



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: October 17, 2008 REPORT NO. HRB-08-066

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of October 30, 2008

SUBJECT: **#8 –Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #2**

APPLICANT: Happy Hazard, LLC on behalf of the property owners, Rodney Love and Larry Wood

LOCATION: 4144 Lark Street, Uptown Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Alberta Security Company House/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #2 at 4144 Lark Street as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #2 at 4144 Lark Street as a historical resource under HRB Criterion C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies distinctive characteristics through retention of character defining features of the Prairie style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1923 period of significance; and
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of an established Master Builder Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn



### Planning Department

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## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed modification of a structure 45 years or older, consistent with the San Diego Municipal Code section 143.0212 and with the owner's desire to have the house and site designated as a historical resource. The house at 4144 Lark Street is a single family home that was originally constructed in 1923 by the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn in the Prairie style with John F. and Mary Thomas as the first owners.

The historic name of the house is based on the owner and builder of the house who has been declared a Master Builder by the Historic Resources Board.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Happy Hazard, LLC on behalf of the property owners, Rodney Love and Larry Wood, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion A, B, C and D. Staff disagrees with the determination that the resource is significant under Criterion A and B, but concurs with the determination that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Prairie style and under Criterion D as a notable work by Master Builder Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn, as follows:

*CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.*

Staff does not believe that the subject structure exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development. The property was not the first property to be constructed within the Mission Hills neighborhood nor were there any unique elements used in the construction or design of the house. For that reason, staff does not recommend designation of the 4144 Lark Street based on HRB Criterion A.

*CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.*

The applicant states that the property at 4144 Lark Street is significant for its association with John F. Forward, Jr. Forward, Jr. was resided in the house at Lark Street from 1927 to 1937. During his tenure in the house, Forward Jr. was President of the Union Title and Trust Company and Mayor of the City of San Diego from 1931-1934.

The Union Title and Trust Company was formed by his father after their arrival in San Diego in 1886. Prior to joining his father's company, Forward Jr. worked in the title business for H.T. Christian Company for 10 years. In 1901, Forward Jr. married Alberta Fairbanks, resided in San Diego for a short period of time before relocating to Los Angeles for four years. During his marriage to Alberta, he had one child, Flora Mitchell. Upon their return to San Diego in 1906,

Forward Jr. joined Union Title and Trust Company and managed to hold several different positions in the company.

In 1916 and 1917 Forward Jr. was listed as the Vice President of the American National Bank. By 1918 Alberta no longer appears in the directory and the applicant assumes that Forward Jr. and his wife have divorced. In 1919, Forward Jr. worked with John D. Spreckles and assisted with the sale of North Island to the government. By 1920, he is also listed as the President of Bay Shore Railroad Company. During this time he also married Martha. By 1921, Forward Jr. returned to Union Title and Trust as Vice President. When John Forward Sr. passed away in 1926 Forward Jr. succeeded him in the presidency.

In 1931 Forward Jr. was elected Mayor of the City of San Diego. The mayoral position was a part-time position that allowed him to continue as President of the Union Title and Trust Company. Forward Jr. had difficulty implementing the recently approved reformed City Charter and after only a short period in office, a recall effort was instigated by citizens of the city. On April 1934 Forward Jr. resigned effective August 1, 1934.

After resigning from his mayoral position in 1934, he also resigned from Union Title and Trust to tend to his health, which was seriously impaired by an automobile accident in late 1933. In 1938 Forward Jr. moved into an apartment on Fifth Avenue and died in March 1938.

While John Forward Jr. appears to have been active in several community groups, was President of the Union Title and Trust Company and Mayor of the City of San Diego, there is nothing singularly significant that allow Forward Jr. to rise to the level of a person significant in local history. As such, Staff does not recommend designation of the house under Criterion B.

*CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

Constructed in 1923 in the Prairie style the house is constructed of wood frame and stucco. The square shaped floor is two stories and provides for 3,934 square feet of livable space. The house is located on a corner lot at the southwest corner of Lark Street and Montecito Way. The rear detached garage that front Montecito matches the style and form of the main house and was constructed in 1924.

The roof of the house is a low pitched hipped roof sheathed with asphalt shingles. The eaves on the house are approximately three feet with a bracketed cornice all of which are stuccoed with a sand finish. The front porch is a slightly raised with a low stucco and wrought iron wall. The floor of the porch has a non historic tile surface. The porch is covered by a large flat roof that is supported by stuccoed brackets similar to the ones on the main roof. The porch also has a decorative surround formed in the stucco that provides relief on either side of the door and above the porch roof.

The windows on the house are predominantly double hung wood 1/1 windows. At least three of the windows have a decorative wrought iron balconet. On the front façade of the house there is a recessed window opening that has been removed and on the north façade there is a large arched

divided light window that provides light to the stairway. On the north side there is a non historic slider window on the second floor, which is next to a slider window that appears to match the size of another window flanked by a double hung window on either side and a garden window on the first floor. The northwest corner of the house also features a secondary entrance with a small roof covering a wood and glass door and double hung window.

The south façade of the house features a symmetrical placement of the windows with a chimney. The chimney is located at the middle of the façade and rises slightly above the roof line.

The garage is a smaller version of the house. With the exception of the windows, the roof line, materials and details match the main house. The windows on the garage are 5/1 wood casement windows that are placed in a long band, which is commonly found on Prairie style houses.

Overall the integrity of the house is good and the house has been maintained. Staff believes that there have been a few changes to the exterior of the home, but staff believes that the alterations do not detract from the historic character of the house. Tile has been added to the front porch, the enclosed window to the north of the front porch does not appear to be original to the house, the slider garden window have been added to the north façade, the garage door is not original and a tiled shed roof has been added to the garage. Staff also believes that there may have been some modification to the slider window on the second floor on the north side of the northwest corner with the removal of possible double hung windows flanking the window. Regardless of the modifications, staff recommends that the house is designated under Criterion C as a good example embodying distinctive characteristics of Prairie style architecture.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.*

Martin V. Melhorn was born in Indiana in 1866. He lived and worked in Falls City, Nebraska and Denver, Colorado before moving to San Diego in 1911 with his wife, Alberta, and their son William. With John J. Wahrenberger and John C. Rice as his partners, Martin formed the Bay City Construction company in 1911. Bay City Construction lasted until 1916 and during this time Melhorn and Wahrenberger both predominantly designed in the Craftsman and Arts & Crafts styles.

In 1913 Melhorn started another company, Alberta Security Company, with his wife Alberta, which focused on the financial aspects of his construction business. Bay City Construction Company was dissolved when John Wahrenberger became ill in 1916 at which time Melhorn began working under the name Martin V. Melhorn Investments. During this time Melhorn's design style shifted away from Arts & Crafts and became more experimental and he designed larger residences for leading citizens of San Diego. Some of his experimental designs at this time included cottages and bungalows in which he incorporated Prairie, Neoclassical, Colonial Revival and Japanese inspired elements.

Martin V. Melhorn Investments gave way to M.V. Melhorn & Son in 1922 when he partnered with his son William. This partnership lasted until Martin Melhorn's unexpected death in 1926. There are several homes that have been listed on the Register that have been designed by

Melhorn. These homes include: HRB Site #318—The Melhorn/King Residence, 1302 Washington Place; HRB Site #583—Neil Brown/Martin V. Melhorn House, 4195 Palmetto Way; HRB Site #780—Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec Home #1, 1201 West Arbor Drive; HRB Site #790—Tudor Rogers/Martin V. Melhorn House, 4060 Alameda Drive; and HRB Site #823—Franklin and Helen Boulter/Martin V. Melhorn House, 4119 Palmetto Way. Staff feels that the design of the house is a notable example of a Master Builder's work and recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As part of a future Mills Act Agreement, staff recommends that a historic photo is obtained or further research of the house completed to determine the presence/absence/configuration of the front window and the second floor northwest corner window, the tile is removed from the front porch, the garden and second floor north side bathroom window are returned to their original style, and the tile shed roof is removed from the garage. Detailed Mills Act conditions will be determined during the application process.

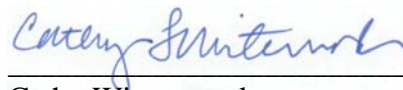
#### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that 4144 Lark Street is designated as a historical resource under HRB Criterion C as a good example embodying distinctive characteristics of Prairie style architecture and Criterion D as a notable work of architecture by Master Builder Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn. Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives.



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Jodie Brown  
Senior Planner



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Cathy Winterrowd  
Senior Planner/Program Coordinator

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Attachment(s):

Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover