building, social responsibility and cultural exploration. The Mechanic' Institute looks forward to serving the City for the next 165 years.

**Mechanics' Institute**  
**Legacy Business Registry Application**  
**Section 5 - Supplemental Historical Photographs**



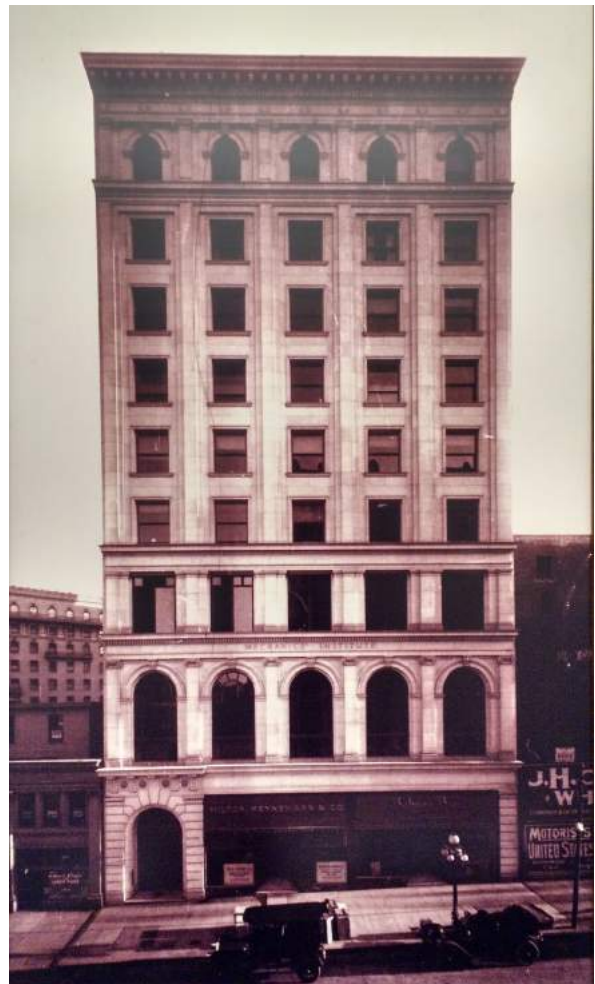




**PHOTO 1**  
**Mechanics' Institute**  
**31 Post Street**



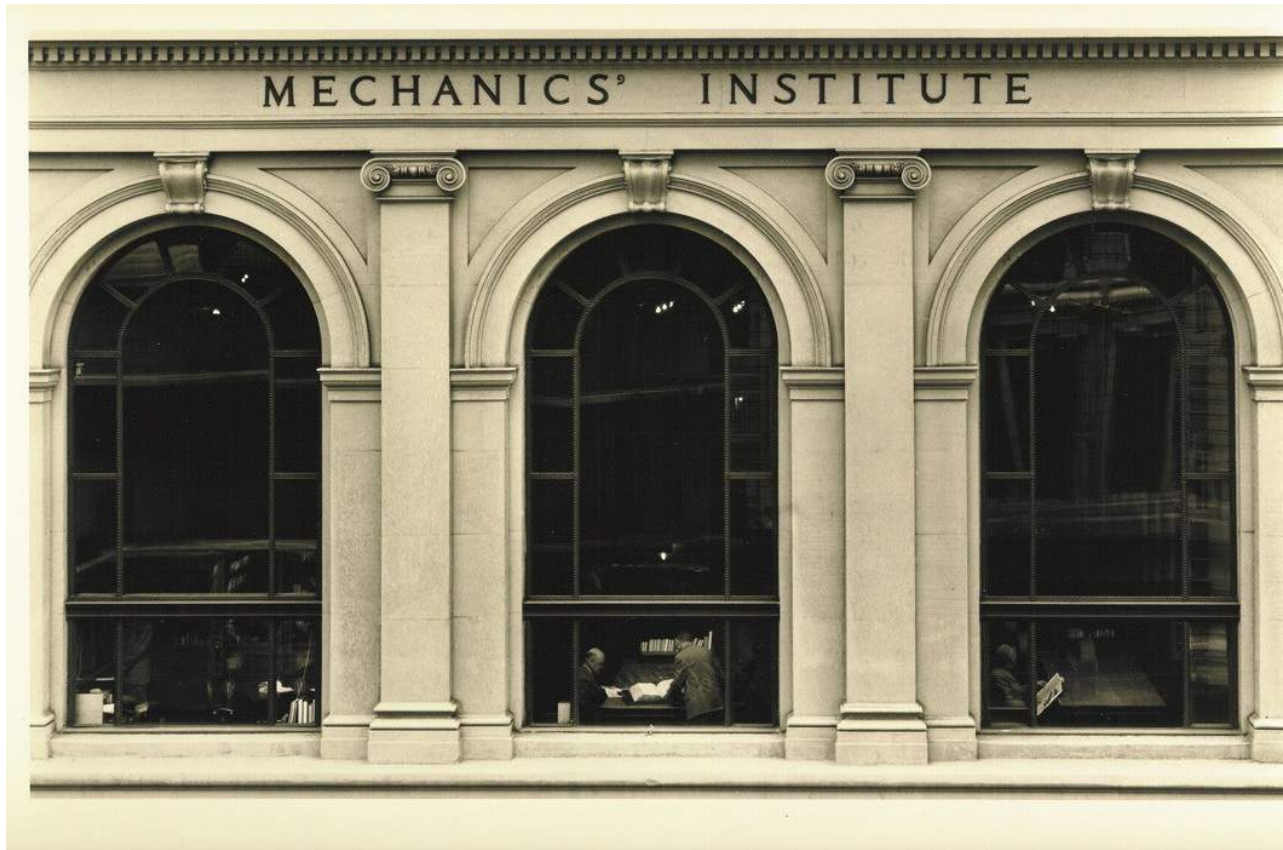
**PHOTO 2 & 3**  
**Mechanics' Institute when its**  
**current building was being con-**  
**structed. The address changed to**  
**57 Post. (circa 1909)**







**PHOTO 4 - Mechanics' Institute in 2017 after a façade refresh**



**PHOTO 5 - Façade detail, circa 1955.**  
**PHOTO 6—1854 U.S. Coast Survey Map of SF circa 1854.**



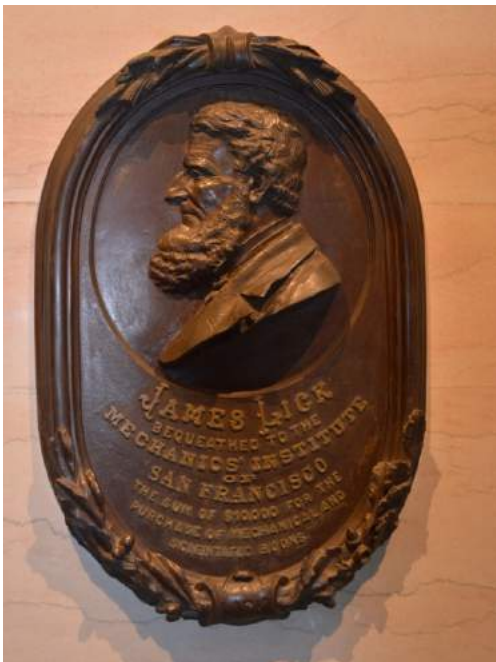




**PHOTO 7 - Circular Staircase  
by Pirkle Jones, circa 1955**



**PHOTO 8 - Circular Staircase  
circa 2018**



**PHOTO 9 - James Lick  
installed in 1896, circa 2014**



**PHOTO 10 - Andrew Hallidie (1898).  
upon its restoration in 2016.**



**PHOTOS 11**

**Mural by Arthur & Lucia Mathews, sketched in 1906, installed in 1917.**





**PHOTOS 12 & 13 - 2nd Floor Library Views circa 1910 and 2018**





**PHOTOS 14 & 15 - 3rd Floor Library Views circa 1955 and 2017**





**PHOTOS 16 & 17 - 3rd Floor Classrooms, circa 2013**





**PHOTOS 18 & 19**  
**Meeting and Event Space views, circa 2017**



**PHOTOS 21 & 22**  
**Chess Room (circa 1910 and 2018)**





**PHOTO 23**

A day of lectures and dancing to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939, circa 2019.



**PHOTO 24**

(Above) Discussion, tasting, and book launch for *Iconic San Francisco Dishes, Drinks and Desserts* by Laura Borrmann featuring food and cocktails from Sam's Grill, Sam Wo's, 15 Romolo and It's It, circa 2018.

**PHOTO 25**

(Below) a packed house to fete author Dave Eggers and *A Monk of Mokha*,





**PHOTO 26**

**How to Apply for Creative Writing Grants, taught by Lyzette Wanzer, 2018.**

**PHOTO 27**

**(Below) Book Launch with J.J. Mulligan for *No Human is Illegal*, 2019**







**PHOTO 28**

One of many chess camps held per summer, circa 2017.

**PHOTO 29**

(Below) 2019 SF Scholastic Chess Championship, Golden Gate Park



# Mechanics' Institute

## Legacy Business Registry Application

### Section 5 - Supplemental Historical Documents

#### **Newspapers—historic**

Thousands of newspaper articles covered the actions and news of the Mechanics' Institute since its founding in December 1854 to the present with the bulk of them occurring from 1855-1950.

The [California Digital Newspaper Collection](#) , a free database with some of the state's principal papers, contains over 16,000 articles on the "Mechanics' Institute".

The *San Francisco Chronicle's* historic newspaper database (1865-2015) contains nearly 12,000 articles on the "Mechanics' Institute".

#### **Newspapers—contemporary**

##### **SF Chronicle**

The Mechanics' Institute's events are mentioned innumerable times in the Datebook. From February 2014 to December 2017 the Institute was also in a partnership with the *Chronicle*, offering a popular historical tour of the building and its services to *Chronicle* readers (6 tours) and its meeting room space to host John McMurtrie's Book Club.

November 20, 2018—[\*Ralph Lewin, who helped make Mechanics' Institute a literary hub, stepping down\*](#), by John McMurtrie.

March 4, 2018, [Chess is the challenge for young people at Golden Gate Park tournament](#) by Karen de Sá

November 15, 2015—[Moving through the years with Mechanics Institute chess tradition](#), by Lea Suzuki as part of *the Regulars*: a photo and video column.

October 6, 2015—[S.F.'s venerable Mechanics' Institute becoming literary hub](#) by Porter Shreve.

##### **Sacramento Bee**

November 27, 2015, [Discoveries: Mechanics' Institute an egalitarian oasis in fast-changing S.F.](#) by Sam McManis

##### **Hoodline**

January 2, 2017, [DaDa Debuts At The Mechanics' Institute With Art, Cocktails, & More](#), by Lisa Amand

March 25, 2017, [7 Places To Go Without Leaving The Inner Sunset This Weekend](#), by Walter

Thompson

March 18, 2016, [Secretly Awesome: Inside The Mechanics' Institute, A FiDi 'Cultural Hub'](#) by Geri Koepfel

### Books

The Institute is mentioned in several contemporary non-fiction and fiction books. The following is a selection.

- 1) The Institute's official history that is available at most libraries and on [Amazon.com](#).  
*Four books, 300 dollars and a dream : an illustrated history of the first 150 years of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco : how a pioneer reading room for the education of craftsmen became a major library, research facility and social center in the heart of a busy city* by Richard Reinhardt, Mechanics' Institute, 2005.
- 2) *Making San Francisco American : cultural frontiers in the urban West, 1846-1906* by Barbara Berglund, University Press of Kansas, 2007.
- 3) *Consuming Identities: Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, by Dr. Amy Lippert DeFalco, Oxford University Press, 2018.
- 4) *Discovering Vintage San Francisco* by Laura Smith Borrman, Globe Pequot Press, 2015.
- 5) *111 Places in San Francisco That You Must Not Miss*, by Floriana Peterson, Emons Publishers 2018.
- 6) *Making Culture Visible: The Public Display of Photography at Fairs and Exhibitions 1847-1900*; by Julie K. Brown, Routledge, 2018.
- 7) *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California: Cultural Philanthropy, Industrial Capital, and Social Authority* by John Ott, Routledge, 2016.

### Articles

Because of the Institute's significant contributions to Bay Area culture, it is the focus of scores of articles published in magazines and journals. The following is a selection.

- 1) "Before the Midwinter Fair: the Mechanics' Institute's "Pacific Rim" Industrial Exhibitions of 1869 and 1871", by Taryn Edwards, forthcoming in *The Argonaut*, Summer 2019.
- 2) "Theory made practice: the story of the undertaking and development of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco" by Joseph Cumming, *Sunset Magazine* 19:1 (May 1907) 43–50.
- 3) [The Mechanics' Institute Library Commission and Construction: 1906-1912](#) by Christopher VerPlank, in honor of the Mechanics' Institute's Building Centennial Anniversary



Celebration, 2010.

- 4) [A cultural history of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco, 1855–1920](#) by Hildie V. Kraus, published online July 18, 2013.
- 5) "The Mechanics' Institute Fairs, 1857 to 1899" by Nora Leishman, *The Argonaut*, Fall 1999.

### **Presentations**

The Institute is a popular venue for talks on its own history and how it has influenced San Francisco's history and culture at large. The Institute's Chess Club also [live streams](#) many of its activities. The following is a selection of presentations given at the Institute and for other organizations and historical groups including the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley, Wells Fargo, the San Francisco Writers Conference, and the Society of California Pioneers. Some of these talks are available via the Mechanics' Institute's YouTube channel or on video in its Library collection.

- 1) July 9, 2019—*Before the Midwinter Fair: the Mechanics' Institute's "Pacific Rim" Industrial Exhibitions of 1869 and 1871*, by Taryn Edwards, to be delivered before the San Francisco Historical Society. Also presented to the Mechanics' Institute, and the Treasure Island Museum. An earlier version of this talk, [Before the P.P.I.E.](#) is available via You Tube.
- 2) March 27, 2019 – *Wise Counselor: Andrew Smith Hallidie and the foundation of the University of California* by Taryn Edwards. A discussion of MI President Andrew Hallidie and its role in the foundation of the University. For the San Francisco City Guides. Also presented to the San Francisco Corral of Westerners, the Institute for Historical Study and the Bancroft Library. Filmed as the [Unveiling of Mr. Hallidie](#) in January 2016. Available via YouTube.
- 3) February 17, 2019 – *Historical Research: How to Make the Past Come Alive Accurately – a discussion with Brigid O'Farrell, San Francisco Writers Conference 2019, San Francisco Hyatt Regency*, by Taryn Edwards.
- 4) December 15, 2018 – *The Writing Community of the San Francisco Mechanics' Institute and How a Librarian Can Be A Writer's Best Friend*, by Taryn Edwards for the Tri Valley Writers Club, Pleasanton.
- 5) December 13, 2018 – *The Emperor's Ride: Notes on a Famous Photograph*, by Taryn Edwards with John Lumea. A discussion of the life of Emperor Norton and the role of the Mechanics' Institute in San Francisco cycling culture. For the Battery, San Francisco. Also presented to the Mechanics' Institute.
- 6) September 28, 2017 – *Andrew Smith Hallidie: the man, the building and the restoration*, by Taryn Edwards with Rick Evans and Bruce Albert, for the AIA's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Architecture and the City Festival. A discussion of MI President Andrew Hallidie's life to commemorate the restoration of the Hallidie Building. For the Mechanics' Institute, San Francisco, CA.

- 7) September 5, 2017 – *The Mechanics’ Institute of San Francisco*, by Taryn Edwards. A general discussion of the Institute and its foundation for Wells Fargo, San Francisco, CA. The same talk can be viewed on YouTube before the [Mechanics’ Institute](#) and before the [BayNet Libraries Annual meeting](#) of 2016.
- 8) May 30, 2017—*James Lick and the Mechanics’ Institute: an Uncertain Friendship*. A discussion of philanthropist James Lick and his role in the foundation of the Mechanics’ Institute. For the Society of California Pioneers, Annual Board Luncheon, and for the opening of the museum exhibit on James Lick. San Francisco, CA.
- 8) January 24, 2017 – *Wine at the Fairs: the Wines, Brandies and Vinous Products at the Mechanics’ Institute’s Industrial Expositions, 1857-1899* by Taryn Edwards. For the San Francisco Corral of Westerners, Sonoma County Library, and San Francisco Historical Society.
- 9) November, 2016 – Librarian Taryn Edwards appeared as a “historical expert” in the documentary [the San Francisco Cable Cars](#) relating the life of Andrew Smith Hallidie and the role of the Mechanics’ Institute in the formation and debut of the cable cars. Film by Strephon Taylor (released March, 2017).

Mechanics' Institute's  
Constitution & Bylaws circa 1855 &  
Annual Report for 1855

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## PREFACE.

THE first meeting of the Mechanics of the City of San Francisco, for the purpose of organizing the association now known as the Mechanics' Institute, was held at the office of the City Tax Collector, in the City Hall, on the evening of the eleventh day of December, 1854. At this assembly, Mr. GEORGE K. GLUYAS presided, Mr. RODERICK MATHESON acted as Secretary, and MESSRS. BENJAMIN HAYWOOD, RODERICK MATHESON, JOHN S. WILLIAMS, E. T. STEEN, and HENRY E. CARLTON, were appointed to draft a Constitution and By-Laws for the proposed association.

On the sixth day of March, 1855, that committee reported the following Constitution, which was adopted:

### CONSTITUTION

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF THE  
CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO.

#### ARTICLE I.—NAME AND OBJECT.

SECTION 1. This Association shall be known as the "MECHANICS' INSTITUTE OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO," and shall have for its object the establishment of a Library, Reading Room, the collection of a Cabinet, Scientific Apparatus, Works of Art, and for other literary and scientific purposes.

SEC. 2. The Directors shall hereafter be called and known by the name of the Directors of the Mechanics' Institute of the City of San Francisco.

#### ARTICLE II.—CAPITAL STOCK.

SECTION 1. The capital stock of this Institution shall be seventy-five thousand dollars, or such further sum as may be fixed upon hereafter, (in shares of twenty-five dollars each,) which shall be invested in the purchase of a suitable lot in the City of San Francisco, and the erection thereon of a proper building or hall for the use of said Institute, and in the purchase of books, magazines, maps, charts, and scientific apparatus.

SEC. 2. The shares of stock shall be signed by the President and Secretary, and countersigned by the Treasurer of the Institute.

#### ARTICLE III.—MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION 1. Any person may become a stockholder in this Institute, by purchasing at least one share therein, and paying one dollar and fifty cents quarterly in advance.

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SEC. 2. Any person may become a subscribing member, by paying an initiation fee of five dollars, and one dollar and fifty cents quarterly in advance, with all the privileges of a stockholder, except the right to vote and hold office.

SEC. 3. Both stockholders and subscribing members shall sign the Constitution and By-Laws of the Institute.

SEC. 4. If the dues of any member remain unpaid for the term of six months, his privileges and rights of membership shall be forfeited, unless his delinquency be excused by the Board of Directors.

SEC. 5. Persons may be elected honorary members at a regular meeting of the Institute, and shall be entitled to all the privileges of regular membership, except the right to vote and hold office.

SEC. 6. Any person not a stockholder may become a life member by paying fifty dollars, and enjoy all the privileges of membership except the right to vote and hold office.

SEC. 7. All members eligible to office must be Mechanics, Manufacturers, Artists, Engineers, or engaged in some mechanical pursuit, and citizens of San Francisco.

#### ARTICLE IV.—ELECTIONS.

SECTION 1. All elections shall be by ballot, and be made by such of the members as shall attend for that purpose, in person. Each member shall be entitled to but one vote in the election of officers of this Institute, and the person or persons having the highest number of votes shall be declared elected.

SEC. 2. Each member shall be entitled to one vote for every share of stock which he may hold, on all questions which involve the expenditure of moneys, not otherwise provided for.

SEC. 3. The election of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretaries, and Board of Directors, shall take place annually, on the first Friday in March of each year; and shall be held under the superintendence of three Judges selected from the members by the Board of Directors for the time being. At least twenty days' notice shall be given of such election in two of the city papers.

SEC. 4. In case the election of officers should not take place on the day fixed by the Constitution, it shall be the duty of the Board for the time being to give notice of an election to take place as soon thereafter as practicable, from the date of the day upon which the election should have been held; and in such case the officers of the Institute shall remain in office until such election has been held, and their successors appointed.

SEC. 5. The officers of this Institute shall enter upon the performance of their duties on the Thursday next succeeding their election.

SEC. 6. Librarians and subordinate officers shall be appointed by the Board of Directors, to hold office during the pleasure of the Board of Directors.

#### ARTICLE V.—COMPENSATION.

SECTION 1. No pecuniary compensation shall be allowed to the President, Vice President, or the Board of Directors.

SEC. 2. Librarians, subordinate officers, and Clerk, shall be allowed such compensation as the Board of Directors, from time to time, may determine upon.

#### ARTICLE VI.—VACANCIES.

SECTION 1. In case any vacancies occur in the Board of Directors, the President shall immediately order an election to fill the same.

#### ARTICLE VII.—OFFICERS.

SECTION 1. The officers of this Institute shall be a President, Vice President, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and seven Directors, to be elected annually.

SEC. 2. The President shall preside at all meetings of the Institute and of the Board of Directors, and preserve order; and, in case of an equal division of members upon any question, shall give the casting vote.

SEC. 3. The President shall have the power to call special meetings of the Board of Directors, and of the Institute, whenever he may deem it desirable.

SEC. 4. The President, at the expiration of his term of office, or oftener, if so requested by the Institute, shall make a written report of the general doings of the Institute, and suggest such means as may seem to him best calculated to promote its prosperity.

SEC. 5. The Vice President shall preside and perform all the duties of the office of President, in the absence or disqualification of that officer.

SEC. 6. The Corresponding Secretary shall be the organ of the Institute in its conference with other societies and the public. He shall make a record of all letters written by him, in a book kept for that purpose.

SEC. 7. The Recording Secretary shall affix his name to all the advertisements and notices emanating from the Board of Directors, or from the Institute. He shall attend all meetings, and, in the absence of the President and Vice President, shall call the same to order, and shall truly and at large record the proceedings of the Board of Directors, together with the proceedings of the Institute, in books kept for that purpose.

SEC. 8. The Treasurer shall take charge of all the funds of the Institute, (except the property invested in the name of the Board of Directors,) subject to the order of the majority of the Board of Directors, signed by the President and Secretary. He shall make a monthly report, exhibiting in detail his receipts and disbursements, and the balance in the treasury, and if invested, how. And for the better security of the trust confided to him, he shall give to the Board of Directors a bond in the sum of three thousand dollars, with two sureties, to be approved of by the Board of Directors, who shall have power to increase the bond as they may deem proper. He shall keep a regular account of the financial affairs of the Institute, an abstract of which, accompanied by satisfactory vouchers, he shall exhibit at each annual meeting. On resigning or being suspended from office, he shall hand over to his successor all books, vouchers, moneys and papers of the Institute in his possession.

SEC. 9. The Board of Directors shall be vested with full power to appropriate funds, enact by-laws, and conduct the affairs of the Institute: *Provided, however,* that no appropriation of more than three hundred dollars for any one object shall be made without a vote of the Institute.

SEC. 10. A removal from this State shall disqualify an officer from exercising the duties of his office, and shall be equivalent to a tender of his resignation.



## ARTICLE VIII.—MEETINGS.

SECTION 1. There shall be an annual meeting of the Institute on the first Wednesday in February, for the purpose of receiving the report of the Treasurer and Board of Directors, exhibiting the state of the Library, finances and property, and for the transaction of such other business as may be presented.

SEC. 2. At all the meetings of the Institute, at least fifteen members must be present for the transaction of business.

SEC. 3. There shall be meetings of the Institute on the first Friday in every month, at such hour as the Board of Directors may designate.

SEC. 4. The President, at the request of the Board of Directors, or by the written request of ten members, stating the reason therefor, shall call a meeting of the Institute for transacting special business, giving three days' notice thereof.

## ARTICLE IX.—FINANCES.

SECTION 1. The funds arising from assessments, contributions, lectures, and other sources not herein named, shall be appropriated to the purchase of books, payment of current expenses, and otherwise, as the Board of Directors shall from time to time direct.

SEC. 2. All orders, drafts, and other documents affecting the funds of the Institute, must be authorized by a majority of the Directors, and signed by the President and Secretary.

SEC. 3. No liability shall be incurred by the stockholders or Board of Directors, unless the amount so appropriated be actually in the treasury to meet such appropriation.

SEC. 4. When any appropriation of one thousand dollars or more is required, it shall be necessary for a majority of the stockholders to be represented.

## ARTICLE X.—NEGLECT OF OFFICIAL DUTY.

SECTION 1. In case of flagrant official misconduct, or neglect of duty on the part of a member of the Board, the Directors shall have power, by a vote of two thirds of their members, to expel the offending member; from which action, however, an appeal shall be allowed to a called meeting of the Institute, which shall ratify or annul the proceedings of the Board of Directors, as the circumstances of the case may warrant.

## ARTICLE XI.—EXPULSIONS.

SECTION 1. If any member shall wantonly create a disturbance at any meeting of the Institute, or devise or take part in any measure designedly to injure the Institute, or shall purposely deface the books, building, rooms, or appurtenances thereof, on written complaint of five members, a meeting shall be held, and the matter referred to a committee of three members, who shall investigate the charges and report at a future meeting of the Institute; when, if the charges are sustained, he shall be reprovved or deprived of membership—always allowing the accused ample opportunity to excuse or extenuate his character and conduct.

## ARTICLE XII.—ALTERATIONS AND AMENDMENTS.

SECTION 1. This Constitution shall not be altered or amended, unless by the vote of two-thirds of the members present at a stated meeting, notice being given one month previously for that purpose.

On the twenty-ninth day of March, 1855, a permanent organization was effected, and the following officers were the first elected:—

BENJAMIN HAYWOOD, PRESIDENT.

JOHN SIME,..... *Vice President.* P. B. DEXTER,..... *Rec. Sec'y.*  
J. W. BROOKS,.... *Treasurer.* WM. M. LAROCHE,..... *Cor. Sec'y.*

*Directors:*

GARDNER ELLIOTT, GEORGE COFRAN,  
S. H. WILLIAMS, JAMES BALLENTINE.  
JOHN C. MACREDDY, ELI COOK,  
S. C. BUGBEE.

On the twelfth day of April, next succeeding, the association adopted the following By-Laws, Rules of Order, and Regulations for the Library and Reading Rooms:—

## BY-LAWS

## OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

## ARTICLE I.—BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

SECTION 1. Stated semi-monthly meetings of the Board shall be held at the rooms of the Institute, on Saturday evening, (unless otherwise ordered,) at half past seven o'clock.

SEC. 2. The President may call special meetings at any time, and any three members, if they desire, may also have a special meeting convened through the President. Five members of the Board shall constitute a quorum.

SEC. 3. On taking the chair, the President shall call the Board to order, and the Secretary shall call over the list of members alphabetically, noting the absentees, when he shall read the minutes of the last meeting.

## ARTICLE II.—COMMITTEES.

SECTION 1. At the first meeting after the election of the Board, or as soon thereafter as may be, the President shall appoint the Standing Committees of the Board. They shall be as follows, and consist of three members each:—

*First*—Committee on Library, Reading Room, and Buildings;

*Second*—Committee on Ways and Means, and Accounts;

*Third*—Committee on Books and Donations;

each of which Committees shall report quarterly.

SEC. 2. It shall be the duty of the Committee on Ways and Means and Accounts to examine, from time to time, into the finances of the Board; to see that all dues are paid; to devise ways by which the means of the Institute may be increased; to take into consideration any reports or propositions relating to the treasury; and generally to have a supervision over the financial department of the Institute, and to examine the Treasurer's accounts, and certify to the correctness of the same, and that the money is actually paid where it purports to be. The Treasurer's books shall be open at all times to this Committee, to the President of the Board, and also to any member of the Directory.



SEC. 3. It shall be the duty of the Committee on Library, Reading Room and Buildings, to procure suitable and convenient rooms, and have them properly fitted up and furnished, as the wants of the Institute may require; and it shall have a general supervision of the rooms, furniture and books, see that they are properly arranged, and the room is properly cleaned and kept in good order, and report to the Board, from time to time, on the state and condition of the same.

SEC. 4. It shall be the duty of the Committee on Books and Donations to examine and report upon suitable books for the Library, and works of art and other things for the Cabinet; to acquire these by purchase; to solicit and accept donations of books and other articles applicable to the Library, Reading Room and Cabinet; and to recommend, from time to time, (when the finances will warrant,) the purchase of new works; and to take into consideration such matters as shall be referred to it by the Board.

SEC. 5. All special committees not provided for by the Constitution shall be appointed by the President, unless otherwise ordered by the Institute.

#### ARTICLE III.—LIBRARIAN.

SECTION 1. The Librarian shall be appointed by the Board of Directors; and for the moneys, books, and other property, temporarily committed to his charge, he shall file with the President a legal bond, with one or more sureties, approved by the Board of Directors, in the sum of one thousand dollars, which bond shall be increased at the pleasure of the Board.

SEC. 2. He shall endeavor, in all suitable ways, to increase the number of subscribers, and collect their subscriptions; and, for all moneys coming into his hands, belonging to the Institute, he shall account to the Treasurer on the first Monday in each month throughout the year, or oftener if required, taking duplicate receipts of the Treasurer for the same; one of which duplicates shall be filed with the Committee on Ways and Means, monthly.

SEC. 3. It shall be his special duty to be courteous, kind, accommodating, and gentlemanly to any one who enters the Library and Reading Room; and, while firmness is strictly enjoined on him to carry out all the regulations of the Reading Room and Library, he must be careful to avoid all personal official difficulty with any one who enters the Library, or in endeavoring to collect the subscriptions or dues of members.

SEC. 4. The keys of the Library and Reading Room shall be in his possession, and in case of sickness, or neglect of duty, he shall deliver the keys to the President, who will then be authorized to appoint a temporary Librarian.

SEC. 5. He shall be punctual in opening and shutting the Reading Room at the hours named in the Rules, and these hours shall be exclusively devoted to the interests of the Institute, to the exclusion of all private business of his own. He shall cause the room or rooms to be properly warmed and ventilated, and the books, tables and chairs kept free from dust.

#### ARTICLE IV.—DEEDS AND PAPERS.

SECTION 1. All deeds, leases, bonds, contracts, and other valuable papers, shall be deposited in the hands of the President of the Institute, which, in the

event of his resignation or death, shall be placed in the hands of the Vice President, who, on the new President coming into office, shall deposit them with him.

#### ARTICLE V.—ELECTIONS.

SECTION 1. All elections or appointments made by the Board of Directors, shall be by ballot.

#### ARTICLE VI.—AMENDMENTS.

SECTION 1. These By-Laws shall be amended, altered, or suspended, only at a stated meeting of the Board of Directors, notice thereof having been proposed in writing at the previous stated meeting, and shall only be enacted by a majority of all the members elect voting for them.

### RULES OF ORDER

#### FOR THE REGULATION OF PROCEEDINGS IN THE INSTITUTE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

SECTION 1. The President shall preserve order and decorum; he may speak to points of order in preference to members, and shall decide questions of order, subject to appeal, as is usual.

SEC. 2. When any member is about to speak, he shall address the President, and confine himself strictly to the question under discussion.

SEC. 3. When a motion or resolution is made, it shall be handed, if in writing, to the Secretary, and by him re-read, before it is debated; and every resolution shall be reduced to writing, if the chairman order it or a member desire it.

SEC. 4. No new motion or proposition shall be admitted under color of amendment, as a substitute for the motion or resolution under debate. Any member, however, may call for a division of the question when the sense admits of it.

SEC. 5. When a question is under debate, no motion or proposition shall be received, but to adjourn, to lie on the table, for the previous question, to postpone indefinitely, to postpone to a given day, to commit, to amend—which several motions shall take precedence in the order as here arranged. Motions to adjourn shall always be in order, except when a member is speaking, and shall be put without debate.

SEC. 6. If at any meeting a member doubt the decision of a vote, he may call for a division, and the members voting on each side shall then be counted by tellers appointed for that purpose by the President, and the result declared by him.

SEC. 7. No member who did not vote with the majority on any question, shall move the reconsideration of the vote.

SEC. 8. Voting by proxy shall not be allowed.

SEC. 9. A motion for amendment, until decided, shall preclude further amendments of the main question.

SEC. 10. Motions and reports may be committed, at the pleasure of the meeting.



SEC. 11. All questions shall be propounded in the order in which they are moved ; and in filling blanks, the largest sum and the longest time shall be put first. Reconsideration of questions can only be had at a first subsequent meeting.

SEC. 12. The yeas and nays shall be entered on the minutes at the call of any two members.

SEC. 13. The meeting may resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole at any time, when propositions made shall not be entered on the journal, without they are carried in committee ; and when in committee, the President shall leave the chair and appoint a chairman.

SEC. 14. If, at any meeting of the Institute, questions should arise that are not treated upon above, they shall be decided upon by appeal to "Cushing's Manual."

### REGULATIONS FOR THE LIBRARY.

SECTION 1. The Library shall be open every day throughout the year, from 10 o'clock, A. M., until 10 o'clock, P. M., (unless otherwise ordered by the Board,) Sundays, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and New Year excepted.

SEC. 2. The Librarian shall keep a full and accurate catalogue of all the books, magazines, maps, charts, and works of art belonging to the Institute, and arrange them in proper order ; he shall make a record of all books and other donations presented to the Institute, in a book provided for that purpose, with the names of the donors, and make suitable acknowledgments of the same.

SEC. 3. He shall register in a book prepared for that purpose, and to be kept in the Library-room, the name of each member of this Institute, and shall in no case deliver a book to any member until the name of such member shall have been so registered.

SEC. 4. He shall enter, in a book kept for that purpose, the title of every volume delivered by him ; the name of the person to whom delivered ; the time of taking and returning the same, together with the forfeitures arising from every default.

SEC. 5. He shall collect all dues and forfeitures incurred by the members, and account for the same to the Treasurer, as herein before provided.

SEC. 6. He shall submit to the Board of Directors a monthly report, stating the amount of moneys received and expended by him ; report the names of such members as may refuse to pay their dues and forfeitures, or lose or damage any book belonging to the Library ; the names of all delinquents, with the amount of dues remaining unpaid ; and recommend the adoption of such measures as he may judge necessary for the greater efficiency and usefulness of the Institute.

SEC. 7. He shall suffer no person, *excepting members of the Board*, to remove a book from its place in the Library, without his permission.

SEC. 8. He shall replace the books in proper order upon the shelves, as soon as may be after they are returned, having first examined them with care, and ascertained whether they have been injured or defaced.

SEC. 9. He shall see that the books, Library and Reading-Room are kept in

good order ; he shall duly observe the instructions which may be given him by the Board of Directors, and take care that the regulations relative to the loaning of books be strictly adhered to.

SEC. 10. He shall ascertain, during the months of January, April, July, and October, by examination of the account of each member, the book or books not then returned to the Library ; and shall cause the same to be procured of the members in default.

SEC. 11. He shall deliver to any member applying personally, or to his written order, one volume if it be a folio or quarto, and two if an octavo or duodecimo, or volume of less size.

SEC. 12. Every member may detain each book or set delivered as aforesaid, if it be a folio or quarto, four weeks ; an octavo, three weeks ; or a book or set of less size, two weeks ; except new publications, which, until they shall have been in the Library two months, shall not be detained, an octavo longer than two weeks, and books of less size one week, and which shall not be renewed. No book shall be reserved by the Librarian for any Director or member.

SEC. 13. Any member who shall detain a book or set longer than the time above limited, respectively, shall forfeit and pay to the Librarian, for every day a volume is so detained, if it be a folio, twenty cents ; a quarto, fifteen cents ; an octavo, ten cents ; if it be a duodecimo, or smaller volume or pamphlet, five cents.

SEC. 14. If any member lose or injure a book, he shall make the same good to the Librarian ; and if the book lost or injured be one of a set, he shall pay to the Librarian, for the use of the Institute, the full value of the said set, and may thereupon receive the remaining volumes as his property.

SEC. 15. No member shall be permitted to receive a book from the Library until he shall have paid all sums due from him to the Institute, and made good all damages and losses which he may have occasioned.

SEC. 16. Books of reference, and such others as may, from time to time, be specially designated by the Board, shall not be taken from the Library, except by special permission of a member of the Board of Directors : *Provided, however*, that newspapers, encyclopædias, dictionaries, and atlases, shall in no case be taken from the Library-Room.

SEC. 17. Any member wishing to withdraw from the Institute, must inform the Librarian of it, see that his resignation is registered, and pay up his dues and fees ; or he will be considered as continuing a member, and charged accordingly, unless otherwise ordered by the Board of Directors.

### REGULATIONS FOR THE READING-ROOM.

SECTION 1. The Reading-Room shall be opened every day throughout the year, from nine o'clock, A. M., until ten o'clock, P. M., unless otherwise ordered by the Board.

SEC. 2. Loud conversation and smoking shall not be allowed, except in a room set apart for those purposes.

SEC. 3. No member shall assume the liberty of arranging the books of the



Library, or periodicals upon the tables, or performing any of the duties that devolve upon the Librarian.

SEC. 4. None but members shall be allowed the privilege of the Reading-Room, unless introduced by a member of the Institute.

SEC. 5. Any member may have the privilege of introducing a friend, not a resident of the city, whose name shall be registered by the Librarian in a book kept for that purpose, and who shall receive a ticket of admission to the Reading-Room for the term of four weeks.

SEC. 6. No member shall be allowed the privilege of the Reading-Room, unless all dues and forfeitures incurred are liquidated.

SEC. 7. No member shall be allowed to remove papers from the files, or books, plates, or periodicals, from the Reading-Room.

SEC. 8. Any member who shall mutilate the periodicals or papers placed on the files or tables in the Reading-Room, or remove them therefrom, shall be liable to fine and expulsion.

SEC. 9. No member, except of the Board of Directors, shall be allowed inside the Bar of the Library-Room.

SEC. 10. The Reading-Room may be occupied exclusively by ladies, and gentlemen accompanying ladies, between the hours of twelve and two, P. M.

SEC. 11. Should a member transgress any article in these Regulations, he shall be reported to the Board of Directors, who may take such measures thereon as they may deem expedient.

SEC. 12. The Regulations of the Library and Reading-Room shall not be altered, amended, or suspended, unless by the votes of five members of the Board of Directors, present at a stated meeting, notice being given for that purpose.

On the twenty-fourth day of April, 1855, the proper certificate was filed in the office of the County Clerk of the County of San Francisco, by which the Institute became a body corporate, under the general incorporation act of the State of California.

On the second day of July, of the same year, Messrs. WM. M. LA ROCHE, Corresponding Secretary, J. W. BROOKS, Treasurer, and S. C. BUGBEE, Director, resigned their respective offices; and Messrs. HENRY F. WILLIAMS, CHARLES H. GOUGH, and R. R. WILLIAMS, were severally elected in their stead.

On the third day of October, following, Mr. BENJAMIN HAYWOOD having resigned the Presidency, the Vice President, Mr. JOHN SIME, succeeded to that office; Mr. GARDNER ELLIOTT, one of the Directors, was elected to the vacant Vice Presidency; and the vacancy thus created in the Board of Directors, was filled by the election of Mr. WILLIAM MCKIBBIN.

On the fifth day of March, 1856, the President presented the following report, as required by the Constitution:

ANNUAL REPORT.

TO THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE:

On this, the first anniversary of our formation as a society, allow me to congratulate you on its successful organization as a body, and, in submitting this report, to suggest such action as it appears to me will conduce to the ultimate prosperity of the Association.

In presenting the following financial statements, (the aspect of which is not as favorable as might have been hoped for,) it must be borne in mind that this is the first year of our existence, and that we have naturally had more difficulties to overcome, during these early days of our association, than we shall be probably subjected to in the years to come.

The Treasurer's report, herewith submitted, shows the total receipts of the year to have been.....	\$1,106 86
And that the disbursements during the same period were.....	1,085 37
Leaving a balance in the Treasury, on the first day of February, _____	
1856, of.....	\$21 49

Two hundred members have paid their first instalment on stock; one hundred and fifteen have paid their first and second instalments thereon; and only ninety-two have paid their quarterly dues. We have enrolled the names of two hundred and eighty-two members, during the past year; but I regret to say that many of them are members only in name—neither assisting us, by their exertions, to carry out the objects of the Association, nor aiding us by pecuniary contributions.

Among other objects of the Institute, are the establishment of a Library and Reading-Room, and the provision for regular courses of lectures; thereby providing sources of attraction and intellectual entertainment for those who desire to avail themselves of such advantages.

Our library is yet quite small, consisting of but four hundred and eighty-seven volumes in all. It is desirable that this number should be increased as speedily as possible; and our successors in office should not depend upon the public alone, by whom we have been somewhat disappointed in regard to donations of books, but should make appropriations for that purpose, as soon as practicable.

Having learned that, in October last, a resident of New York had died, leaving an amount of money, out of which every properly organized Mechanics' Institute in the United States was to receive the sum of five hundred dollars, the Board of Directors ordered to be sent, to our agent in that city, the necessary notice of our organization, the number of our members, and such other information as was necessary to make the bequest available. We have since heard that the trustees of this fund do not again meet until the coming June, when, it is thought, we will be enabled to obtain the bequest; and, in anticipation of that event, it has been ordered that its amount be invested in books for the Library.

In this connection, I must urge upon members the necessity of promptly paying their dues; for, without a well-filled treasury, it is impossible to perfect any arrangement for their own comfort, or for the benefit of the Society.

My Library Account (<https://search.milibrary.org/patroninfo>)

MENU



# Mechanics' Institute

Since 1854

(/)

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## Mechanics' Institute History

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a short history of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco  
by Taryn Edwards

### What is a Mechanics' Institute?

Mechanics' Institutes in general were the offspring of the industrial revolution. They were created in Scotland in the 1820's with the objective of providing technical education to those for whom a traditional university experience was unattainable.

The concept spread like wildfire throughout the English speaking world and at its pinnacle there were some seven hundred Mechanics' Institutes in England alone<sup>[1]</sup>.

Typically, Mechanics' Institutes offered their communities vocational and technical "hands on" classes, lectures on science, technology and the humanities, a library that supported the Institute's educational aims, and recreational opportunities that encouraged camaraderie. Such a facility was greatly needed in Gold Rush era San Francisco.

### Why was the Institute founded?

In 1848 San Francisco had roughly 800 people. By 1852 the population had mushroomed to 34,000 with over 100,000 a year still coming. Most of them left the city to try their hand at mining but the gold had gotten harder to find. The city began to experience an influx of former miners returning to the city — exhausted, depressed, and often without enough money to support themselves.

The miners, the City, and the residents were in trouble.

By 1852 however, there were by now a significant group of residents who were hoping to "make their pile" by starting businesses and making San Francisco their permanent home but they were stymied by the city's lack of infrastructure and organization. The City was definitely feeling growing pains. Its problems included:

- It had an extremely diverse, unskilled, and unreliable population — that would leave whenever news of a gold strike was heard.
- Its economy was completely reliant on the manufacture and export of gold — a source of capital that fluctuated wildly.
- And it desperately needed supplies. If one needed a new pair of pants, building materials to make a house, or sugar for one's coffee, it had to be imported from the Eastern states, South America or Hawaii. Most goods were imported and there was a real feeling starting to grow that California should take advantage of its natural resources.
- There was no organized workforce to help get industry off the ground but there were rumblings of discontent among this group because of license taxes that were imposed upon people who produced or manufactured things. This coupled with the general sentiment that mechanics and laborers weren't paid a living wage meant that something had to change.

Meanwhile, the newspapers of the day abounded with stories of Mechanics' Institutes around the world and how they helped their communities prevail.

The mechanics of this city began to see the need for such an organization — one that catered to their socio-political needs, their reading interests, and their professional growth.

On the evening of December 11, 1854, John Sime, Roderick Matheson (<http://www.ourhealdsburg.com/history/matheson.htm>), Benjamin Heywood, George Gluyas and a score of others assembled in the tax collector's office, at City Hall with the object of forming a Mechanics' Institute. They all shared similar dreams: boundless faith in the future of San Francisco as a port and industrial center, concern about the moral atmosphere of San Francisco, and most importantly they had an intense aversion of imported goods, which they believed kept prices high and deprived local people of jobs.

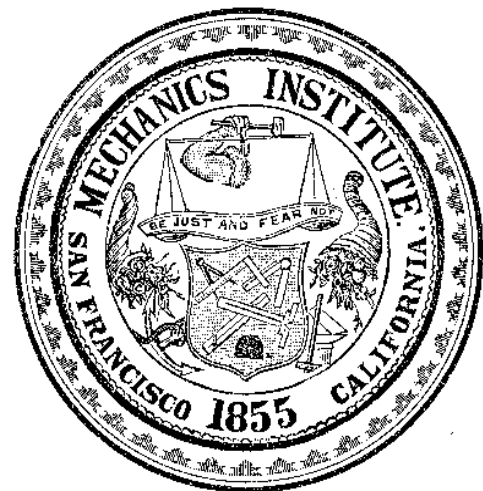
From the beginning the directors knew what sort of Institution they wanted:

- A library with open stacks so all the books were accessible to the members.
- A game room where members could spread out their chess and checker boards.
- Classes that would stretch the mind and teach new skills
- To be an organization that welcomed everyone regardless of race or gender
- and to cost as little as possible.

The Constitution and By Laws were shortly written and a logo was designed by architect Thomas Boyd

## Funding

Prior to the Rogers Act of 1878 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rogers\\_Free\\_Library\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rogers_Free_Library_Act)), there was no mechanism in place to fund libraries in California, thus all had the challenge of finding a reliable funding source. The Mechanics' Institute was designed, like most other "public" libraries of the day, to be a stock company with two types of membership: stockholders who purchased shares worth \$25 each with 10% due at signing and \$1.50 payable quarterly in advance; and subscribers who paid an initiation fee of \$5 and \$1.50 quarterly. Subscribers had all the privileges of stockholders except for the right to vote and hold office. This plan, if effective, would have resulted in \$75,000 in capital with which the Institute could purchase a lot, construct a building, and fit out its library.



The symbols are very common to mechanics' institutes in general, especially the arm and hammer — a universal symbol of labor. The beehive connotes industry and the plumb line and leveler, compass, square and rule are all symbols of the craftsman. The cornucopias represented California's agricultural potential and the anchor its role as a port. The scales remind us to lead a balanced life and the motto "*Be just and fear not*" admonishes one to act according to their principles.



The stockholder system was never successful. The Mechanics' Institute had difficulty getting its stockholders to pay for the stocks they had promised to buy (only 10% was due at the time of purchase). The system would undergo several changes in the coming years and ultimately was abolished in 1869. Today the Institute is funded by membership dues which covers 7–9% of our income. The rest of our funding comes from donations, income generated by the Institute's rental property, and interest on its endowment.

## Starting Out (1855–1866)

By June 1855 the Institute rented two rooms on the 4th floor of the Express Building which was on Montgomery Street at California. A visitor described our lodgings as being very comfortable with some 400 books and a growing collection of scientific curiosities including samples of California's minerals, petrified Oregon pine, and an eagle's leg and claw of monstrous size<sup>[2]</sup>.

A course of lectures was also planned and on November 2, 1855, Col. Edward Dickenson Baker delivered the first, on the Dignity of Labor at Musical Hall — the largest venue in the City. The newspapers the next morning described it as "one of the largest gatherings ever assembled in California". The future of the Mechanics' indeed looked bright but within the year it became evident that membership dues were not enough to keep the lights on and pay the staff. The Institute's finances were so dire that its librarian, Peter Bartelle Dexter (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fde56>), offered to work for free.



## First Fair

The directors had to come up with a plan so they decided to host an Exposition — like other Mechanics' Institutes did in the eastern United States and Great Britain — to raise money to support the classes offered by the Institute, provide money for the purchase of Library materials, and to promote local industry and agriculture.

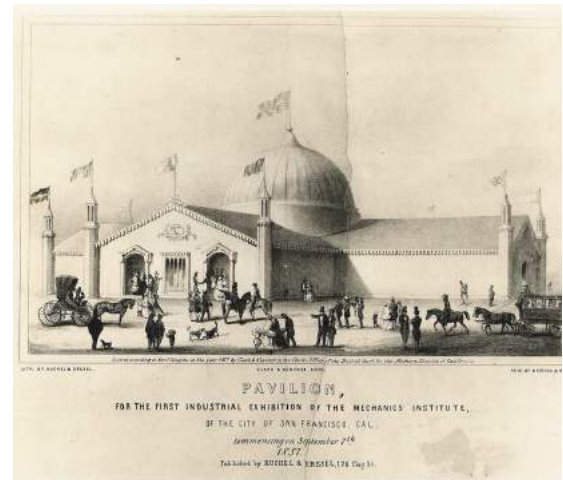
Advertisements for the upcoming fair were distributed at post offices, labor exchanges and in newspapers up and down the State advertising the upcoming Exposition and inviting manufacturers, inventors, farmers, miners, and artists to take part. There was no cost for Exhibitors and prizes were to be awarded



By the summer of 1857 the Institute erected a Fair Building on a sandy hill on the outskirts of town — on Montgomery Street between Post and Sutter (where the Crocker Galleria shopping center is now). The wood frame building had a canvas roof and was approximately 18,000 square feet — then the largest building in California. The interior was cross-shaped, with four rooms that opened onto a central lobby. Beneath the dome was a bubbling fountain festooned with flowers and above, hanging from the rafters was a huge eagle with wings outstretched — a symbol of the State's potential.

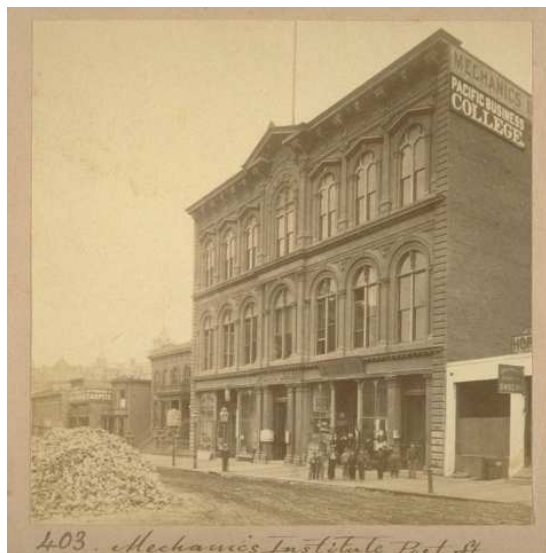
On display one found an astounding array of the State's natural resources, invention and ingenuity. There were four examples of billiard tables, cabinets filled with curiosities, samples of the state's minerals, a bountiful display of the State's finest flowers, fruits and vegetables; a fire engine, fancy articles such as needlework, fabrics and laces, and art — from the Nahl brothers, William Jewitt, and many others.

The first fair lasted for nearly four weeks and had about 10,000 visitors (roughly 25% of the adult San Francisco population at the time). There were 650 different exhibitors with approximately 25% of them being women. Ultimately there would be 31 fairs between 1857–1899 which would contribute greatly to the economy and industrial pursuits of the San Francisco Bay Area. These fairs, and the rental of the fair buildings, were income generators for the Institute and supported its library and other services.



## The Institute at 31 Post Street (1866–1906)

After a rocky first ten years, the Institute finally was financially stable enough to purchase the site of its present home on Post Street, between Montgomery and Kearny in 1866 and erect a three-story building that was designed by William Patton. The new building featured retail spaces on the ground floor, a spacious, well lighted and well ventilated library with open stacks; a lecture hall for about six hundred people, a commodious chess room, a handsomely furnished ladies sitting room, and many other rooms slated for rental by committees, lodges, and related scientific organizations<sup>[3]</sup>.



The Institute quickly became a cultural center of the City hosting free lectures on science and technology, technical classes in mechanical drawing, applied mathematics, wood carving, iron work and other technical subjects. Its rentable meeting rooms were available for tenants to host soirees, literary readings, and socio-political discussions. These auxiliary activities show a fascinating side of the Mechanics' Institute and were a reflection of the popular issues of the day.

## Relationship with UC Berkeley

The Institute's important in California technical education reached its pinnacle in 1868 when the California Legislature granted a charter for the establishment of the University of California. The Institute's President was tapped by the Governor to serve in an ex-officio capacity on the Board of Regents. The Institute heavily participated in the fledgling University's first years, hosting technical classes and lectures in its rooms on 31 Post Street (<http://bit.ly/1le01H1>), helping develop the curriculum and sitting on the Board of Regents until 1974.

Click here (<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/CalHistory/brief-history.1.html>) for more information.

## Earthquake

At the beginning of 1906, the Institute had 4,150 members and 135,000 volumes. In January that year, it absorbed the collections of art, literature and rare editions held by the Mercantile Association, another independent library that was founded in 1852. This union formed a magnificent collection amounting to some 200,000 books. When San Francisco was leveled by the earthquake and fire of April 1906, the collections and building were completely destroyed. The loss included the Institute's priceless files of California newspapers, its complete set of British patent reports dating back to James I of England (1603–1625), its collections of technical, scientific and artistic works, plus its Post Street building and pavilion. The contents of two safes were uninjured. The records saved consisted of about twenty five years' minutes, the members' ledger, some leases and contracts and a few other records, among them the original copy of the Institute's Constitution with signatures of the members. The only thing unharmed in the building was the bronze cast of James Lick



## The Institute at 57 Post Street (1906–present)

Memories were all that remained as the result of the earthquake and fire. Its devastation spread to much of the central part of the city. The Mechanics' Institute erected a temporary building at Grove and Polk Streets, where it had bought a block of land in 1881 on which now stands the Civic Auditorium. The Institute's Office opened on May 23, 1906, construction was begun on June 4th, and after many trials of delayed materials and a scarcity of construction workers, the new building opened its doors in August, about four months after the fire.





The first day of the fire, the Head Librarian sent telegrams to libraries and book dealers in the Eastern states, requesting books for the collection. Books on architecture and engineering were particularly desired. The highest priority for the Library was to obtain everything that could be gotten on architecture, building construction, and engineering, in fact everything that would be necessary or useful to aid in rebuilding the City. The trustees authorized that \$5,000 be spent at once on the purchase of books. The opening collection of some 5,000 books quickly grew to over 17,000 volumes. There was fear that the Institute would soon be confronted with the ever-present problem at the former 31 Post Street location... how to find more room. By August, the Institute had lost nearly 1,000 members. Some had left the city, while others found the new location inconvenient. In fact, there was some doubt whether the former Post Street location would be the best spot to rebuild the Institute building. Some felt that the Institute should move a little further west, since the shopping district had moved a few blocks west of its old location.

## Hired Albert Pissis

By July 1910, the new nine-story building at 57 Post Street was completed and on July 15, the Institute moved into it. By 1912, collections totaled some 40,000 books. That same year, San Francisco decided by popular vote to establish a Civic Center. The City bought the Institute pavilion block for \$700,000. At the Institute's 1914 annual meeting, the constitution was amended whereby the Post Street property, city bonds and other assets together be established as a perpetual endowment. Since that time, the subject coverage of the collections has broadened to meet the interests of an increasingly diverse membership. The resources continued to grow along with the rapid industrial growth of California..

The Mechanics' Institute continues to be a leading cultural center that includes a vibrant library of some 160,000 volumes, a world-renowned chess program and a full calendar of engaging cultural events. The Institute today is a favorite of avid readers, writers, downtown employees, chess players, and the 21st century nomadic worker.

Each month, the Library adds some 300 new items to its collection of some 165,000 items.



[1] For more information on mechanics' institutes, a seminal work is *George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education* by Thomas Kelly, Liverpool at the University Press, 1957.

[2] "Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco", *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, 14 December 1855

[3] "Inagurations of the Mechanics' Institute", *San Francisco Bulletin*, 27 March 1867.

[4] "Dramatic Affairs", *The Californian*, April 6, 1867, volume 6, no 20, page 5.

[5] "Amusements", *Daily Alta California*, 11 November 1870.

*Filing Date:* August 19, 2019  
*Case No.:* 2019-015658LBR  
*Business Name:* Mechanics' Institute  
*Business Address:* 57 Post Street, Suite 504  
*Zoning:* C-3-O (Downtown - Office) Zoning District  
250-S Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0311/013  
*Applicant:* Taryn Edwards, Strategic Partnerships Manager  
57 Post Street, Suite 504  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Located In:* District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625  
[shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org](mailto:shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org)

## **BUSINESS DESCRIPTION**

The Mechanics' Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization governed by a 16-member Board of Directors. The Mechanics' Institute is the oldest surviving library in California designed to serve the general population, and the oldest chess club in the nation. It was conceived on December 11, 1854, by a group of mechanics (artisans, craftsmen and laborers) who were dissatisfied with San Francisco's lack of libraries and dearth of educational opportunities for adults. On March 6, 1855, the Institute was formally arranged as a membership organization with a constitution, slate of elected officers and bylaws. The plan was to host a library, to offer classes and lectures that would teach new skills, to welcome everyone regardless of race or gender and to cost the user as little as possible.

By June 1855, the Institute was renting a room in the Express Building, and for the next 10 years it operated at several addresses before purchasing its current location on Post Street in 1866. The institute built a three-story building on there that functioned as the Institute's offices, lecture hall, library and chess room for the next 40 years. That building was destroyed on April 18, 1906. On May 2, 1906, ground was broken at Larkin and Grove, on land the Institute owned, to build a temporary space to house donations of books made by concerned citizens to replace the Institute's library. By September 1906, the Institute's library and chess tables were back in business. By October, it had resumed offering lectures. In 1908, the Institute hired architect Albert Pissis to design the Institute's current home at 57 Post Street – a nine story building that was finished in July 1910. The building was declared a local landmark in 1981.

The business is located on the south side of Post Street between Kearny and Montgomery streets in the Financial District neighborhood. It is within a C-3-O (Downtown - Office) Zoning District and a 250-S Height and Bulk District.

## **STAFF ANALYSIS**

### ***Review Criteria***

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1855.



2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. The Mechanics' Institute qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- i. The Mechanics' Institute has operated continuously in San Francisco for 164 years.
- ii. The Mechanics' Institute has contributed to the history and identity of San Francisco.
- iii. The Mechanics' Institute is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

Yes. The business is associated with the library and chess traditions.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

Yes. The organization is one of the state's earliest educational institutions and the building is an excellent example of a mixed use building whose internal functions are expressed in external design. The building was designed by master architect Albert Pissis (1852-1914).

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

Yes. The property is SF Landmark No. 124 and is a Category I property within Article 11 of the Planning Code. It has a Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of its local designations.

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

No.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. Mechanics' Institute has been mentioned in many newspaper articles, historical documents, dissertations and other treatments of local history over the last 160 years. Most recently, Porter Shreve described the Institute has "a vibrant cultural oasis in a landscape of glass and steel skyscrapers," and Adam Johnson was quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle stating that "The Mechanics' Institute is the first chamber in the beating heart of San Francisco's literary scene," adding that the library is "filled with books, history, rich programming, and writers and readers of all walks."

***Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business***

**Location(s) associated with the business:**

- 57 Post Street

**Recommended by Applicant**

- Library, Events, and Chess departments
- The landmark building and its character-defining features
- Traditions of independent learning, grassroots community building, social responsibility

and cultural exploration

**Additional Recommended by Staff**

- None



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Historic Preservation Commission Draft Resolution No. ###

HEARING DATE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

*Filing Date:* August 19, 2019  
*Case No.:* 2019-015658LBR  
*Business Name:* Mechanics' Institute  
*Business Address:* 57 Post Street, Suite 504  
*Zoning:* C-3-O (Downtown - Office) Zoning District  
250-S Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0311/013  
*Applicant:* Taryn Edwards, Strategic Partnerships Manager  
57 Post Street, Suite 504  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Located In:* District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625  
[shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org](mailto:shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org)

1650 Mission St.  
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Fax:  
**415.558.6409**

Planning  
Information:  
**415.558.6377**

**ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR MECHANICS' INSTITUTE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 57 POST STREET, SUITE 504, BLOCK/LOT 0311/013.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on September 18, 2019, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.



**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** that the Mechanics' Institute qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for the Mechanics' Institute.

**Location(s):**

- *57 Post Street*

**Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:**

- *Library, Events, and Chess departments*
- *The landmark building and its character-defining features*
- *Traditions of independent learning, grassroots community building, social responsibility and cultural exploration*

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations** are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs** its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file 2019-015658LBR to the Office of Small Business September 18, 2019.

Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: