



# ***Downtown San Mateo Historic Building Self-Guided Walking Tour***

Produced by:  
City of San Mateo  
Planning Division  
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### **About Downtown San Mateo**

The city of San Mateo began as a Catholic Mission Outpost in the 1790s. A few commercial structures followed with the establishment of a stage stop mid-way between San Francisco and San Jose. San Mateo's identity as a destination was ambiguous until the opening of the railroad in 1864. By the 1880s, several brick buildings lined the square around the train station. For decades, many residents found their needs met for goods and services on South B Street. These services ranged from pharmacies, dried food, cigar, meat markets, groceries, hardware, and lumber stores. The older structures lining downtown San Mateo hold various architectural styles due to the diversity of services offered.

By the time East Third Avenue developed in the 1920s and 1930s, San Mateo became a booming suburb of San Francisco. At one point, newspapers reported that 85% of the local population commuted to San Francisco. To accompany this lifestyle, investors and architects adhered to the style of its sophisticated, suburban audience. Throughout the district, many ground floor building facades show signs of alteration. In some cases, the changes appear minor- in other cases, the alterations radically alter the appearance and integrity of the buildings. The most prominent facade styles range from Spanish-Colonial, Art Deco, and Urban Revival. The relocations of many essential services away from Downtown has helped preserve the historical character of San Mateo's traditional core. While modifications have been made, its symbology was profound enough to compete with the late 1950s nationwide trend of malls. A walk along these historic streets can still conjure an image of San Mateo's past identity.

### **Key phrases for Historic San Mateo Architecture**

**District Contributor:** A building, site, structure, or object adding to the historic significance of a property.

**Non-Contributor:** A building, site, structure, or object that does not add to the historic significance of a district.

**Individually Eligible:** Ability of a property to meet the National Register criteria.

**The Standards used below are listed by the National Registry of Historic Places, to determine the level of historical or architectural significance of a structure.**

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

For additional Historic Information, please visit these resources on their website **National Registry of Historic Places:**

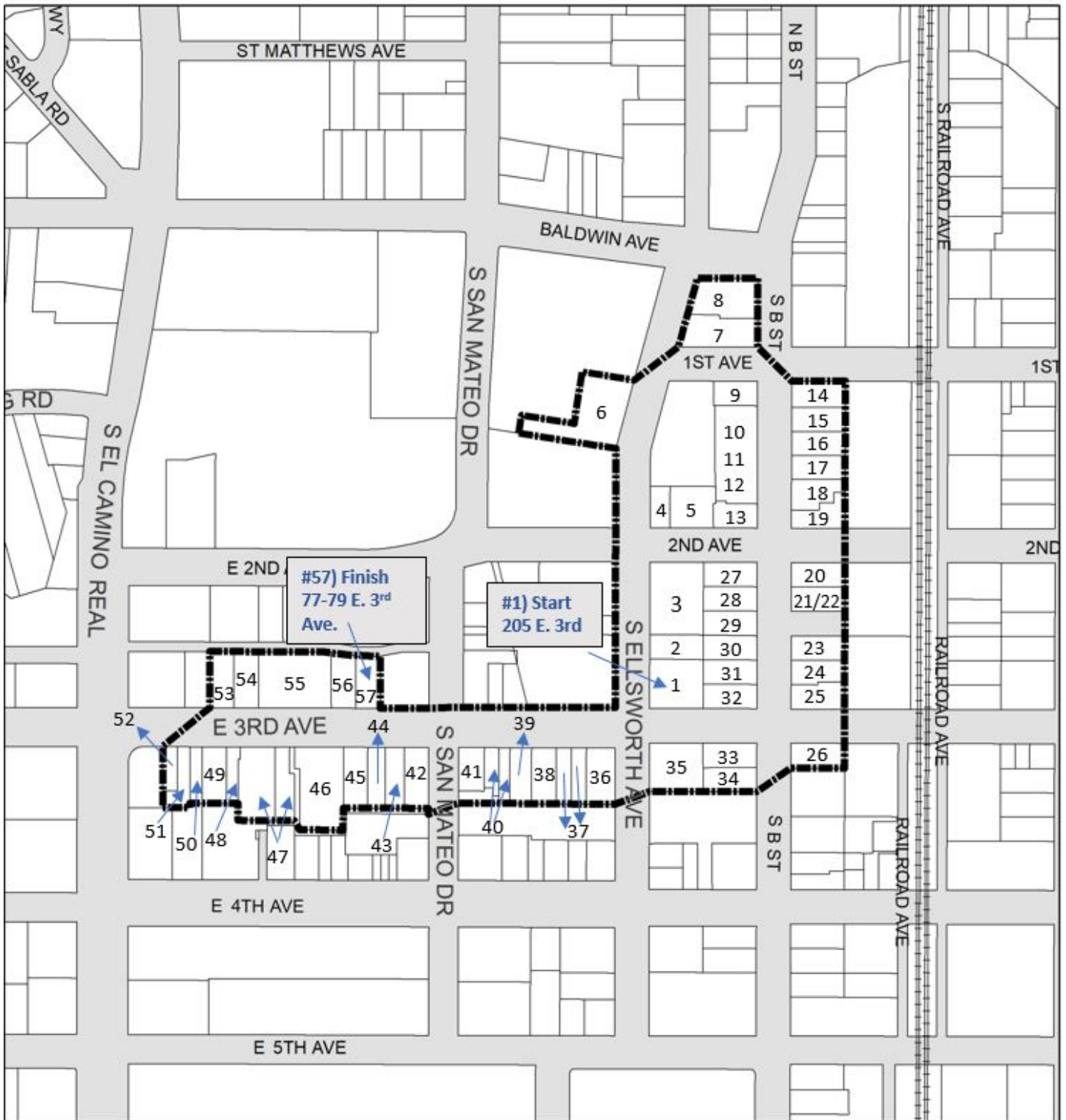
**Site index:** <https://www.nps.gov/dscw/siteindex.htm>

**Historic FAQ:** <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/frequently-asked-questions.htm>

**Glossary of National Register Terms:** [https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a\\_appendix\\_IV.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_appendix_IV.htm)

**Historic Preservation Standards and Guidelines:** <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/standards.htm>

57) **Finish** 77-79 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.



1)  
**205-221 East Third Ave.**

**Individually Eligible**  
**Built in: 1929**

The Medical Arts Building is a fine example of a modernistic commercial block embellished with an Art Deco ornamentation. One section is four stories high, while the other section is three. At the top, chevrons ornament the spandrels between the piers. In the lower part of the building has been altered according to the needs of businesses which occupy it. The main entrance of the building has been unaltered. It is splayed and embellished with ornamental tile in stylized floral and geometric patterns.



2)  
**243 S. Ellsworth Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**  
**Built in: 1937**

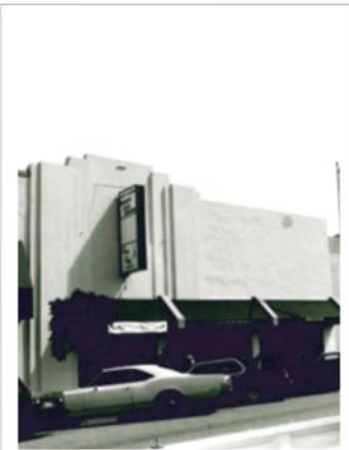
This one-story commercial block has an incised arch pattern running along the top and two vertical incised lines along the sides. The entire facade of the structure is dominated by an arch, which is cut in the center to distinguish the two storefronts. The other has large picture windows.



3)  
**200 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave/215 S. Ellsworth Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**  
**Built in: 1917**

These one and a half story commercial block has a plain stucco and upper facade. The only ornamentation on the west side of the building is vertically stepped pylons. Contemporary awning has been added to mark the separate businesses.





4)

**201 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1900**

Originally built in Mission Revival Style. The upper story as plain stucco and the bottom as brick. For years this was the Wisom Hardware store, and later their appliance store. During the 1906 earthquake, this building was badly damaged and after remodeling lost much of its original detail and form.



5)

**215-229 (also known as 213) 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave.**

**Individually Eligible**

**Built in: 1900**

This handsome brick structure located along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue was once the Wisnom Hotel. Renamed the Hotel St. Matthew in 1920, it is the only remaining downtown hotel of its era. The building features four octagonal stucco window bays that project out above the ground floor and double-hung windows with shutters on both sides and brick rowlock lintel design aspects.



6)

**120 South Ellsworth Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1939**

The Spanish Colonial Revival fire station is all that is remains of the 1940 era city hall. Notable Architectural features include a hipped roof that covers all three sections of the building and a belt course. Arching over each door is a lunette, where there is a roundel enclosing each diamond.



7)

**36 South B St. (also known as 215 1<sup>st</sup> Ave)**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1897**

This early brick commercial building with an unframed window wall. The front elevation is divided into two bays at street level and three bays at the second. The second bay is supported by flat pilasters with capitals. One corner pilaster was removed when a more modern storefront was added to the building.



8)

**22 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1930**

San Francisco architects Thomas Edwards & H. Schary, who also designed the Merkel Building, crafted this interesting Spanish Colonial Revival Building for the Wisnom Company. The richly ornamented stucco relief incorporates art deco forms and tiling. An early tenant included the San Mateo Employees Bureau.



9)

**100 (also known as 100-110) South B St.**

**Individually Eligible**

**Built in: 1907**

The Wisnom Building is an early surviving example of the Mission Revival style. Robert Wisnom, prominent in local commerce and construction, operated a lumber yard beginning in the 1880's in the rear of the building. Early tenants included a drug store and real estate office. Aside for the facade alterations on the first floor, the buildings integrity remains intact.







10)

**114 South B. St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1923**

A half-circle cut-out, placed slightly off-center dominates the facade of this extremely plain stucco one-story building. Brick facing around the main entry and union emblems above the circle provide some visual relief.

11)

**116 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1923**

This one-story concrete stucco-finished building had various early uses after its 1923 construction. The contractor listed in city records was Charles Pederson of San Mateo. Its owner was Henry Forman, who is listed in 1931 as the main tenant along with a dry good store. In the mid-1930s the building was vacant, but by 1941 it housed a bowling alley.



12)

**130-144 (also known as 114-154) South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1907**

Another building constructed by and for pioneer builder Robert Wisnom. This building maintains a commercial focus, with double-hung windows that have an ornamental stucco relief around openings. The middle bay has a stepped mission style parapet rising above the clay tiled parapet for both sides. Based on a 1922 rendering of the building, it appears that street level storefronts have lost their transom windows.

13)

**164 South B St.**

**Individually Eligible**

**Built in: 1925**

This elegant \$50,000 Greek Revival Building was designed by architect W.H Weeks and built by Samuel Wisnom, Roberts son. David Wisnom, another of Robert's sons, was a board member of the bank which was the original occupant. It is a two-part Greek revival style, that has pairs of fluted pilasters to either side of enframed openings.



14)

**101 South B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1897**

Although not considered a significant historic building due to extensive modifications, this is one of the earlier structures remaining on B Street. This decorative brick structure was originally a livery stable, then changed with the times to become an auto garage.



15)

**113 South B St. (also known as 119)**

**Individually Eligible**

**Built in: 1891**

This is one of the more significant early structures on B Street, built as the Odd Fellows Hall, the oldest fraternal organization in San Mateo. It also housed the San Mateo Market and Mountain View Fruit Company. The four brick second story bays are richly detailed in sandstone colored brick. The multi-colored tile on the ground floor is believed to be a later modification.







16)

**129 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1928**

Notable architects Edwards and Schary designed this simple reinforced concrete building, which cost \$12,000 to build. Its tenants included a variety of local businesses, including the Pioneer Cigar Store, coffee shop, and hat shop. A thin cornice tops the building parapet and steps up at the sides and over the middle square column. Modifications have been limited to first floor.

17)

**139 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1900**

An early wood frame commercial building, this address was well known in the 1920's as Noah's Cafeteria, operated by one of the first known black businessmen in San Mateo. Well known throughout the area and with a growing clientele, Noah moved his restaurant to Third Avenue in the mid-twenties.



18)

**147 South B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1925**

This two-story stucco-commercial building was designed by Kuhn and Edwards in 1925. Its proposed cost was \$16,000 for owners, local real estate investors Conrad and Raybould. Through the 1920s and 1930s it provided retail and office space for local businesses.

19)

**159 South B. St. (also known as 313 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave)**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1925**

This two-story structure is dominated by a corner tower. Early photographs show battlements crowning the tower and a ground floor with a recessed corner entrance and large display windows with transoms above. The date "1875" is painted above the center window on the upper story bay.



20)

**201 South B St.**

**Individually Eligible**

**Built in: 1931**

Considered by many as the most significant historic building in San Mateo, the house of Merkel was designed by San Francisco architects Thomas Edwards and H. Schary. The excellent art deco design is highlighted by octagonal bays at each corner, two story arched windows, and richly patterned terra cotta tiling. The House of Merkel was a popular gathering place for over 50 years. Carl and Cuna Merkel, immigrants from Germany, opened a cigar store on this site in 1918 and expanded the business with the new building to include a soda fountain, confectionary and liquor store. The business had something for all ages, including a billiard parlor and horse betting.



21)

**215 South B St. (Front) - 210 South Main St. (Back)**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1914**

Although extensively modified, this building was San Mateo City Hall from 1914 to 1961. The main street frontage is intact, exhibiting the prominent ground floor arches. The old judge's chamber still occupies the second floor, and a prison cell and rifle range occupy the basement. Additional uses are located in the rear.





22)

**215 South B St. (Front) - 210 South Main St. (Back)**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1914**

The rear of 215 S. B Street has four stucco pillars with brick each lining the bottom three large windows.

23)

**239-245 South B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1916**

The upper section of this building is a plain stucco facade. Below are two storefronts, one brick and one with wood awnings over the door and windows.



24)

**251 South B St. (also known as 253)**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1923**

The brick and concrete Louis Building housed numerous tenants at this prime location, including the Plumbers and electricians Association and the Benet Building Company. Four rectangular sash windows punctuate the front facade, one on each end bay, two in the middle. Despite modifications made to its corner neighbor Bank of America, the building retains a sense of its original form.





25)

**277 B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1932**

This is the original site of San Mateo's first branch of Bank of America. The original structure was remodeled several times. The walls are made of pebbly concrete, above a polished granite foundation. Smooth metal concrete above a polished granite foundation; smooth black metal has been applied to the surface in two places: flanking the B street entrance and around and above the ATM window. An abstract patterned mosaic is above the B street entrance.



26)

**301 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1912**

This reinforced concrete Mission Revival building housed the National Bank of San Mateo, San Mateo Hardware and Pope's Drug Store during its first 30 years. This Mission Revival Style has a shallow tiled roof and a line of framed sash windows.



27)

**200 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1925**

This brick commercial building with an enframed window wall fronts on B Street with additional storefronts on Second Avenue. Alterations include a band of new vertical striped siding above ground level windows and new doors and windows for individual businesses. Despite changes, this simple building is a good example of the modest stores in B streets heyday.





28)

**214-220 South B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1914**

This one-part commercial block has no ornamentation on its upper section. Each store has a centrally located door flanked by large display windows.

29)

**224-236 B St.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1913**

This is a one-story brick building with a stepped parapet. It retains its original simple cornice and four original brick piers. Between these piers are diagonally placed Redwood boards. An arrow-shaped stained glass window has been added on the right side of the center section. This window mimics the sign affixed to the side of the building.



30)

**240 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1937**

Stylish art deco building, occupied by F.W Woolworth from 1935-1938. The building is stucco with tiled horizontal line patterns; the center portion has four stepped, rectangular elements placed on the vertical. Framed within are three rectangular ornate patterns sculpted in the stucco.



31)

**250 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1926**

This building has previously housed the Tasty Cake Shop, Piggly Wiggly and Safeway markets. Only one of the three storefronts retains the original transom window. A steeply sloping clay tile roof supported by a series of small brackets suggests a Spanish mission influence to this stucco structure. Alterations include the replacement of the original windows and doors.



32)

**270 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1925**

Designed by Mitchell Jackson and built by George Balovich, this building housed a jewelry store, dress shop, restaurant, creamery and liquor store in its early years. In 1937, it was remodeled to the current style to likely reflect Spanish Colonial revival style popular on Third Avenue. The bays on the ground floor have large glazed openings at the second floor. The corner diagonal entry-way is also not-original having replaced a conventional corner storefront with windows.



33)

**220 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1905**

This stucco building has a series of framed windows at the ground floor, each bay separated by flat columns with bell-shaped capitals. The large pair of double-hung windows at the second floor are framed by an arched stucco relief with a braided edge. This interesting Italian Renaissance style building, previously housed local newspaper companies.







34)

**316 South B St.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1907**

This structure housed several small businesses and offices. Its earliest listings in the 1920 era city directories show the tenants including Jennings and Ticknor Shoes and Bootery, Kirkbride and Gordon, attorneys, the local post office, a cigar and confectionary shop, and in the early 1940s, Peninsula Hardware. Once a brick facade, it has since been reinforced with stucco. The bracketed cornice and dentils link this building with the colonial revival style.

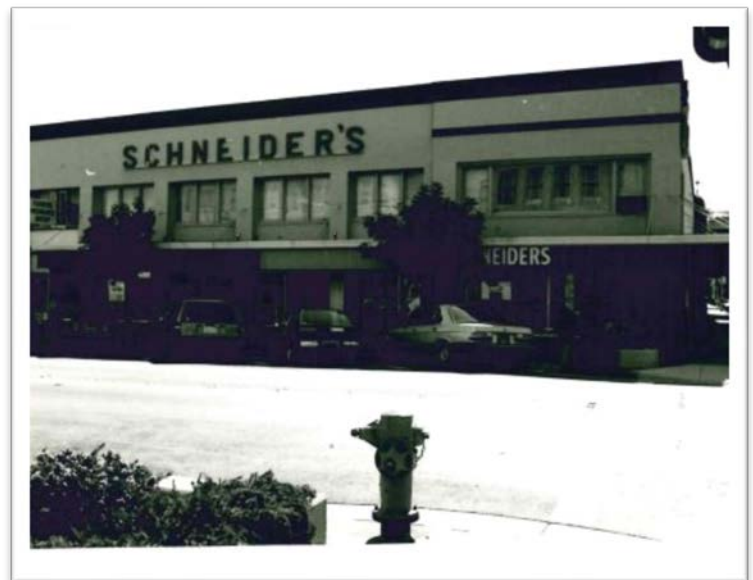
35)

**208 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1926**

Simple modern design with art deco details. A framed window wall on the ground floor has a large, flat metal canopy cantilevered from the face of the building and shades the storefront windows. End bays have a small contrasting cornice just below the larger contrasting stucco cornice which wraps around street side of the building. Tall art deco style letters spell out the name Schneider's just below the cornice. The primary tenant of this two-story building at the corner of Third and Ellsworth was the Greenline Drug Company. In the mid-1940's, JCPenney's moved its store from across the street to this location. Since the 1950's, it has housed Schneiders, a locally-owned apparel store.



36)

**198 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. (also known as 180)**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1927**

Scherba's is a utilitarian structure that has a flat roof and display windows, that utilize a belt cornice for an entryway that cuts the facade visually in half.



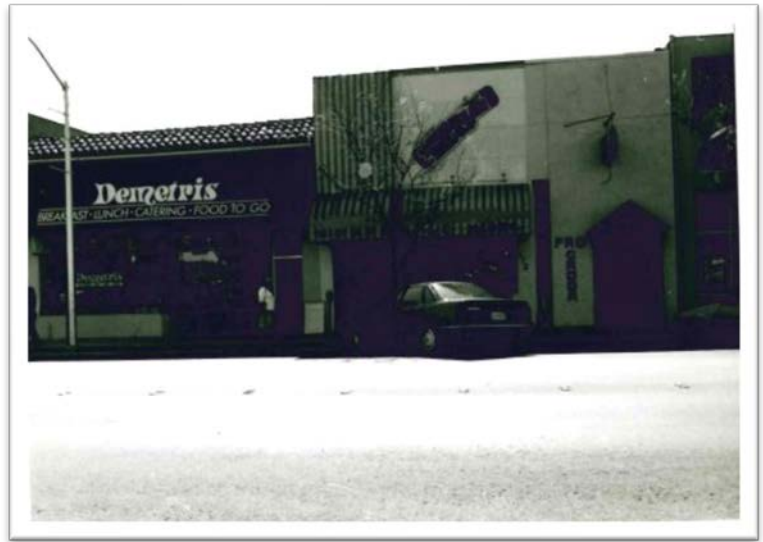
37)

170-172-174 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1929**

These two building facades have been altered to flat surfaces; 170 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue is plain, with only a gabled roof over the entryway and 172 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue has a striped awning, which covered about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the facade. 174 (Previously Demetris's) has retained a small degree of original character- the shed tile roof. Additionally, a new flat awning dominates the facade; below are contemporary display windows and entrance.



38)

150 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1931**

A flat rectangular plane dominates the facade of this one-part commercial structure. Flanking the entryway and windows are two arches that extend about two-thirds the way up the building. Brick facing has been applied above the arches.



39)

142-144-148 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1931**

The facades of these commercial buildings have been altered to plain stucco surfaces above utilitarian doors and display windows. Perpendicular signs are affixed to the buildings. A cloth awning divides the facade of 148 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue .





40)

**132-140 (also known as 138) East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1930**

These one-part commercial block facades have been altered to flat stucco surfaces with simple, utilitarian doors and display windows. At 140 E. Third Avenue, a canopy projects from the building to provide shelter over the main entryway.

41)

**120 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1930**

This \$14,000 structure designed by Winter and Maurym is a two-part commercial block with a stucco exterior and a hipped tile roof. These seven windows are of Chicago style, with a large fixed central pane of glass flanked by one narrow moveable window on each side. The use of stucco and red tile gives the building a Spanish Eclectic appearance. The use of stucco and red tile continues to give the building a Spanish Eclectic appearance.



42)

**94-98 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue 1924**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1924**

This 1931 Spanish Colonial style commercial building, (designed by Bertz, Winter, and Maury), was chopped in half. One half is more or less intact, displaying a tiled hipped roof and a ribbon of arched windows separated by slender columns. The other has a flat stucco surface. Earlier photographs show a single facade with nine windows, divided into sets of three.





43)

**86 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1931**

This 1931 Spanish Colonial style commercial building (designed by Bertz, Winter, and Maury) was chopped in half. One half is somewhat intact, displaying a tiled hipped roof and a ribbon of arched windows separated by a single facade with nine windows, divided into sets of three.



44)

**82 (also known as 92) East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1930**

This is a one-part commercial block with a low-pitched side-gabled tile roof. The gables are parapeted. The entrances and display windows have been altered over time to suit the individual needs of the two businesses the building accommodates. The left half of the upper part of the facade has also been altered, but the right half maintains the original brick, including brick corbels which run beneath the cornice. A modest structure, which despite modifications, it retains detailing of its original design.



45)

**72 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1936**

San Francisco architects Fabre and Hildebrand designed this \$28,000 "concrete and terra cotta lined structure" in 1936 for A.H. Avansino, also of San Francisco. This professional building, known for years as the Avansino Building, has housed local businesses and professional offices since its first listing in the city directories in 1937.





46)

**60 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1924**

The San Mateo theatre was renovated and converted to office space. In the transformation, the surface decoration and marquee were stripped away, and the front of the building was pushed out to accommodate new ground level businesses. Of the original building, only the upper portion is visible above the new two-story front addition.

47)

**36 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**Individually Eligible District**

**Built in: 1927**

Built for \$250,000, Benjamin Franklin Hotel, 8-story major commercial feature of the downtown; built as a local resort for vacationing San Franciscans. Ornamentations reminiscent of Churriguereque carvings provides accents at selected points, embellishing an otherwise simple and planar elevations. Architect W.H. Weeks.



48)

**32 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1933**

One-part commercial block. Spanish Colonial Revival style. The roof is flat and a narrow tiled shed roof is supported on bracket runs throughout the facade. An early building indicates it was constructed of concrete. The street level facades have been altered to suit the needs of contemporary business owners.



49)

**28 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1935**

Reminiscent of a Georgian townhouse. The original building permit indicates that it was constructed of concrete. It has changed little over the years, standing out from its surroundings due to its light color, vertical proportions, and illusions of colonial domestic architecture. Rusticated corner boards emphasize each bay and rustication surrounds the off-center entrance as well.



50)

**16 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> (also known as 18-20)**

**Non-Contributor**

**Built in: 1925**

16 East 3<sup>rd</sup> has a plain stucco facade with wide striped awning above the display windows. Its neighbor at 18-20 E. Third can be described as an unframed window wall with stone-like facing on the facade.



51)

**10 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1924**

Two-part commercial block. Above the entrances is a ribbon of casement windows embraced by a semi-elliptical surround. A heavy stringcourse runs across the tops of the flat-top arch, elaborated with a contrast of red and white checker work. It is an idiosyncratic building combining the contemporary lines of the windows with the whimsical finals and an elaborate cornice frieze. For Raybould & Johnson – realtors and subdivides of major estates in San Mateo.







52)

**33 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1935**

Most distinctive feature is elaborated roof and parapet gables. The building is horizontal in proportions and has relatively anonymous facade beneath its elaborated roof. This building has lost two iconic features of a brick facade in a geometric pattern, but still retains a strong hold of its original character.

53)

**41 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1930**

One-part commercial block of brick. The side-gabled roof is punctuated by three round-headed dormers. A row of dentils provide the only elaboration on an otherwise unembellished building. The display windows are surmounted by a belt course which separates it from the plain brick wall rising up to meet the grey, slate roof. The exterior has been modified with new plate glass windows, but the original pilasters with fluting appear at each end.



54)

**51 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. 1931**

**Individually Eligible District**

**Built in: 1931**

Excellent example of Tudor style as it was used to give domestic character to commercial architecture. This building has a number of Tudor-Style, including decorative half-timbering and an elaborated chimney with multiple shafts. It has a steeply-pitched side gabled roof with three-cross gables. Scalloped bargeboards ornament the gable and the entrance is recessed behind an arcade consisting of three segmental arches. Except for minor changes to the street level store fronts, this building has changed very little- former Levy brother's store.



55)

**71 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. (also known as 69 East 3rd)**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1931**

According to city building records, this commercial structure was designed by architects Mertz, Winter and Moury for San Francisco owners, Stelling and Gould for the price of \$26,000, in 1931. Its first tenant in 1935 was J.J./ Newberry and Company, which remained until 1957 when the store moved to the new Hillsdale Mall south of the traditional downtown. The compatibility of this structure with its neighbors and its intact condition make it a strong contributor to the commercial district.



56)

**77 (77-79) East 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1933**

This is two-story brick commercial block which is side-gabled and parapeted. The ground floor, which accommodates three businesses, has large display windows and recessed entrances. Immediately above the ground floor a ribbon of windows form a band across the entire facade. Small columns separate the windows into pairs. The facade from the windows to the roof is a flat wall of brick broken up only by two molded stringcourses in a lighter color which contrasts with the darker brick. Colonial Revival with modern influence.



57)

**72 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave.**

**District Contributor**

**Built in: 1940**

The roof of this building is side-gabled, with the parapeted gables commonly found in this block of Third Avenue. The low-pitched tile roof and iron brackets connect the building with the Spanish Colonial Revival Style popular at the time. This structure is brick, which is unusual given this style. The ground floor has been altered dramatically, however the upper story retains its original art deco detailing.

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