

25 March 2025

To: Historical Resources Board

From: Bruce Coughran

RE: Agenda for March 27, 2025, Agenda Item #2 Rose Vollmer/Richard Lareau House - 4101 Lomaland Drive

Dear Hon. Board Members,

I would like to comment in favor of Historical Status for BOTH 4101 Lomaland #2 and 4101 Lomaland #1 Houses, as explained below.

BACKGROUND OF SUBMITTING PARTY

My name is Bruce Coughran. In the 1990's I engaged in a research project focusing on the initial building of the Theosophical Society Community on Point Loma ("Lomaland") as a part of a graduate program in history at Cal State University at Dominguez Hills that resulted in a Thesis that was delivered in June 1995 (referenced below¹). The specific purpose of this work was to document the initial building of the community, and also to relate its impact on, and interaction with, Point Loma and San Diego History. (As a side note, I grew up in a house directly adjacent to the subject property, at 747 Stafford Place, and have been familiar with the site since the early 1960's.)

COMMENTS ON CONSIDERATION OF HISTORICAL DESIGNATION FOR 4101 LOMALAND DR #1

Having read the staff report, I note that the economic and cultural impacts of the Theosophical Society's activities on the development of San Diego at the turn of the 20th century have been noted, and that the building in question was judged to be significant enough for Historical Site designation previously, as an example of the building styles of the Theosophists.

But it is also worth emphasizing that at the time of the first land purchases in 1897, there was no significant development on Point Loma. The maritime-oriented villages of Roseville and La Playa were small. Otherwise, there were a few farmhouses. The Ocean Beach Hotel had been built in the boom of the 80's but burned shortly after, and Ocean Beach (despite lot sales) was almost entirely made up of beach shacks and temporary structures.

The Theosophists built a community of hundreds of residents from around the world, had property that, at its height, was over 500 acres, planted over 40,000 trees, grew crops, fruit, cultured silk, and had a publishing company with an international reach, at least three magazines, an outdoor theater, a symphony orchestra, not to mention their extensive scholastic and literary work. Members and associates were instrumental in civic, sports, and artistic activities including being founding members of Presidio Park, the 1915 exposition, the Point Loma Golf Club, the San Diego Art Association, among many others. ²

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² Greenwalt

It is also worth noting, that it is not an overstatement to say that the very existence of Sunset Cliffs Natural Park is because of this community. The property that makes up the Park, up to Hill Street, is entirely ex-Lomaland property. And the rest of the park (up to Point Loma Ave.) was a partial purchased by A.G. Spalding in 1903 (later the site of Spalding Esplanade or Spalding Park.)

Despite the grandeur of their international reach and significant artistic, theocratic, and intellectual achievement and ambition, the community lived simply and communally on Point Loma. Students lived in group homes, but adults lived mostly individually, in small, modest quarters (indeed, Dr. de Puruker who became the head of the society after Katherine Tingley died, lived in one of these, maybe less than 40 sq.ft., in the boys department.)

This type of living, and what it said about one's relationship to the community and the meaning of community itself, the humility it represented, is one of the unique factors that set the community apart, and made it the significant force it was. The only remaining structure that represents this type of living is 4101 Lomaland #1.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF 4101 LOMALAND DRIVE #1

As briefly described above, the Lomaland community, despite its voluminous achievements, represented an expression of group power, and individual humility. With the exceptions of Katherine Tingley herself (and the Spalding House) there were not big houses in Lomaland. Almost all of the living quarters were small and simple. It is for this reason that 4101 Lomaland #1 should be preserved.

A casual visitor to the site will see the few remaining buildings, and think of them as representative. The existence of 4101 Lomaland #1 would give an insight to the nature of this community, how they really lived, that provides significant and important insight to what the community was about, and why they had the impact that they did. The community had dozens (perhaps as many as 60 or more) such structures. This is the last remaining one, and should be preserved.

References

1) "White City on the Hill: The Building of the Theosophical Society Community on Point Loma, California, 1897-1942." Master's Thesis, CSU Dominguez Hills, December, 1994 UMI: 1374834

2) Greenwalt, Emmitt A, California Utopia: Point Loma 1897-1942, Point Loma Publications, 1978