



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 1, 2018 REPORT NO. HRB-18-057

HEARING DATE: November 15, 2018

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House**

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

APPLICANT: Singleton Family Trust; represented by Heritage Architecture & Planning

LOCATION: 3404 Front Street, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 452-537-0900

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House located at 3404 Front Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House located at 3404 Front Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1921-1930 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the rear 2017 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 early Modern architecture with Mission Influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1921-1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a rectangular massing with clean lines, a lack of ornamentation, smooth stucco texture, arched entry, wood casement windows and stucco chimney.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Louis Gill and retains integrity as it relates to its 1921-1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is notable as a quality, high style example of Gill's work early in his solo career when his designs were still greatly influenced by the work of his uncle, Master Architect Irving Gill.

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 subject resource includes a single-family residence, attached maid's quarters and garage on a canyon lot in the Banker's Hill neighborhood of the Uptown Community.

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 historic name of the resource, the Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Laura Brewster, who constructed the house as their personal residence and the name of Louis Gill, a Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Heritage Architecture and Planning, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D and staff concurs. 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 subject resource includes a single-family residence, attached maid's quarters and garage designed by Louis Gill between 1921-1930. Each of the structures has a cubic or rectangular massing with smooth stucco and clean lines. The main portion of the residence is two-stories and covered by a low-pitched, hipped roof with a small eave overhang. A scored concrete pathway leads to a one-story porch pop-out with flat roof and arched entry in the center of the front (east) elevation. On the south façade is a one-story sunroom with balcony above and stucco chimney. The maid's quarters, garage and a site wall combine to make a small courtyard on the northern end of the property. The maid's quarters consist of a one-story, gable roof addition to the original house. Originally, the garage was contained within the main massing of the house and accessed through the north façade until the existing garage was constructed. At the rear, the lot slopes down into a canyon revealing a basement level addition with trellis covered terrace above constructed in 2017. Fenestration includes both casement and fixed wood windows except on the sunroom where the original windows were replaced with aluminum.

In 1924 and 1930 Louis Gill renovated the subject resource. The 1924 remodel included the addition of the sunroom, the construction of the site wall between the house and garage, the conversion of the north balcony into a screened porch, the conversion of the original garage to a dining room and the construction of a new garage. The 1930 remodel consisted of the construction of the maid's quarters and the enclosure of screened porches on the first and second floors of the north façade. These renovations were designed by the original architect consistent with the original architectural style of the house and add to the architectural significance of the property in regard to both Criteria C and D.

Several alterations have been made to the subject resource after its 1921-1930 period of construction. The sunroom's original wood windows were replaced at an unknown date with aluminum, dual-pane windows. Although the new windows are a differing material they replicate the original lite pattern and the aluminum has similar dimensions to the original wood windows.

The roof over the sunroom was converted to a balcony and the original wood shingles were replaced with composite roofing at an unknown date. In 2017 the property was remodeled and an addition was added to the rear façade. This project included the conversion of the dining room window to a door where the original garage door was located and the restoration of several aluminum windows to wood. The 2017 project was reviewed by historic resources staff and determined to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. These modifications do not significantly impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling.

In the early twentieth century, San Diego architect Irving Gill began to develop a distinct style which incorporated the key principles of early modern architecture with a stripped-down Mission influence unique to Southern California. Similar to the early European Modernists, Gill's works were simple and featured very little ornamentation. Character defining features of Gill's work include flat roofs without eaves, casement windows in groups, cubic or rectangular massing and clean lines. Influences of the Mission style are apparent in Gill's work through the use of arches, breezeways and smooth stucco exteriors. Despite the popularity of Gill's progressive work among his devoted San Diego clients, Gill was not well known outside of Southern California and few other regional architects or builders emulated his style. The early work of Louis Gill was greatly influenced by his uncle, Irving, with whom he partnered with for several years.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the early Modern architecture with Mission influences and retains integrity from its 1921-1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a rectangular massing with clean lines, a lack of ornamentation, smooth stucco texture, arched entry, wood casement windows and stucco chimney. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the property 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 property located at 3404 Front Street was designed by Master Architect Louis John Gill. While also having worked alongside his uncle Irving Gill from 1912 to 1919, Louis Gill was a prolific architect in his own right and was responsible for or otherwise involved in the design of many prominent commercial buildings, apartments, churches and homes throughout San Diego and Coronado, some of which have been designated historic. Gill worked almost exclusively in the Spanish Eclectic and Mission Revival styles until his retirement in 1955. Aside from his many contributions to San Diego's architectural heritage, Gill is also recognized for his participation in a variety of professional organizations including the San Diego Chapter of the A.I.A. and the California State Board of Architectural Examiners. Gill's locally designated notable works include HRB #156, the Wegeforth House; HRB #203, the County Administration Building; HRB #207-023, the Chinese Mission Building; and HRB #366, the Louis Gill House.

The subject resource was designed by Louis Gill in 1921 with renovations by the architect in 1924 and 1930. As an early example of Gill's work during his solo career, the influence of his uncle Irving Gill can be seen in the clean, geometric aesthetic of the house. The high quality design and attention to detail brought to the subject resource typifies the signature style of Gill's work during this time.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Louis Gill's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is notable as a quality, high style example of Gill's work early in his solo career when his designs were still greatly influenced by the work of his uncle, Master Architect Irving Gill. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Louis Gill.

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 Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House located at 3404 Front Street be designated with a period of significance of 1921-1930 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that exhibits the distinctive characteristic of early Modern architecture with Mission influences; and HRB Criterion D as a resource that is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Louis Gill. The designation excludes the rear 2017 addition constructed outside of the period of significance.



Suzanne Segur
Associate Planner



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison

SS/ks

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 11/15/2018

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 11/15/2018, to consider the historical designation of the **Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House** (owned by Singleton Family Trust 12-27-12, 3404 Front Street, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **3404 Front Street, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **452-537-09-00**, further described as BLK 414 POR 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 Laura Brewster/ Louis Gill House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of early Modern architecture with Mission Influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1921-1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a rectangular massing with clean lines, a lack of ornamentation, smooth stucco texture, arched entry, wood casement windows and stucco chimney. 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 Louis Gill and retains integrity as it relates to its 1921-1930 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is notable as a quality, high style example of Gill's work early in his solo career when his designs were still greatly influenced by the work of his uncle, Master Architect Irving Gill. 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 2017 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: N/A

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

BY: _____
JEREMY JUNG,
Deputy City Attorney

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