



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 11, 2018 REPORT NO. HRB-18-004

HEARING DATE: January 25, 2018

SUBJECT: **ITEM #9 – Robert R. Curtis House**

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

APPLICANT: Sean and Elizabeth Allen represented by Johnson & Johnson

LOCATION: 1435 Grove Street, 92102, Golden Hill Community, Council District 3  
APN 539-423-02-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Robert R. Curtis House located at 1435 Grove Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Robert R. Curtis House located at 1435 Grove Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1912 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes a rear patio enclosure, rear addition and a 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 Tudor Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its steeply pitched gable roof with triangular knee braces, half-timbering at the gable ends, wood divided light windows, a centrally located gable roofed porch supported by brick columns, and gable roofed dormers.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Robert R. Curtis and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource was built as a personal residence early in his career, it reflects his early residential work before he became a well-known architect of schools and institutional buildings. In partnership with Theodore Kistner, the architects built a thriving offices in San Diego and Los Angeles specializing in public buildings.

## 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 is located within the Golden Hill community. The subject property is located on the east side of Grove Street between Beech and Ash Streets and located within a mixed use neighborhood.

The property was identified in the 1996 Greater Mid City San Diego Preservation Strategy and noted as a contributor to the potential South Park District. The property was designated as a contributor to the South Park Historic District in 2017 as HRB #1276-282.

The historic name of the resource, the Robert R. Curtis House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Robert R. Curtis who designed and lived in the house. Robert Curtis is being proposed as a Master Architect.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Johnson and Johnson Architecture which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B, C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria, C and D, but not HRB Criterion B. 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 applicant's report suggests that the property is significant for its association with Margaret Curtis. Mrs. Curtis, nee Dewey, was born on November 2, 1879, in Mineral Bure, Illinois. She met her future husband while attending Knox College. After their relocation to San Diego, Mrs. Curtis worked in the Women's Alliance of the Unitarian Church, was a board member of the Neighborhood House and worked in several social work and welfare organizations. While Mrs. Curtis devoted her time to a number of worthy causes, her philanthropic work does not rise to the level of significance at the local, state or national level. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion B.

*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.*

Constructed in 1912, the subject property was designed in the Tudor Revival style. The house is one and half stories with a gable roof. The gable roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles and features triangular knee brackets. The exterior of the house is sheathed with wood shingles and the fenestration is a mixture of wood divided light double hung, casement and fixed windows. The gable ends feature stucco and half-timbering.

The front (west) façade features a centrally located, gable roofed porch. The gable end of the porch features vertical half-timbering and stucco. The porch is supported by brick columns with a running bond pattern. The bricks are also used in a low wall surrounding the porch. Flanking the porch are two tripartite windows. The sets consist of 4/1 double hung windows on either side of a 6/1 double hung window. Directly above the porch is a double gable dormer. Each gable end features vertical half timbering and two 6-light casement windows. To the left of the gabled dormer is a small shed roof with a pair of 6-light casement windows.

The north and the south facades are similar in appearance. The first floor features a tripartite window and a fixed window while the second floor features a tripartite windows that match the front façade windows. The distinction between the two facades is the light pattern and the operation. On the south side first floor the tripartite window features casements while on the north side the matching windows are double hung. The north side also features a brick chimney that pierces the eave and a slight different half timbering pattern at the gable end.

The rear of the house features a large dormer with a jerkinhead roof, half timbering and a small pair of single light casement windows. This façade also features a one story addition. The addition is sheathed with wood shingles that match the main body of the house.

There have been limited alterations to the house. The shingles at the exterior were replaced, but it is not clear how many of the shingles were replaced. Additionally, as noted previously, a rear addition was added in 2013. The original garage that was accessed via a ribbon driveway on the south side of the house was demolished sometime after 1956. In 2017, staff reviewed plans for a new rear addition and garage. The proposed work was deemed consistent with the Standards.

Popular in the 1920s and 1930s, Tudor Revival architecture is loosely based on a variety of late Medieval English styles and influences, but unlike some English prototypes, Tudor Revival style houses exhibit steeply pitched gable roofs that dominate the facades. Other character defining features include decorative half-timbering; tall, narrow windows, usually appearing in multiple groups and with multi-pane glazing; massive chimneys, sometimes with decorative chimney pots; entry porches with round or Tudor arches; and gable dormers. Relatively uncommon before World War I, widespread adoption of masonry veneering techniques in the 1920s accompanied a dramatic rise in the style's popularity as even the most modest examples began to closely mimic the brick and stone veneers of their English prototypes. Tudor Revival style houses usually include the use of stucco as well as wood cladding and brick or stone veneer, depending upon the subtype.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Tudor Revival style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a steeply pitched gable roof with triangular knee braces, half-timbering at the gable ends, wood divided light windows, a centrally located gable roofed porch supported by brick columns, and gable roofed dormers. 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 applicant is proposing Robert R. Curtis as a Master Architect. Robert R. Curtis was born on December 20, 1879 in Sheffield, Illinois. He graduated from Knox College in 1901. Mr. Curtis married Margaret Dewey prior to their relocation to San Diego. Prior to moving to San Diego, the Curtis family lived in Colorado. Shortly after arriving from Colorado, Mr. Curtis designed and built their home at 1435 Grove Street. Upon arrival in San Diego, Mr. Curtis was listed as an architect.

Mr. Curtis opened his own architectural office in 1911 upon arrival in San Diego. In 1900 the state instituted architectural licensing. With the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, licensing became more pressing. Mr. Curtis earned his license #832.

From 1916-1919, Mr. Curtis stepped away from his architectural practice and owned/worked at an oil and gas station on Broadway. Shortly after selling his oil and gas station, Mr. Curtis started working for Theodore C. Kistner. Mr. Kistner was the principal architect of T.C. Kistner & Co. Mr. Kistner designed apartment buildings and schools in early San Diego. Around the time that Mr. Curtis was hired at the firm, the company became the official architect for the San Diego School office. In 1922, Mr. Kistner opened an office in Los Angeles and Mr. Curtis stayed to run the San Diego office. As an architect, Mr. Curtis started as a specification writer and worked his way up to manager. By 1933, the firm of Kistner & Curtis was formed. During the war years, the firm worked exclusively for the military. Commendation was given to the firm by the Navy's Bureau of Yards & Docks for their many achievements. After the war, the firm resumed designing and earthquake retro-fitting schools.

In 1952, the Los Angeles firm was renamed Kistner, Curtis, Wright & Wright to acknowledge Henry L. Wright and his brother William T. Wright, an architect and structural engineer, respectively. The San Diego branch was renamed Kistner, Curtis & Foster. Mr. Curtis continued to run the San Diego office and passed away in 1958.

In addition to his own residence at 1435 Grove Street, Mr. Curtis is credited with designing multiple schools and military buildings listed in Appendix D of the nomination report. Additionally, at the time of the firm's 1952 reorganization, Mr. Curtis designed a new home for both himself and his daughter's family at 4811 and 4821 Lomas Drive, respectively.

Significance Statement: The subject property is a notable work of Robert R. Curtis. Built as a personal residence early in his career, it reflects his early residential work before he became a well-known architect of schools and institutional buildings. In partnership with Theodore Kistner, the architects built thriving offices in San Diego and Los Angeles specializing in public buildings. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

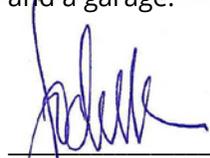
#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 Robert R. Curtis located at 1435 Grove Street be designated with a period of significance of 1912 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of a Tudor Revival style house and HRB Criterion D for its association with Master Architect Robert R. Curtis. The designation excludes a rear patio enclosure, rear addition and a garage.



Jodie Brown, AICP  
Senior Planner



Sonnier Francisco  
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison

jb/ms

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 1/25/2018

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/25/2018, to consider the historical designation of the **Robert R. Curtis House** (owned by Sean D. and Elizabeth A. Allen, 1435 Grove Street, San Diego, CA 92102) located at **1435 Grove Street, San Diego, CA 92102**, APN: **539-423-02-00**, further described as BLK 21 LOT 2 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 Robert R. Curtis House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Tudor Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1912 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains its steeply pitched gable roof with triangular knee braces, half-timbering at the gable ends, wood divided light windows, a centrally located gable roofed porch supported by brick columns, and gable roofed dormers. 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 Architect Robert R. Curtis and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource was built as a personal residence early in his career, it reflects his early residential work before he became a well-known architect of schools and institutional buildings. In partnership with Theodore Kistner, the architects built a thriving offices in San Diego and Los Angeles specializing in public buildings. 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 a rear patio enclosure, rear addition and a 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: N/A

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
CORRINE NEUFFER,  
Deputy City Attorney