

Revised Addendum regarding The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House

Purpose: In light of the property owner's claim that the Prairie Architectural style is common in the La Playa neighborhood, the Historic Resources Board requested information confirming its prevalence in San Diego, and specifically within La Playa. Further, the property owner's claim that The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House is ineligible under Criterion A, prompted the Historic Resources Board to request additional information as to the significance of the subject property under this criterion, especially in the context of the history of this community at the time of the building's construction. Finally, the Historic Resources Board requested supplemental information under Criterion C with respect to the historic construction materials used on the premises, including redwood and other difficult to obtain materials, as well as the original tile roof as it relates to the Prairie Architectural style.

Consultants Response:

Criterion A: We have conducted a thorough search of the San Diego History Center's records, as well as the CHRID database, for Prairie Architectural style homes in San Diego. We have also conducted a thorough field survey of La Playa to find any intact, unaltered, or minimally altered homes of this style from the pre-1921 period. Our research plainly shows that the Prairie Architectural style accounts for approximately 10% of designated resources within the City of San Diego (this is inclusive of hybrid Prairie style homes). Yet, within La Playa, the subject home stands out as unique – it is amongst the first three homes built in La Playa, the only home built in this time period in the Prairie Architectural style (with none to follow for over three decades), and the only such remaining style home from this time period still standing in La Playa. La Playa is Point Loma's oldest neighborhood and Point Loma is one of the oldest neighborhoods in all of San Diego, making The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House one of the earliest, if not the earliest, example of a Prairie Architectural style home in the entire city.

The residence located at 310 San Fernando Street is significant under Criterion A as it represents a special element of La Playa and Point Loma's historical, cultural, and architectural development. From 1890 to 1942, within the relevant period of this home's construction, La Playa played a vital role in the region in dry farm agricultural operations. Just after the home's construction, during the Mexican Insurrection of 1914, the United States Army confined several hundred ex-patriot Americans, mercenaries, and Mexican

revolutionaries captured in battles along the International Border and fenced them in at La Playa. During World War I, hundreds of canvas Army tents held bivouac troop organizations preparing for overseas duty. In 1917, the United States Navy abandon the coal station and began erecting enormous concrete fuel tanks in the hillsides of Point Loma to refuel shipping. After the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, the Department of War erected several large concrete batteries along Warhead Road to mothball naval artillery and munitions for a time of peace. Much of the farming that had existed previously vanished at the dawn of World War II when the US government seized significant portions of La Playa for military operations, leaving the fields, orchards and grazing land to go fallow and allowing native vegetation to regenerate. After World War II ended, real estate speculators acquired much of the land for suburban housing projects.

Few homes from the relevant period exist today because few homes were built on these former farmlands to begin with. Coastal development in this area has led to the loss of many original structures built between 1890 and 1921, making surviving examples exceptionally rare. The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House is only one of a very small handful of La Playa residences remaining in place today. In fact, only two other designated homes in La Playa pre-date 1920—the Thomas Hamilton House (1910), at 480 San Fernando (HRB #371), and the Raoul Foster House (1913), at 384 San Fernando (HRB #798), though neither is of the Prairie Architectural style. The Hamilton House is a Craftsman Bungalow, and the Foster House was constructed in the Spanish Eclectic style.

As noted above, the Prairie Architectural style accounts for less than 10% of all designated resources within the City of San Diego, even when including hybrid or blended styles. Within the La Playa community specifically, among the 34 total designated resources, no other home represents the early Prairie Architectural style.

Of the 139 designated homes within the broader Point Loma area, only nine represent Prairie or Blended Prairie Architectural Style, underscoring the extreme rarity of this architectural form in this historic coastal community. Additionally, these Prairie Style homes are located in entirely different neighborhoods. There is little question that the loss of The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House to the proposed demolition would be a significant blow to the historic legacy of the La Playa neighborhood, the Point Loma community, and the City as a whole – one which cannot, and never will, be replaced.

Thus, The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House is unique in its architecture and speaks to a time when fewer homes, on larger, agricultural properties dominated La Playa. Though those time have long since passed, The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House remains – an emblem to a significant historic period in San Diego and deserving of a historic designation and the protections of preservation it affords.

Criterion C: 310 San Fernando, a 113-year old structure, stands out with respect to its extensive integrity, and essential design elements meeting the Prairie Architectural style.

By comparison, the Thomas Hamilton House (HRB #371), was built just a year earlier than the subject home, circa 1911, in the Craftsman Bungalow style, but has undergone several significant alterations including enclosing its porch, and the addition of a bay window. Yet, 480 San Fernando was afforded a designation in 1998 by the HRB.

Similarly, the Raoul Foster House, built a year after the subject home, circa 1913, is an early version of the Spanish Eclectic style, which has also undergone significant alterations. These alterations included the development of a large, 2-story addition onto the main house. Notwithstanding this, 384 San Fernando was designated historic in 2007. (HRB # 798.)

The subject home at 310 San Fernando suffers from none of these types of substantive alterations, and is unique in its Prairie Architectural style. Its integrity is impressive, especially in light of its extraordinary age in this challenging coastal/marine environment and without the benefit of a historic designation. Consider that when the Thomas Hamilton House was designated, it was “only” 97 years old. A review of the City of San Diego’s Historic Landmarks Designated by the SD Historical Resources Board (rev. 7/24/2024) presents another interest and unique facet to this home’s story. At 113 years old, The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House would represent the oldest home in all of Point Loma (not merely La Playa alone) to be designated making this a more than a once-in-a-generation, or even a lifetime opportunity to preserve the City’s history. With this in mind, it is worth investigating the true nature of the integrity of this gem of a home:

- a) It retains 31 of its original 35 windows intact (89% original);
- b) All but 3 small, set back windows are in their original openings (91%+ original);
- c) It maintains its original one-story squared bay projection – a defining feature of the Prairie Architectural style;
- d) it retains its projecting porch wing, along with its side stair entry, intact, as seen in historic photos – another defining feature of the Prairie Architectural style;
- e) it keeps its original low-pitched hipped pyramidal roof with wide overhanging eaves – yet another defining feature of the Prairie Architectural style;
- f) it preserves its original wood pergola/porte cachère just as shown in historic photos;

g) it preserves its rear porch and balcony in original form except for the addition of stairway (which may easily be removed and repaired to its original form); and

h) it retains its original rough-dashed stucco finish intact, matching historic and transitional photos.

Though much was made at the previous HRB meeting of a pergola added on the south side of the home, it is freestanding (that is, it is not permanently affixed to the house) and may be easily removed without any damage to the home. And though the Applicant is not the owner of the subject property, and thus unable to make a close examination of the components of the structure, we were able to observe through photographic evidence, that the original redwood appears to remain intact under the covered eaves.

Without an opportunity to make further close-up observations, it is not possible to assess what other historic and/or difficult to obtain materials remain on the subject property though we would welcome the opportunity to do so. If the Historic Resources Board would direct the owner to permit our entry, and the owner agreed, a more fulsome report on this aspect of the home could easily be prepared.

Finally, while the original tile roof has been replaced, this material is not a defining feature of the Prairie Architectural style, whereas its underlying shape and structure are. The low-pitched hipped pyramidal roof remains framed in its original form, and is plainly a key feature of the Prairie Architectural style. This appears to be fully intact and in its original form, likely with most or all of its timber in place.

For the Board members' convenience, Table A is provided below reflecting the exemplary integrity of this magnificent 113 year old home.

Feature	Intact	Original	Defining Characteristic of Prairie Architectural Style
Windows	✓	✓	89% original & intact – not vital to style
Window Openings	✓	✓	91% original & intact – not vital to style
Squared Bay Projection	✓	✓	✓ - Definitive example of style
Porch Wing	✓	✓	✓ - Definitive example of style
Porch Side Stair Entry	✓	✓	✓ - Definitive example of style
Main Concrete Stairs (West)	⊗	⊗	⊗ - Trivial – immaterial to style
Low-Pitched Hipped Pyramidal Roof	✓	✓	✓ - Definitive example of style
Roof Tile	⊗	⊗	⊗ - Trivial – material not vital to style
Wood Pergola/Porte Cachère (South)	✓	✓	✓ - Matches the Historic Photos

Pergola (West)	⊗	⊗	⊗ - Trivial – freestanding, easy to remove
Rear Porch & Balcony	✓	⊗	⊗ - Trivial - only change is addition of stairs
Exterior Walls	✓	⊗	✓ - Unadorned stucco walls

Conclusion:

Though there are minor alterations to 310 San Fernando this is to be expected in a structure that is 113-years old, subject to a damp coastal environment, and not yet designated for preservation. The alterations which have been made to The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House are largely non-substantive, cosmetic, simple to remove without harm, and/or entirely consistent with alterations common within the Prairie Architectural style's historical period of significance.

Given The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House's largely intact and original features, in a definitive Prairie Architectural style, it remains the Applicant's position that this home is worthy of historic designation and preservation. There are no other examples of this type of home from this exceedingly early period in La Playa, and certainly none as intact, or in as original condition, as The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House – a truly singular example of the Prairie Architectural style from the early 1900's.

The Dr. Winfield McKay and Susan McKay House has great bones and can stand the test of time for another hundred or more years, if the HRB deems it worthy of designation. We strongly recommend historic designation and the preservation of this wonderful resource in light of it meeting and exceeding all necessary aspects of Criteria A and C.