



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: August 14, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-038

HEARING DATE: August 28, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM 5 – ELLEN THOMPSON/WALTER DOUGLAS HOUSE**

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

APPLICANT: Dirigo Trust 05-14-20 represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 3140 2nd Avenue, 92103, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 452-612-08-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Ellen Thompson House located at 3140 2nd Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Ellen Thompson/Walter Douglas House located at 3140 2nd Avenue as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1916 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation includes the interior stairs and stair railing, stained glass windows, living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet, and detached garage. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Prairie style of architecture with Italianate influences and retains integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a flat roof form with wide overhanging eaves, brackets, heavy sand stucco cladding, an asymmetrical primary facade, projecting one-story enclosed front entry with columns, focal window with partial-width columns and integrated flower box and original wood fenestration in a variety of styles including several fixed stained-glass windows. The interior stairs and stair railing, the stained-glass window at the base of the stair, living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet included in the nomination are original to the 1916 date of construction, are consistent with the Prairie style of the residence and contribute to the significance of the resource.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Walter Douglas, a prominent and accomplished architect responsible for the design of many quality structures in the Colorado Springs and San Diego areas, some of which have been historically designated on the Colorado State and National Registers. Specifically, the resource is significant as an example of Douglas' custom residential work in the Prairie style

during a phase of his career in which he worked in San Diego and retains integrity to its 1916 date of construction.

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 5D3, "Appears to be a contributor to a district that appears to be eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historical name of the resource, the Ellen Thompson/Walter Douglas House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Ellen Thompson, who constructed the house as their personal residence Walter Douglas and the name of Walter Douglas, a Master Architect.

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 3140 2nd Avenue is a two-story, Prairie style with Italianate influences, single-family residential building constructed in 1916 in the Uptown Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on site include a detached garage. The property is located on the west side of 2nd Avenue, in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1916, the property has been modified as follows: prior to the 1940s, the rear patio was enclosed and a back porch and door added, and an upper-level deck was added above the enclosed patio. Prior to 1981, the front doors were altered with the window panels shortened and the upper transoms were changed from two and three-lites to single-lites after 1996. At unknown

dates, protective glass panels over the large exterior stained-glass windows were added and a pergola structure was added to the roof deck, which was removed in 2025.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria C and D. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

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 resource is a two-story, single-family residence constructed in 1916 in the Prairie style with Italianate influences. The house features a flat roof with wide overhanging eaves, decorative brackets in the Italianate style and heavy sand stucco cladding. The second story features four five-over-one double hung wood windows. The resource sits at street level and has a concrete path leading from the sidewalk to the projecting single-story enclosed front entryway to the left with decorative paired columns, three-quarter-length windows, and transoms. On the first floor, to the right of the entry, a focal window with a paneled wood surround, partial-width square columns and an attached wooden planter box. The left side of the building is stepped back to accommodate the projecting front entry and features a six-part stained-glass window with a floral motif set in a frame with corbels and square half columns mimicking the front focal window and planter box. The rear left corner has a projecting porch with decorative art glass windows. The rear of the building features a second-story balcony with wood railings and an enclosed back porch with a rear deck and double doors with sidelights. The Italianate influence is demonstrated with the flat roof brackets, projecting front focal window and planter box creating a bay window effect, and asymmetrical front façade. A detached garage is located to the rear of the property and features a flat roof, carriage doors, and wood windows mirroring the style of the main house.

The property owner is also requesting the inclusion of select interior features which staff concurs with. They are proposing to include the main stairs in the front hall and stair railings of mahogany and Douglass fir, a small stained-glass window at the base of the steps, a large stained-glass window on the steps, mahogany and leaded-glass built-in cabinets in the living room and a built-in buffet in the dining room. Staff recommends that the stairs and stair railing and stained glass windows in the front hall, as well as the built-in cabinets and buffet in the living and dining rooms be included in this designation because they are original to the date of construction and are designed consistent with the Prairie style.

The Prairie style was popular between 1900 and 1920 and was primarily used for domestic architecture. The style originated in Chicago and is closely associated with Frank Lloyd Wright. It spread nationwide due to being featured in magazines and pattern books. Its primary character defining features are a low-pitched roof, deep eaves, two-story construction with one-story wings or porches, and detailing that emphasizes horizontal lines. Examples of features used to create a horizontal emphasis include the deep eaves at both the main roof and lower roofs, contrasting trim between stories, contrasting colors on cornices and eaves, horizontal siding, and horizontal rows of windows. Roofs are typically hipped. Massive porch piers are also common, especially on high-style

examples. High-style examples also typically have a one-story wing, porch or carport on one side of the house. Windows typically have multi-paned upper sections and are either casements or double-hung.

The Italianate style was part of the Picturesque Movement that began in England, and was a reaction to the formal classical ideals in art and architecture that had been fashionable for about 200 years. The movement expressed a desire for greater freedom of architectural expression and for more organic, complicated forms that were intended to complement their natural setting. Popularized in the 1840s and 1850s, the Italianate style was popularized in pattern books by architect Andrew Jackson Downing. Freestanding Italianate buildings displayed the cornice under widely overhanging eaves, while contiguous Italianate row houses or commercial buildings have a bracketed cornice on the front façade. Other markers of the Italianate style are tall, narrow windows, some with elaborate hoods, often shaped like an inverted U. Italianate windows often have round arch or square tops and can also be crowned by a pediment or entablature with brackets. Most Italianate buildings have columned porticoes or porches, sometime extending the full width of the front façade. The style was dominate from 1855 through 1880. As an easily adaptable style it became popular with residential, commercial, and institutional buildings alike.

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 Spanish Eclectic style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, retains overall integrity of design, materials, and workmanship despite the modifications. Infill of the rear porch, addition of a rear deck and balcony do not impact significant character defining features. The alteration of the entry transom lite pattern and the addition clear protective window covers over the stained-glass windows impact character defining features but not to a degree that impairs the property's overall integrity and eligibility under Criterion C. Therefore, the property retains its integrity to its 1916 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Prairie style of architecture with Italianate influence and retains integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a flat roof form with wide overhanging eaves, brackets, heavy sand stucco cladding, an asymmetrical primary facade, projecting one-story enclosed front entry with columns, focal window with partial width columns and integrated flower box and original wood fenestration in a variety of styles including several fixed stained-glass windows. The interior stairs and stair railing, the stained-glass window at the base of the stair, living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet included in the nomination are original to the 1916 date of construction and consistent with the Prairie style of the residence and contribute to the significance of the resource. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

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

The subject resource was designed for Ellen Thompson by the architectural firm of Douglas and Hartman. Neither Walter Douglas or Paul Hartman are currently designated as Master Architects within the City of San Diego; however, multiple buildings attributed to Douglas in Colorado Springs,

Colorado are listed on the Colorado State Register and National Register of Historic Places. The current nomination is proposing to establish Douglas as Master Architect in the City of San Diego.

Walter F. Douglas was born in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India in 1862 and attended the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, where he studied architecture. He returned to the US in 1888 and settled in Colorado, where he worked with Duncan Hetherington to design several buildings, which are on the state and national registers in Colorado. In 1912, Douglas moved to San Diego, where he partnered with Paul Hartman until 1920. During that time, the partners designed the Prairie style homes at 2703 (heavily altered) and 2704 Evergreen Street in Loma Portal as well as several other homes in Loma Portal and Coronado. After the dissolution of the partnership, Douglas designed several other residences in San Diego County, including the "House of the Seven Gables" located at 1001 E Avenue in Coronado. Douglas stopped being active in the San Diego area in approximately 1920. He has no known designated works in the City of San Diego at the time of this report, and only two known works within city limits that retain integrity.

According to the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), a Master can be established through a combination of one or more factors; including the scope and excellence of their overall body of work and the quality of design and detailing excellence. The Historical Resources Research Report argues that Douglas' work in Colorado Springs and the San Diego area reveal his ability to design in a wide range of styles including Victorian, Craftsman, Tudor, Mediterranean and early Modern. Additionally, Douglas' work encompassed a variety of different structures such as large hotels, institutional and commercial buildings, churches, theaters, and residences of all sizes. Additional information provided in Attachment E.4, such as the list of Douglas' designated work in Colorado as well as photos and descriptions of his known work, support the overall excellence of Douglas' work and the associated high quality of design and detailing. Furthermore, the number of Douglas' designs that are listed on the Colorado State and National Registers speaks to the overall excellence of his designs. Therefore, staff supports establishing Douglas as a Master Architect in the City of San Diego.

The Historical Resources Research Report argues that the subject resource is a notable example of Douglas' work in the Prairie style. Prior to his relocation to San Diego, Douglas's work was mostly in the Victorian, Tudor, and Craftsman styles. During his time in San Diego his work shifted toward Prairie and early Modern style residences. The 3140 2nd Avenue property is representative of Douglas' custom residential buildings designed while he worked in the San Diego area from 1912 to 1920.

Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Walter Douglas, a prominent and accomplished architect responsible for the design of many quality structures in the Colorado Springs and San Diego areas, some of which have been historically designated on the Colorado State and National Registers. Specifically, the resources is significant as an example of Douglas' custom residential work in the Prairie style during a phase of his career in which he worked in San Diego and retains integrity to its 1916 date of construction. Therefore, staff recommends the establishment of Walter Douglas as a Master Architect, and the designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion D.

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 staff's field check, it is recommended that the Ellen Thompson/Waler Douglas House, located at 3140 2nd Avenue, be designated as a historical resource with a significance period of 1916 under HRB Criterion C as an example of Prairie-style architecture with Italianate influences; and HRB Criterion D as a resource that is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Walter Douglas. The designation includes the interior stairs and stair railing, stained glass windows, and living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet, and detached garage built during the period of significance.



Megan Walker
Associate Planner



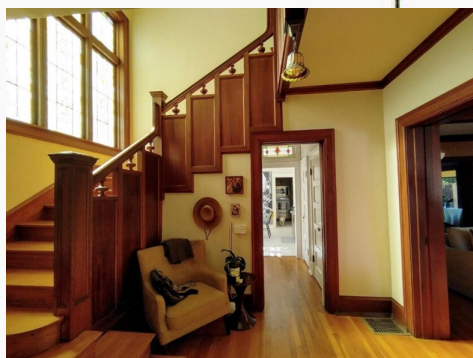
Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

MW/sa/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Interiors proposed for designation
3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

Hand-drawn floor plan of a house with various rooms and dimensions. The plan includes a large front porch (18x12), a living room (12x10), a dining room (12x10), a kitchen (12x10), a bathroom (5x7), a bedroom (12x10), and a staircase. Dimensions are written in red and black ink. Red boxes highlight specific areas: a staircase, a stained glass window, a buffet, and cabinets. Four inset photographs show examples of these features: a wooden staircase with a railing, a stained glass window, a wooden buffet, and wooden cabinets.



RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on , to consider the historical designation of the **ELLEN THOMPSON/WALTER DOUGLAS HOUSE** (owned by Dirigo Trust 05-14-20, 3140 2nd Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **3140 2nd Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **452-612-0800**, further described as BLK 360 LOT J in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the BLANK on the following findings:

- (1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics of the Prairie style of architecture with Italianate influences and retains integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a flat roof form with wide overhanging eaves, brackets, heavy sand stucco cladding, an asymmetrical primary facade, projecting one-story enclosed front entry with columns, focal window with partial-width columns and integrated flower box and original wood fenestration in a variety of styles including several fixed stained-glass windows. The interior stairs and stair railing, the stained-glass window at the base of the stair, living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet included in the nomination are original to the 1916 date of construction, are consistent with the Prairie style of the residence and contribute to the significance of the resource. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.
- (2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Walter Douglas, a prominent and accomplished architect responsible for the design of many quality structures in the Colorado Springs and San Diego areas, some of which have been historically designated on the Colorado State and National Registers. Specifically, the resource is significant as an example of Douglas' custom residential work in the Prairie style during a phase of his career in which he worked in San Diego and retains integrity to its 1916 date of construction. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0.**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include the interior stairs and stair railing, stained glass windows, living room built-in cabinets and dining room buffet, and detached garage

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
KRISTI BYERS, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: HEATHER FERBERT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

DRAFT