



Save Our Heritage Organisation

Protecting San Diego's architectural and cultural heritage since 1969

May 21, 2025

Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison
Heritage Preservation
City of San Diego
City Planning Department

Re: 4101 Lomaland Drive, units #1-4

Dear Senior Heritage Preservation Planner Ms. Segur,

After reviewing the revised report for 4101 Lomaland Drive #1-4, as well as conducting site visits in 2018, 2023, and again in May 2025, Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO) disagrees with the report's conclusion regarding Buildings 1, 3, and 4. We maintain that these resources retain both historical significance and integrity and should be designated. All four structures, #1-4, along with their surrounding cultural landscape, warrant designation by the Historical Resources Board (HRB).

Building #1 - The Corbin House (Theosophical Society Cottage)

Significant under Criteria A and C

The Corbin House is historically significant as a rare example and one of the few remaining built resources directly associated with the Theosophical Society and the early development of the Lomaland community.

According to the *Sunset Cliffs Natural Park Master Plan* (p. 58):

"The Corbin house (Theosophical Society Cabin) shall be considered by the HRB for designation, prior to the implementation of any project that affects the building. If the HRB finds the structure to be significant, alternative uses, including reuse and relocation, shall be investigated. Possible reuse as an interpretive center, or Park information center would be consistent with the Master Plan."

An earlier evaluation by ASM Affiliates in 2003 found the Corbin House eligible under Criterion A for its direct association with the Theosophical Society. SOHO concurs and further notes the building likely represents the conjoining of two or more early cabins, as supported by both ASM and our own evaluations of the structure's interior, attic space, and exterior.

The building retains strong material integrity. Notable character-defining features include:

- Board-and-batten siding
- Deep eaves with exposed rafter tails
- Wood casement windows
- Paneled and glazed doors
- Mortise-and-tenon doors
- Early beadboard paneling
- Blown glass windows
- Early hardware

These features support its architectural significance under Criterion C as a modest but well-preserved example of an early Theosophical sleeping bungalow.

Archaeological Significance of the Site

The site contains several features that may be archaeologically significant and warrant formal evaluation under CEQA. Scattered across the ground surface are abundant pottery sherds, including spongeware and other early types. Of particular interest are two exposed masonry foundations near the south end of the site, discovered in 2023. These foundations, which do

not appear on Sanborn maps, may indicate an earlier homestead or settlement that predates the Theosophical community. Together, these elements highlight the site's potential importance and the need for further archaeological study and protection.

Buildings #2, #3, and #4 - Modern Post-and-Beam Residences by Richard John Lareau

Significant under Criteria A, C, and D

Buildings #2 through #4 were designed by Master Architect Richard John Lareau for Rose Vollmer. Principle additions were added by Richard Lareau as well.

As evidenced in a number of October 2018 emails, Architect Richard Lareau met with SOHO staff, residents, and City staff with a site visit on Wednesday, November 28 at 11am, where he confirmed that #2, #3, and #4 were his. (attached)

From: AHayes SOHO [mailto:ahayes.sohosandiego@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, October 1, 2018, 12:27 PM
To: Segur, Suzanne SSegur@sandiego.gov
Cc: Bruce Coons bdcoons@aol.com; Debra Corr dlenbeach@aol.com
Subject: 4101 Lomaland - Architect Richard Lareau

Bruce and I met with architect Richard Lareau at 4101 Lomaland #3 this past Saturday, along with the current building residents. Not only did Mr. Lareau acknowledge he designed these buildings (and has building records for #2–4), he also expressed that these resources were clearly built in the Post-and-Beam style, and further, are not minimal within his body of work. Mr. Lareau sees this collection of buildings (including the one on Ladera) to be examples of some of his best residential work.

Also, would it be possible to gain access to and schedule a site visit with him and yourself to 4101 Lomaland #2 (which is currently vacant)? Mr. Lareau will also be contacting the city to inquire about access to this building.

Thank you,
Amie K. Hayes
SOHO Historic Resources Specialist

On Thursday, September 20, 2018, a SOHO letter to city staff (attached) explains Mr. Lareau's confirmation that # 3 & 4 were built by him in 1972.

Each exemplifies the Modern Post-and-Beam style and reflects Lareau's distinctive design vocabulary and sensitivity to the coastal context. The following defining features are shared among the three buildings:

- Direct expression of structural elements
- Horizontal massing and flat/shallow-pitched roofs
- Repetitive facade geometry
- Absence of applied decoration
- Strong visual and spatial connections between interior and exterior
- Open floor plans
- Wood and glass exterior materials

In May 2018, Building #3 was confirmed by Mr. Lareau as built by himself and designed in 1972—a statement made directly to both the current resident, SOHO, and City staff.

All three retain a high degree of integrity in design, materials, workmanship, and setting. They are significant under Criterion C as excellent and intact examples of the Post-and-Beam style, and under Criterion D as notable works by a master architect.

Under Criterion A, this cohesive enclave of modern residences built prior to the formal establishment of Sunset Cliffs Natural Park represents a unique aspect of postwar architectural and community development in the area. Their aesthetic and environmental sensitivity—particularly in their siting and relationship with the natural environment—underscore their contextual importance.

Incomplete Contextual Analysis

Staff isolates one building (Unit #2) despite clear sitewide significance.

- The site must be evaluated as a cultural landscape due to its origins as part of the Theosophical Institute, an extremely rare, finite, and culturally significant enclave in San Diego.
- The archaeological significance of the site cannot be overlooked.
- Staff references the earlier 2003 ASM study, which determined that Unit #1 may have originated from Theosophical cabins.
- Furthermore, the Historic Resource Technical Report (HRTR) uses the absence of a formally designated district as a pretext to ignore the site's associative significance under Criterion A (and potentially F), even though HRB #112 already identifies other structures from this movement on nearby properties.

All buildings must be fully considered in relationship to the others on the site.

Staff reports that:

- This mischaracterizes both the ASM and the historic context. The ASM report cited a much earlier study by the City's own consultant, Marie Burke Lia, who concluded that the building was in fact composed of two original Theosophical cabins joined together.
- The ASM Affiliates report did not adequately evaluate 4101 Lomaland Drive #1 under Criterion B and did not provide a basis for its assertion under this criterion.
- The structure is a rare survivor of the Lomaland Theosophical community, and this has intrinsic value that merits study under Criterion B.

Staff notes:

"The HRTR found that 4101 Lomaland Drive #1 is not eligible under Criterion F as part of a district associated with the Theosophical Institute because no such district exists."

- This is circular reasoning: the lack of a designated district is being used as an excuse not to consider the possibility of thematic significance — even though the City itself has already grouped other Theosophical-era structures together under HRB #112 creating a de facto district. This resource, 4101 Lomaland Drive #1 could easily and should be added to that group.
- The fact that HRB #112 already encompasses five surviving Theosophical buildings as a group (without the formal establishment of a district) clearly demonstrates a precedent for thematic association.
- The City has long acknowledged the importance of the Theosophical Society's presence in Point Loma yet has failed to follow through in establishing a historic district or thematic framework to protect and interpret it.
- Given that the surviving buildings are already rare, the City should use this opportunity to reassess rather than dismiss eligible resources based on incomplete or overly narrow recent studies.

Summary of findings - SOHO maintains the following:

- Building #1 is significant under Criteria A and C for its rarity, its association with the Theosophical Society, and its Arts and Crafts architectural style.
- Buildings #2, #3, and #4 are significant under Criteria A, C, and D for their architectural style, integrity, and association with Master Architect Richard Lareau.
- The site itself may also qualify under archaeological criteria, based on identified features and materials.
- We ask that the HRB recognize this pattern of significance and consider a full thematic study or expansion of these rare surviving buildings.

We urge the City and Historical Resources Board to designate 4101 Lomaland Drive #1–4 as historic resources, consistent with the Master Plan's direction and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

Respectfully,



Bruce Coons
Executive Director
Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO)

See Attachments:

SOHO email dated October 1, 2018 (SOHOemail100118.pdf)

SOHO letter dated September 20, 2018 (4101LomalandDrive1-4SOHOupdatedcomments.pdf)