



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 14, 2022 REPORT NO. HRB-22-013

HEARING DATE: April 28th, 2022

SUBJECT: **ITEM #03 – The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building**

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

APPLICANT: Kalonymus Development Partners, LLC; represented by Scott A. Moomjin

LOCATION: 3780-3786 5th Avenue, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 452-056-14-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building located at 3780-3786 Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1982-1994 under HRB Criterion A and Criterion B. The designation excludes the 1911 building section and the 1971 addition. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource, which is significant for its association with the LGBTQ community, is a special element of the historical, cultural, social, economic, and political development of the Hillcrest neighborhood and the City as a whole and retains integrity to its 1982-1994 period of significance. Specifically, The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building housed an agglomeration of LGBTQ support, education, and fundraising organizations in Hillcrest that provided critical information and capital needed to relieve people impacted by the AIDS crisis in San Diego throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.
2. The resource is identified with Albert Edwin Bell, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Albert Edwin Bell, who used, occupied, and managed the building between 1982 and 1993, was a local activist and leader in the LGBTQ community who fought for gay rights and sought relief for AIDS victims during the AIDS crisis in San Diego by creating various activist and support organizations.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The 3780-3786 5th Avenue property includes two standalone two-story buildings (a 1911 building with two additions and a 1932 Spanish Eclectic building) situated on a rectangular parcel in the Hillcrest neighborhood.

The property was identified in the [2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report](#) and given a Status Code of 5B, "locally significant both individually (listed, eligible, or appears eligible) and as a contributor to a district that is locally listed, designated, determined eligible or appears eligible through survey evaluation." The property was also identified in the [2016 San Diego Citywide LGBTQ Historic Context Statement](#) as a potential resource under two themes — LGBTQ Community Organization and LGBTQ Media.

The historic name of the resource, The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building, has been identified as consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the historical tenants who occupied the property, and Albert Bell, a historically significant individual.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Scott A. Moomjian, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion A and Criterion B, and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

The subject property located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue site was utilized by various LGBTQ organizations between 1982-1994, including "The Center," the *San Diego Gayzette*, the Lesbian & Gay Archives, and various AIDS relief and fundraising groups. This property is significant for its association with San Diego's and Hillcrest's historical, cultural, economic, and political development.

San Diego's LGBTQ community has persevered throughout the centuries and continues to develop in the present day. According to the [2016 San Diego Citywide LGBTQ Historic Context Statement](#), little is known about members of the LGBTQ community before the 20th century, as the openly gay lifestyle and specific sexual activities were stigmatized by most 19th-century Americans and outlawed. San Diego's early gay residents likely kept their relationships completely private and, therefore, yielded very little scholarly or reliable information on this topic. As early as 1850, a common-law statute in the territory of California criminalized sodomy, and its punishment can be as punitive as a life sentence. In 1915, California State Penal Code 288a (before its current amendment) made specific oral sex acts illegal, which was a direct result of the arrest of 31 men in the City of Long Beach in 1914 as a part of a sting operation on suspicion of "social vagrancy." Laws such as the 1917 San Diego ordinance prohibiting extramarital intercourse between a husband and wife also effectively criminalized same-sex intercourse. Resentment against the LGBTQ community continued

through the 1930s until the WWII era — when the abandonment of traditional gender roles and sex roles brought LGBTQ people together. Both men and women service members were grouped in same-sex settings for extended periods; some women formed close and sometimes sexual relationships, and some servicemen found new opportunities for gay experiences away from their families. By the 1960s, a major demographic shift took place in a San Diego neighborhood that would develop into the City's first gay neighborhood — Hillcrest. The neighborhood of Hillcrest was initially comprised of young families but became an area with a large concentration of elderly people living alone.

According to the [2016 Uptown Historic Resources Survey Report](#), Hillcrest had a large aging population in the 1960s and 1970s, which meant less pedestrian activity and, therefore, less chance of anti-gay confrontations. When older residents died, their empty homes contributed to a rising vacancy rate and thus formed an area with lower housing costs. Motivated by the relative security and the cheaper housing stock, members of the LGBTQ community began to reside in the area, and Hillcrest became an ideal location for new LGBTQ business and social venues, such as gay bars and nightclubs. Constrained by limited resources, these businesses, support groups, and advocacy organizations have adaptively reused existing buildings of all styles and eras to meet their needs. The LGBTQ community's foothold in Hillcrest persevered throughout the decades, and Hillcrest continues to accommodate an increasingly active and vital community.

San Diego's first case of AIDS appeared in 1981. By 1986, over 700 individuals had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. And by 1990, new diagnoses had peaked at 1,314 and decreased steadily ever since, according to the San Diego Magazine.

From 1983 to 1992, the subject property was the third location for San Diego's Center for Social Services, commonly known as "The Center," which fulfilled the function of an LGBTQ resource and support organization, provided various programs, education, and outreach that were geared specifically for gays and lesbians. The origin of The Center traces back to 1973 when it began as a group of leaders and counselors operating out of Golden Hill to participate in self-development and to support San Diegans who were beginning to come out of the closet. The original leaders aimed to establish a location in Hillcrest but were limited by available funds. Though, by the early '80s, The Center was successful in relocating to 3780-3786 5th Avenue in Hillcrest, occupying the property from 1983 to 1992. During this period, the onset of the AIDS crisis led to the creation of various support groups to serve HIV patients' needs. Organizations that occupied the property as a response to the AIDS epidemic included San Diego Walks For Life (1988-1993), AIDS Response Program (1989), and AIDS Wholistic (1989-1994).

The San Diego Walks For Life was a fundraising organization that distributed funds to direct care, comfort, and counseling for AIDS patients and their families. Today, the San Diego Walks For Life, in its 1980s iteration, no longer exists. Instead, new programs called the "AIDS Walk & Run/AIDS Walk San Diego" continue its legacy, serving as a fundraising mechanism and an education opportunity to generate awareness. According to The Center's AIDS Walk San Diego webpage, the fear and stigma associated with the word "HIV" and "AIDS" have prevented those terms from appearing in the fundraiser's original title in the 1980s. This further demonstrates the stigma and hardship suffered by the LGBTQ community, who were most impacted by the AIDS crisis.

The AIDS Response Program and AIDS Wholistic likely offered auxiliary support for relief and education. Furthermore, archival photographs have demonstrated that the various community groups, such as the Gay Youth Alliance and Mothers of AIDS Patients, have used the courtyard of the subject property as venue space. However, research cannot ascertain whether these groups have occupied the site in a more permanent manner; some people have suggested that groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), Concerned Citizens for AIDS Patients, or San Diego Lesbian Organizations have formed onsite the 3780-3786 5th Avenue property, but research is inconclusive regarding this matter.

Between 1982 and 1983, the *San Diego Gayzette* headquarters occupied the subject property. The *Gayzette* was a popular publication that catered to the LGBTQ community. It offered valuable information such as social networking ads, legal advice, and business advertisements. The *Gayzette* became the paper of record for the LGBTQ community soon after it began publishing. The publication distributed 10,000 copies of its first issue and was the first San Diego publication to cover the AIDS epidemic. This accomplishment is noteworthy because HIV/AIDS and its impacts were still poorly recognized or understood in 1982 by the average San Diegan. The *Gayzette* continued to run until 1986, after its advertising director and community activist John Ciaccio died from AIDS complications. Although the *Gayzette* operated between 1984 and 1986, the Historical Resource Research Report (HRRR) was unable to identify its location during this period.

Per the city directory, the "Lesbian & Gay Archives," a precursor to today's Lambda Archive, occupied the subject property from 1992 to 1994. Established in 1987, the Lambda Archive is a repository of LGBTQ history, and its collection today is recognized as one of the best-maintained in the country. Also, in 1992, an archive was set up at 4545 Park Boulevard, where it remains to this day.

Modifications to the property, most of which occurred before the resource's period of significance, are detailed in the HRRR and discussion of Criterion C below. While these modifications impact the integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling, they do not impact these aspects of integrity to such a degree that the building loses its ability to convey its significance under HRB Criterion A. Additionally, the building retains integrity of location and association, important aspects of integrity for resources that are significant under Criterion A for their association with historical, social, cultural, economic, and political development.

Significance Statement: The Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building, located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue, housed a variety of support, education, and fundraising organizations in Hillcrest that provided critical information and capital needed to support patients and their families who were impacted by the AIDS crisis in San Diego throughout the 1980s. Specifically, the site contained the third location for The Center, the *San Diego Gayzette* headquarters, the Lesbian & Gay Archives, and various AIDS reliefs groups such as San Diego Walks For Life, AIDS Response Program, and AIDS Wholistic. Written records, photographs, and oral history have documented this site as a hub associated with the historical, cultural, social, economic, and political development of the LGBTQ community in San Diego and the Hillcrest neighborhood with a period of significance of 1982-1994 during the AIDS epidemic. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the resource under HRB Criterion A.

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

The subject resource located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue is associated with Albert Edwin Bell (1950-1993), a significant local activist and leader in the LGBTQ community. At age 20, Bell founded the first Gay Liberation group in San Francisco, the gay student union at San Francisco City College, and the gay student union at San Francisco State University. He later worked on Harvey Milk's successful campaign as San Francisco's first openly gay County Supervisor. In the mid-1970s, Albert Bell moved to San Diego, where he became one of the early directors of the Gay Center for Social Services (The Center) later that same decade; He also served as The Center's chairman from 1982 to 1984, which partially overlaps the period where The Center occupied 3780-3786 5th Avenue. In addition, Albert Bell was known to occupy the subject property in 1985 and served as the building manager from at least 1985 to 1992.

As an activist, Bell organized the first local chapter of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987 to bring help to people with AIDS. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, ACT UP is the first official international organization founded to bring attention to the AIDS epidemic, which has utilized civil disobedience and nonviolent protests and demonstrations to raise awareness and pressure governments into providing support to AIDS patients. In 1987, Bell founded "Our House," the first residential living facility in San Diego for people with AIDS. He helped create the AIDS Assistance Fund by at least 1989 and helped produce the AIDS Walk for Life from 1989 to 1993. The AIDS Assistance Fund has provided direct services and benefits to individuals with HIV.

In 1987, Albert Bell and more than 800 activists protested at the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington D.C. against a 1986 decision (*Bowers v. Hardwick*) upholding a Georgia sodomy law's enforcement against homosexuals. This demonstration was documented as the largest act of civil disobedience in decades. Well aware of the power of media, Bell confronted San Diego's KGBT Channel 10 anchor Ed Quinn on the station's relative lack of coverage for the March on Washington. Quinn's retorted cynically and immediately drew condemnation from visiting ABC anchor Peter Jennings. Bell's thoughtful, televised evisceration of the local journalist's apathy led to a meeting with Jennings and the Channel 10 executives, resulting in a substantial change in how gay and lesbian issues were presented in media. Bell's activism continued. In 1988, Albert Bell and other ACT UP activists staged a demonstration at the City Council to urge city officials to provide funding to address the AIDS crisis.

Bell founded a local chapter of "Radical Faeries" at the subject property after attending the first spiritual gathering of the Radical Faeries in Boulder, Colorado, in 1980. Radical Faeries, short for "Faeries on the Frontiers of Gay Consciousness," is a loose collection of individuals and a movement informed by various social and political perspectives. The [2016 San Diego Citywide LGBTQ Historic Context Statement](#) has identified the subject property as the location for the Radical Faeries meetings. Albert Bell also developed a series of lectures titled "Homospiritual: A Gay Journey to Self Esteem," a self-help course attended by hundreds of San Diegans. These lectures have been preserved and are accessible online via Archive.org.

Bell's other accomplishments which benefitted the LGBTQ community include: providing services such as counseling, HIV testing, and HIV/AIDS education as San Diego County's HIV health advisor, donating funds and materials to the Gay and Lesbian Archives of San Diego, and advocating for gay

rights and AIDS relief on the national stage through his visit to the 1992 Democratic Convention in New York as a delegate.

Shortly before his death, Bell received the first Albert Bell Award for Community Service from the San Diego Democratic Club and the first Albert Bell Award for Outstanding Achievements in AIDS Activism from ACT UP SAN DIEGO. In 1993, Bell died of AIDS at the age of 43, surrounded by friends. Posthumously in 2005, he was inducted into the San Diego LGBT Community Wall of Honor.

Albert Bell has lived at 2230 Albatross Street, Apartment #9, and 3815 Vermont Street, Apartment #10. However, these personal residences lack association with Albert Bell's most significant accomplishments in the 1980s and early 1990s. They are not eligible under Criterion B as it relates to Bell's significance as an activist and leader whose activities, achievements, and contributions are demonstrably important within the City of San Diego.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was occupied and managed by Albert Edwin Bell from at least 1985 to 1993, and contains various groups and organizations founded by Bell, including AIDS Walk for Life and San Diego's Radical Faeries chapter. The property also housed The Center when Albert Bell served as its board chairman between 1982 and 1984. Therefore, staff recommends the designation of the resource located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue under HRB Criterion B for its association with Albert Edwin Bell.

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.

3780 5th Avenue (built 1911): The subject resource was constructed in 1911 as a two-story dwelling and originally included a full-length, shingle-covered open front porch. Its original architecture cannot be ascertained, as this building has been extensively modified since its original construction. Currently, the property exhibits a Spanish-influenced design, featuring a medium-pitched gabled roof covered in non-original Spanish mission half-barrel tiles and stucco siding. Its east/primary elevation includes non-original slider windows, a brick veneer wainscot, and a one-story flat roof addition clad in stucco (built 1971). The south elevation includes a non-original bay window projection and a modified shed-roof entry projection with Spanish tile roofing materials. Towards the west side of the south elevation, a 1968 two-story office building addition is present, featuring a flat roof, stairs, and a second-story covered balcony. The stairs were installed flush with the 3782-3786 5th Avenue building, forming a connected series of structures. Fenestration on this building consists of a variety of wood, vinyl, and metal windows.

Modifications on this property include the 1928 conversion of the dwelling space into commercial use, the 1936 return to original dwelling space, the 1953 conversion to multi-family units, the pre-1956 removal of the front open patio, the construction of a rear one-story addition between 1956 and 1963 (partially extant), the 1960 construction to add decorative brick/window shutters/columns (non-extant except for brick), the 1968 two-story rear office building addition, the 1971 front one-story retail store addition, the 1972 standard poster panel construction (non-extant), the 1989 infill of openings and window replacements (location unknown), and the 1997 rehabilitation project which includes window replacements and in-kind repairs. The original appearance of the building is undocumented, and the known modifications are extensive.

The property located at 3780 5th Avenue does not rise to a level of significance for designation under Criterion C for its non-original Spanish-influenced style. Additionally, the building retains low integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling for its original, likely Craftsman, style. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion C for either the Spanish Eclectic or the Craftsman architecture.

3782-3786 5th Avenue (1932): The subject resource was constructed in 1932 as a two-story Spanish Eclectic stucco apartment building. With a flat composite roof, this building features an unadorned arched parapet, an easterly sloping Spanish tile porch cover, and an east-facing balcony/stair. Two modern sectional garage doors are found along the west/rear elevation. Fenestration on this building currently consists of non-original slider windows. Additional architectural elaborations on this building include exposed wooden beams, cantilevering on the south elevation, and multiple rectangular tile attic vents.

Alterations on the property include the addition of a 1961 standard poster panel (non-extant), the 1966 infill of south elevation and north elevation windows and conversion to office space, the undated replacement of original windows and doors, and the undated addition of the two modern garage doors. The stucco texture does not appear to be original.

As originally constructed, 3782-3786 5th Avenue exhibited architectural elements of Spanish Eclectic architecture and continues to retain many of those features. However, the cumulative effect of the overall modifications to the fenestration, cladding, and building site impair the building's integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling to the point that the building is no longer eligible under HRB Criterion C. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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.

Research into the construction of the property at 3780 5th Avenue failed to conclusively identify a builder, designer or architect. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D.

The property at 3782-3786 5th Avenue was built by Palmer Smith in 1932. Palmer Smith has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect, Designer or Builder, and there is insufficient information to designate them as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.

The property at 3780-3786 5th Avenue has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E.

CRITERION F - Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character,

historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.

The property at 3780-3786 5th Avenue is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

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 Center/The *Gayzette*/Albert Bell Building located at 3780-3786 5th Avenue be designated with a period of significance of 1982-1994 under HRB Criterion A and Criterion B. The designation excludes the 1911 building section and the 1971 addition.



Alvin Lin
Junior Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER
ADOPTED ON 4/28/2022

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/28/2022, to consider the historical designation of **The Center/The Gayzette/Albert Bell Building** (owned by Michael J. Jasaitis Separate Property Revocable Trust, 3774 5th Ave #F1, San Diego, CA 92101) located at **3780 5th Ave, San Diego, CA 92101**, APN: **452-056-1400-00**, further described as BLK 6 LOTS 9&10 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. ,** 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 on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A for its association with the LGBTQ community, reflects a special element of Hillcrest's and the City's historical, cultural, social, economic, and political development with a 1982-1994 period of significance. Specifically, **The Center/The Gayzette/Albert Bell Building** was an agglomeration of LGBTQ support, education, and fundraising organizations in Hillcrest that provided critical information and capital needed to relieve people who were impacted by the AIDS crisis in San Diego throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. 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 resource is identified with Albert Edwin Bell, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, Albert Edwin Bell, who used, occupied, and managed the building between 1985 and 1993, was a local activist and leader in the LGBTQ community who fought for gay rights and sought relief for AIDS victims during the AIDS crisis in San Diego by creating various activist and support organizations. 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. .**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include the two-story 1968 building section (3780 5th Avenue) and the 1932 two-story building (3782-3786 5th Avenue).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 1911 building section and the 1971 addition.

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:

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

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