



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 5, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-057

HEARING DATE: November 20, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #8 – JOHN AND MATTIE WHITE/BENJAMIN TORGERSON HOUSE**

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

APPLICANT: Joshua L. and Michelle P. Brown represented by Urbana Preservation & Planning, LLC

LOCATION: 2651 Jonquil Drive, 92106, Peninsula Community, Council District 2, APN 449-693-1700

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the John and Mattie White/Benjamin Torgerson House located at 2651 Jonquil Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the John and Mattie White/Benjamin Torgerson House located at 2651 Jonquil Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1930 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the 1984 rear addition constructed outside of the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture and retains integrity from its 1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features varied roof forms, tile roof with little eave overhang, decorative smooth stucco exterior, an asymmetrical primary facade, a second-story balcony, front courtyard with stucco site wall, a battered stucco chimney and wood fenestration consisting of casements and single-light fixed windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the building exemplifies Torgerson's custom work through its use of massing with stepped wings and varied roof forms to emphasize the scale of the building and prominence of the corner lot, as well as its many architectural details which convey the Spanish Colonial Revival

style; including his use of second story balconies both projecting and recessed, heavy corbels, and decorative stucco details. Much of Torgerson's other works are in simplified minimal traditional style, his custom works and multifamily properties exhibit more elaboration and distinctive elements of architectural styles. The resource exhibits a quality of craftsmanship similar to that seen in his other known custom works and retains integrity in relation to the original 1930 design.

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 has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historical name of the resource, the John and Mattie White/Benjamin Torgerson House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the names of John and Mattie White, who constructed the house as their personal residence, and the name of Benjamin Torgerson, a Master Builder.

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 2651 Jonquil Drive is a two-story, Spanish Colonial Revival-style, single-family residential building constructed in 1930 in the Peninsula Community Planning Area. The property is located at the intersection of Jonquil Drive and Elliott Street, in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1930, the property has undergone the following modifications: In 1984, a permit was obtained for a rear addition to the attached garage, which included a roof deck over the garage and a rear pool. As part of the Quieter Homes Program, the windows, skylight, and HVAC system were replaced in 2010. The wood gates to the courtyard were replaced with wrought iron gates,

and the house was repainted in 2023.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Urbana Preservation & Planning, LLC, 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 1930 in the Spanish Eclectic style. The house features varied roof forms with tile roofing, minimal eave overhang, smooth stucco cladding, and an asymmetrical primary façade. The resource is reached by a brick path into a gated front courtyard with stucco walls. The second story features a central projecting balcony with decorative corbels, flanked to the left by a roof deck over the garage and to the right by a wing with a stucco screen and a recessed balcony. The first-floor primary façade features a garage to the left, a slightly projecting front entry under the balcony with a picture window, and the front entry door. To the right is a stepped-forward wing with a battered stucco chimney, flanked by a pair of casement windows. The east façade of the building has a gable with a picture window with a heavy wooden lintel and a projecting elevation with a shed roof and a pair of casement windows. Fenestration consists primarily of wood casement windows as well as large, fixed picture windows.

Following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture was revived. What resulted was the Spanish Eclectic style which was the predominant style in Southern California between 1915 and 1940, significantly altering the architectural landscape until the Modernist movement took hold during and after WWII. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, and unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped, and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile; focal windows; arched windows and other openings, and accented entries.

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. The modifications are designed in a manner that is consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The rear addition behind the garage and pool do not impact the resource's character-defining features. The windows installed under the QHP are wood and replicate the size, operation and lite patterns of the original windows consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The modification of the iron gates is limited and does not significantly alter the property's integrity. Therefore, the property retains its integrity to its 1930 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture

and retains integrity from its 1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features varied roof forms, tile roof with little eave overhang, decorative smooth stucco exterior, an asymmetrical primary facade, a second-story balcony, front courtyard with stucco site wall, a battered stucco chimney and wood fenestration consisting of casements, and single-light fixed windows. 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.

Benjamin M. Torgerson was born in Iowa in 1894. He first visited San Diego in 1915 to go to the Panama-California Exposition. In 1925, he moved to San Diego. His earliest known building permit is from 1927. The 1929 City Directory lists him as a carpenter. One of his early projects was a house designed by Irving Gill, which has since been demolished.

From about 1930 to 1935, Torgerson partnered with George E. Cooley. The partners built modest houses in response to buyers' needs during the Great Depression. However, they also took advantage of depressed building material costs and skilled workers seeking employment to build high-end custom houses in University Heights, Kensington Heights, Talmadge Park, and North Park. In addition to single-family houses, they built commercial buildings and multi-unit apartment buildings.

Torgerson worked independently from 1935 until his retirement in 1942. Around 1937, he established himself as a prominent builder in San Diego's rebounding real estate market. Due to his wife's connections to Life Magazine, he won the commission to build one of the magazine's "Life Houses" in La Jolla in 1937. The Life Houses grew out of Life Magazine's promotion of small, affordable houses built in the Minimal Traditional style with Colonial Revival influences, which was part of the 1930s Better Homes Movement. Torgerson built revised versions of his Life House elsewhere in the city, developing his "California Colonial" style. He incorporated the style into FHA-funded Minimal Traditional houses built in keeping with the design principles of the Better Homes Movement.

In addition to modest houses, Torgerson continued to build grander custom houses, apartment buildings, bungalow courts and commercial buildings. He built at least 98 buildings over the course of his career. The architectural range of Torgerson's buildings spans Craftsman, English Tudor, French Provincial, Spanish Eclectic, Spanish Renaissance, Monterey/Colonial and Minimal Traditional styles.

At least four of Benjamin Torgerson's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board, including the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 (HRB #1039), which established him as a Master Builder in 2012:

- HRB # 749- Benjamin Torgerson/George Cooley Spec House #1 (4343 Adams Avenue), 1930
- HRB #1025- The Life House (6025 Waverly Street), 1939
- HRB #1039- George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 (5158 Marlborough Drive), 1931
- HRB #1152- Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House (2555 Plum Street), 1940

The subject resource was built by Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson in 1930, for owners John and Mattie White. The subject residence is an example of Torgerson's custom work in the Spanish

Colonial Revival style and conveys his skill as a builder of custom homes. The building exemplifies Torgerson's custom work through its use of massing with stepped wings and varied roof forms to emphasize the scale of the building and prominence of the corner lot, as well as its many architectural details which convey the Spanish Colonial Revival style; including his use of second story balconies both projecting and recessed, heavy corbels, and decorative stucco details. Much of Torgerson's other works are in simplified minimal traditional style, his custom works and multifamily properties exhibit more elaboration and distinctive elements of architectural styles.

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 D as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. 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. The addition behind the garage, of the roof deck and changes to the gates do not alter character-defining features. The replacement of the windows through the QHP process replicate the material, size, operation and lite patterns of the original consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. These changes do not impair the resource's ability to convey its significance as a notable work by Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1930 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the building exemplifies Torgerson's custom work through its use of massing with stepped wings and varied roof forms to emphasize the scale of the building and prominence of the corner lot, as well as its many architectural details which convey the Spanish Colonial Revival style; including his use of second story balconies both projecting and recessed, heavy corbels, and decorative stucco details. Much of Torgerson's other works are in simplified minimal traditional style, his custom works and multifamily properties exhibit more elaboration and distinctive elements of architectural styles. The resource exhibits a quality of craftsmanship similar to that seen in his other known custom works and retains integrity in relation to the original 1930 design. Therefore, staff recommends 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 Spanish Colonial Revival house, located at 2651 Jonquil Drive, be designated as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1930 under HRB Criterion C as an example of Spanish Colonial Revival

style architecture and HRB Criterion D as a resource that is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. The designation excludes the 1984 addition constructed outside of the period of significance.

Megan Walker
Associate Planner

Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

MW/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 11/20/2025

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 11/20/2025, to consider the historical designation of the **JOHN AND MATTIE WHITE/BENJAMIN TORGERSON HOUSE** (owned by Joshua Louis Brown & Michelle Parks, 2651 Jonquil Drive, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **2651 Jonquil Drive, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **449-693-1700**, further described as BLK L LOT 1 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 Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture and retains integrity from its 1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features varied roof forms, tile roof with little eave overhang, decorative smooth stucco exterior, an asymmetrical primary facade, a second-story balcony, front courtyard with stucco site wall, a battered stucco chimney and wood fenestration consisting of casements, and single-light fixed windows. 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 Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the building exemplifies Torgerson's custom work through its use of massing with stepped wings and varied roof forms to emphasize the scale of the building and prominence of the corner lot, as well as its many architectural details which convey the Spanish Colonial Revival style; including his use of second story balconies both projecting and recessed, heavy corbels, and decorative stucco details. Much of Torgerson's other works are in simplified minimal traditional style, his custom works and multifamily properties exhibit more elaboration and distinctive elements of architectural styles. The resource exhibits a quality of craftsmanship similar to that seen in his other known custom works and retains integrity in relation to the original 1930 design. 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 exclude the designation excludes the 1984 rear addition constructed outside of the period of significance.

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

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