



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: August 13, 2025

TO: Historical Resources Board and Interested Parties

FROM: Megan Walker Associate Planner, Heritage Preservation City Planning Department

SUBJECT: **ITEM #1 – 3924 Albatross Street**

The property located at 3924 Albatross Street was previously docketed for review by the Historical Resources Board on May 22, 2025, at which time staff was not recommending designation of the property under any HRB Criterion. At the May hearing the property owner's representative requested a continuance to a date certain of August 28, 2025. The Board moved to grant the continuance and the motion passed with a vote of 5-1-0.

Prior to the May 22, 2025 hearing, the property owner submitted additional information following the distribution of the staff report. Staff has prepared this memo to address clarifying dates presented by the property owner via email on May 20, 2025. Additionally, the applicant provided information from the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance regarding the role of zoonotic testing since the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff has included the article provided by the consultant.

The property owner's May 20, 2025 email corrects minor errors in the staff report dated May 8, 2025, including the date Shirley Sykes was born from 1924 to 1928, their son's birth from 1959 to 1957, and the date Shirley left the house from 2011 to 2019. These corrections do not impact staff's analysis of the property's significance and eligibility under criterion B.

The San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance letter on the *Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory Made Possible by the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family*, presented by the consultant, discusses the work currently being done by the scientific team at the lab. Staff maintains that while the article demonstrates the ongoing nature of the research being conducted at the laboratory, it does not establish a connection between the research work done at the Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory with the Sykes themselves or the house at 3924 Albatross Street. Furthermore, the new information does not provide enough analysis to determine that Charles and Shirley Sykes made significant contributions to the history of San Diego in a way that surpasses their contemporaries of the same socio-economic status. Therefore, staff continues to not recommend the designation of the property under HRB Criterion B.

In conclusion, staff continues to not recommend the designation of the house at 3924 Albatross Street as a historical resource under any HRB Criteria.

Megan Walker
Associate Planner

Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
Development Services Department

mw/SS

- Attachments:
1. Staff Report HRB-25-020 dated May 8, 2025
 2. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance on the Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory Made Possible by the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family
 3. Email from Sykes Family



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: May 8, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-020

HEARING DATE: May 22, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM 3 – 3924 Albatross Street**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Paul F. and Linda K. Sykes Living Trust 4-22-21 and Charles and Juliet Sykes Trust 10-11-00; represented by Janet O'Dea.

LOCATION: 3924 Albatross Street, 92103, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 444-632-1800

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the property located at 3924 Albatross Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 3924 Albatross Street under any adopted HRB Criteria.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource.

The property was identified in the [2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey](#) and given a Status Code of 5S3, "Appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [*Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 3924 Albatross Street is a one-story, Craftsman style single-family residential building constructed in 1913 in the Uptown Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on the site include the detached rear apartment. The property is located on the west side of Albatross Street south of University Avenue, in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1913, the property has been modified as follows: In 1936, a roofing permit to change the roof from wood shingles to composition asphalt was issued. Based on the Sanborn maps and the Assessors Building Record, between 1956 and 1957, flat roofs were added to the pergolas that flank the front porch. At unknown dates, before 1957, the rear porch was infilled, and the carriage house in the rear was converted into an apartment. After 1957, two different side walls were constructed on the front porch, a north wall with siding matching the original house and a south wall with siding done in a vertical board, and the sides were infilled with wood windows. In the 1970s, a security door and bars were added to the front porch and side and rear doors.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Allen Hazard & Janet O'Dea, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B and C. Staff disagrees and finds that the building is not eligible under any HRB Criteria. This determination is consistent with the [*Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*](#), as follows.

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

The report concludes that the subject property is eligible under Criterion B for its association with Charles and Shirley Sykes, who the report concludes are significant for their financial contributions to the study of zoonotic diseases. The Sykes resided at 3924 Albatross Street from 1959 to 2011. Charles passed away in 2001, and Shirley lived in the house until 2011. The Sykes donated funds to the San Diego Zoo to help establish the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family Molecular Diagnostics Lab in 1999. Shirley would continue to be involved in the funding and promotion of the lab until her health declined in 2014. As a part of their generous donation to the San Diego Zoo, scientists have been able to develop diagnostic testing for endangered species of wild and zoo animals.

Charles and Shirley Sykes were both born in 1924. During WWII, Charles was stationed in India, where he became concerned about the impacts of human intrusion on natural habitats. After the war ended, he returned to the University of Chicago, where he met Shirley, who had been working and studying at the school. The couple were married in Pennsylvania in 1946 and Charles finished his degree while Shirley worked as a secretary for the Institute of Radiobiology and Biophysics,

which focused on advancing the field of biochemical research. After Charles completed his degree, they moved to New York, where they had their daughter in 1953 and son in 1956. Later in 1956, the family moved to San Diego, where their second son was born in 1959, and they bought the house at 3924 Albatross. The couple became involved in the Oriental Rug Auction scene where they became well respected by local dealers and curated an exhibit on Oriental Rugs for the San Diego Museum of Art. Shirley continued her education, receiving a Master's in English at San Diego State University and becoming a professor at Mesa College. In 1975, the Sykes began to sell off their personal collection of rugs from the house at 3924 Albatross Street after being robbed at gunpoint in their home. The profits from the rug sales were invested in the stock market, and the proceeds from these investments were used to fund the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family Molecular Diagnostics Lab at the San Diego Zoo. This would be the first zoo-based Molecular Diagnostics Lab, which studies infectious diseases in mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians in the Zoo and in the wild. After Charles died in 2001, Shirley donated her IRA to the Lab and began volunteering with other parts of the zoo. In 2014, health issues forced Shirley to resign from volunteering at the zoo, but she continued to visit the Lab to keep up with the research until her death in 2019.

The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) states "Eligibility under Criterion B for significant person(s) involves first determining the importance of the individual, second ascertaining the length and nature of the individual's association with the resource under study and in comparison to other resources associated with the individual." The Criteria Guidelines also state that to be established as an important individual, the "the person must have made demonstrable achievements and contributions to the history of San Diego, the state, or the nation." While Charles and Shirley Sykes were accomplished within their interest of oriental rug collecting and donated generously to the zoo in both time and money, there is insufficient evidence to support their establishment as historically significant individuals. The Sykes were not involved directly in the work of the Molecular Diagnostics Lab, but rather provided funding to support it. Financial contributions and donations to organizations that carry out important work is not sufficient to establish an individual as significant. Additionally, the work that they supported with their donations is relatively recent and on-going, and there is insufficient passage of time to determine the historical significance of the work undertaken at the Molecular Diagnostics Lab. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion B.

As the property is not significant under Criterion B, an evaluation of integrity as it relates to Criterion B is not relevant or required.

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.

The subject resource is a one-story, single-family residence constructed in 1913 in the Craftsman style. The house features a gabled roof with overhanging eaves, decorative brackets, lattice vents, and horizontal wood siding. The resource has concrete steps leading to the full-width front porch with a centered entry door at the primary façade. The front porch features a front gabled roof with roofed pergolas flanking the central gable supported by four square brick columns and partial porch side walls with windows. The south elevation features a brick chimney and intersecting gabled wing set back from the front façade, with a shed roof and door flanked by a pair of windows. The north elevation has a leaded glass piano window covered by a storm window, a projecting box window

with a gable roof, decorative braces, and vents. The west elevation has an enclosed rear porch with vertical wood siding, multi-lite wood windows, and transoms, with a rear door covered by a security screen and steps. Fenestration consists of wood tripartite windows with decorative transoms, fixed and double-hung windows.

The original partial-width porch had a central covered gable with a pergola on each side, which were covered with roofing, creating a full-width covered porch. Side walls have been added to the porch at various times using different materials, with windows added to fully enclose the sides. In addition, a security door and bars have been added across the front entry of the porch, and lattice screens have been secured to the open portions of the porch between the brick columns to fully enclose the porch.

The rear apartment was built in 1913 and has a gabled roof with overhanging eaves, horizontal wood siding, and board-and-batten board. The front porch, facing toward the main house, features a shed roof supported by knee brackets. Fenestration consists of wood double-hung windows.

With origins in the British Arts and Crafts movement, which was born in response to the overly ornate Victorian aesthetic and the highly mechanized Industrial Revolution, Craftsman style architecture was popular in the United States largely between 1905 and 1930. Early examples by Greene and Greene were highly publicized in magazines, thus familiarizing the rest of the nation with the style. Character defining features of Craftsman architecture include a low-pitched, gabled roof with wide, unenclosed eave overhang; exposed roof rafters; decorative beams or braces; full or partial-width porches supported by tapered square columns or pedestals; wood or stucco cladding; and wood frame and sash windows in fixed, double hung and casement varieties.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Craftsman style. The property, which has been modified as detailed at the beginning of the analysis section of this report, no longer retains the overall integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The expansion of the roof over the pergola portions of the front porch, the construction of side porch walls, and the addition of windows partially enclosing the front porch impact the most significant character-defining feature of the Craftsman resource, the porch. The rear porch enclosure and other alterations also contribute to a cumulative impact on the house's integrity of materials and design, as the property does not retain integrity to its 1913 period of significance under HRB Criterion C. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion C.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to

restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and the staff's field check, it is recommended that the property located at 3924 Albatross Street not be designated under any HRB Criteria.



Megan Walker
Associate Planner
City Planning Department

Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

MW/sa/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover



Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory

Made possible by the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family

Update – April 2025

The Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory (MDL) of the Disease Investigations department has grown since its inception in 1999 supported by funding from the Charles and Shirley Sykes Family. In particular, the lab has significantly expanded capacity in the last 3 years. Two molecular technicians were hired as additions to the team because of increased diagnostic and project needs. The laboratory was also equipped with two new robots (Opentrons OT2 and Flex) to help with high-throughput, and next generation sequencing technology (Oxford Nanopore Technologies). Furthermore, MDL is being used as a base to validate assays on a portable, hand-held PCR unit (Biomeme Franklin) that can then be deployed to the field to provide point of care diagnostics.

Wildlife Health impacts (diagnostics)

- **Avian influenza virus (AIV) surveillance:** MDL set up USDA approved avian influenza virus testing upon receiving State Veterinary approval. High pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a current threat to birds in our care that is being monitored by SDZWA. MDL provides routine surveillance testing and emergency response testing. Surveillance data was shared with USDA/APHIS as a rare source of systemically collected information from wildlife to inform models.
- **Field capacity building:** MDL is in the process of validating multiple PCR assays for use on the portable PCR unit Biomeme Franklin. The assays include testing for chytrid fungus and avian plasmodium (malaria), two species of high conservation concern in mountain yellow-legged frogs and Hawaiian forest birds, respectively.
- **Surge capacity for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW):** The Disease Investigations team received funding to make SDZWA wildlife disease diagnostic capacity and surge capacity available to CDFW. MDL is actively preparing assays and workflows to meet CDFW needs.

Conservation impacts (projects)

- **African elephant EEHV:** Elephant endotheliotropic herpesvirus (EEHV) has caused acute death in several African elephants within the U.S. since 2019. A multi-year project was initiated by SDZWA in collaboration with two other Zoos to better understand viremia

and shedding patterns and to help create management guidelines. Thousands of samples were tested by MDL and data are currently being analyzed by an MDL based postdoctoral fellow.

- **Southern resident killer whale (SRKW) parasite screening:** The SRKW population is heavily impacted by anthropogenic threats. MDL is collaborating on a project that is identifying biomarkers and determinants of health in this population. Specifically, MDL is developing workflows to screen SRKW fecal and breath samples for parasites using next generation sequencing.
- **Cheetah Epigenetics:** MDL helped develop the first epigenetic “clock” for cheetahs using DNA methylation to predict age, sex, and investigate health biomarkers related to a liver disease called sinusoidal obstructive syndrome. This work validated exciting new techniques and opened the door to integrating these markers into wildlife health studies that can help us build more comprehensive models/understandings of wildlife health and disease.
- **Lab-to-Field Protocol Development:** MDL has been designing protocols that allow us to measure the biomarkers mentioned above in-house and eventually in the field, using diverse biological samples like blood and skin and field-accessible laboratory techniques. We hope to expand this approach to study mercury exposure in Amazonian wildlife, using portable sequencing to explore molecular effects of environmental toxins. These efforts aim to make these novel molecular tools accessible for real-world conservation. The ability to assess age, sex, and health from limited samples can inform and potentially improve how we monitor vulnerable species in the wild.

From our beginnings testing a small number of species for a handful of diseases, the MDL at SDZWA has grown into a dynamic team of scientists poised to run over 100 assays, respond to disease outbreaks, and develop new tests for emerging infectious diseases. We thank the Sykes Family for being an early supporter of this laboratory which aims to remove disease as a roadblock to conservation.

From: [Janet O'Dea](#)
To: [Walker, Megan](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Item 3
Date: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 11:17:07 AM

****This email came from an external source. Be cautious about clicking on any links in this email or opening attachments.****

Hi Megan

I received this message from Charlie Sykes and checked the report but the dates that were included in the report or accurate. Please look this over before you make any statements during the meeting tomorrow. I didn't want to talk about this publicly of the meeting if this is something that you could address. If you want to discuss anything about this please give me a call. Thank you

Janet O'Dea
619-794-2781

Begin forwarded message:

From: Janet O'Dea <janetodea@gmail.com>
Date: May 20, 2025 at 8:43:37 PM PDT
To: CHARLES SYKES <charles1sykes@cox.net>
Subject: Re: Item 3

Thanks The dates are important to get right.
I did not address them.
I am sure I had the right dates in the report. I will double check this though.

I just sent you the slide presentation,

I focused on when they started the lab in 1999 because they are making a statement that it is too recent to evaluate historic significance.
Let me know. If it is ok, I would like to email a copy to the city so that they have a back up.

Janet O'Dea
619-794-2781

I am a guest on the ancestral land of the Kosa'aay (Cosoy), a Kumeyaay village

On May 20, 2025, at 10:44 AM, CHARLES SYKES
<charles1sykes@cox.net> wrote:

Good morning Janet,

I reread the report just now. There are a few minor date errors which are not significant such as the fact that my mother was born in 1928, not '24 and I was born in 1957 not '59. It states that she lived in the house until 2011, but in fact she died in the home in August 2019. She was only away for a few months recovering from heart surgery in late 2014/early 2015. While she was recovering from surgery, she instructed me to make a large donation to the lab which was helpful in ensuring its continued success. My mother lived a modest life, preferring to donate to important causes instead of replacing her 1999 (base model) Volvo or buying expensive clothing and jewelry.

Thanks,

Charlie

p.s. I'll probably arrive a little before 1:00 (after rereading the agenda)

On Wednesday, May 14, 2025 at 05:01:03 PM PDT, Janet O'Dea <janetodea@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Charlie -

Here is the staff report.

There are a few points I would like to counter besides the prep done previously.

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2025-05/sr-3924-albatross-street-final.pdf>

Janet O'Dea
619-794-2781