



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 20, 2020 REPORT NO. HRB-20-034

HEARING DATE: July 23, 2020

SUBJECT: **ITEM #9 – Board of Education Warehouse Building**

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

APPLICANT: Bridge Housing; represented by Marie Burke Lia

LOCATION: 2101 Commercial Street, Southeastern San Diego Community, Council District 8, APN 535-640-1800

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Board of Education Warehouse Building located at 2101 Commercial Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Board of Education Warehouse Building located at 2101 Commercial Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1929 and 1929 - 1939 under HRB Criteria A, C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of the City and the Southeastern Community's historical and economic development revealing the influence of the automobile on residential and industrial expansion and retains integrity to its 1929 – 1939 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is the only known extant educational associated building from Southeastern's 1917-1939 period of automobile related expansion and continues to convey the significant character defining features of automobile related industrial development as identified in the Southeastern San Diego Historic Context Statement, including location near a rail line, utilitarian design and large portal bays for vehicular access.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the warehouse building type with Art Deco influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1929 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits box-like massing, a flat roof, multiple large portal bays, elevator tower, elaborated door surround at the front entrance, vertical pilasters that project beyond the roofline, belt course and divided lite steel windows.

3. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Eugene Hoffman and retains integrity as it relates to the original design and 1929 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is significant as it reflects the influence of popular architectural styles on Hoffman's designs and illustrates the evolution of his San Diego work from classical revival styles to modern styles such as Art Deco.

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 subject resource is a four-story warehouse designed by Master Architect Eugene Hoffman and constructed by the San Diego City Board of Education in 1929. The resource is situated on the corner of 21st and Commercial Streets in the Southeastern Community adjacent to a San Diego Trolley line. Buildings in the surrounding vicinity are a mix of older warehouse/ industrial buildings and recently constructed residential.

The property was evaluated in 2006 as part of an historical assessment of the San Diego Board of Education buildings located at 2101, 2107 and 2145 Commercial Street. The 2101 Commercial Street building was determined to be significant at the national, state and local level. The assessment also concluded that the subject resource was significant as a special element of San Diego's development and as representative of the work of a master architect (currently HRB Criteria A and D).

The historic name of the resource, the Board of Education Warehouse Building, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name historically associated with the property.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by the office of Marie Burke Lia, which concludes that the resource is not significant under HRB Criteria. Staff disagrees and finds that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria A, C and D. 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 resource located at 2101 Commercial Street was constructed in 1929 for use as a warehouse by San Diego City Schools. The building was previously part of a larger industrial complex used by the Board of Education which occupied the entire block and included two other structures; another warehouse building constructed between 1910 and 1915 and a carpentry shop constructed between 1930 and 1958. The complex's other buildings were demolished circa 2013 in order to accommodate residential development.

The [Southeastern San Diego Historic Context Statement](#) prepared in 2014 discusses residential and industrial development in the Southeastern Community and identified the popularity of the

automobile as a significant theme in development between the years 1917 and 1939. Relevant excerpts of the Context are summarized below.

From 1917 to 1939 the Southeastern community experienced a period of densification and expansion which can mostly be attributed to the introduction of the private automobile. The 1915 Panama-California Exposition and World War I brought an influx of people into San Diego. At the same time, a dramatic increase in automobile production made cars increasingly affordable to the middle classes. In previous periods, residential development was primarily west of present day I-15; however, the introduction of the automobile allowed residents to settle further from the city center without necessarily relying on public transportation systems.

The automobile driven increase in residential development led to a need to construct new schools or renovate existing ones. Although none of the schools from this time period are extant, between 1917 and 1939 four new schools (Memorial Junior High School, Balboa School, Ocean View School and Sunshine School) were constructed and six existing schools (New Sherman School, New Encanto School, New Stockton School, New Logan School, Burbank School and Chollas School) were either remodeled or replaced. Construction of the subject resource in 1929 for use as a warehouse by San Diego City Schools directly correlates to the construction of these new educational buildings. The resource is significant because it is the only known extant educational associated building from this automobile related period of expansion away from the city center.

Prior to the rise in popularity of the automobile, industrial development was centered around the San Diego waterfront. Similar to residential development, the automobile made it feasible for industrial uses to be located away from the port and major rail lines. Industrial uses such as breweries, a concrete block factory and a candy factory began to expand into Barrio Logan and Logan Heights beginning in the 1920's. Industrial buildings from this time period were generally utilitarian in design and featured Spanish Eclectic, Renaissance Revival or Art Deco architectural influences. Additionally, industrial properties often included multiple buildings on the lot and a location close to rail lines. The subject resource is significant because it reflects this shift away from industrial development on the waterfront and also retains features specifically designed to access the building via automobile such as a transportation platform and are loading bays.

The resource has had limited modifications since its 1929 date of construction including the addition of a concrete ramp, the loss of other buildings originally in the Board of Education's industrial complex and the infill of a former loading bay. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, location, setting feeling or association as it relates to Criterion A.

Significance Statement: The resource is a special element of the City and the Southeastern Community's historical and economic development revealing the influence of the automobile on residential and industrial expansion and retains integrity to its 1929 – 1939 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is the only known extant educational associated building from Southeastern's 1917-1939 period of automobile related expansion and continues to convey the significant character defining features of automobile related industrial development as identified in the Southeastern San Diego Historic Context Statement, including location near a rail line, utilitarian design and large portal bays for vehicular access. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion A.

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

Research into the owners and tenants of the property at 2101 Commercial Street did not reveal any individuals who could be considered historically significant in local, state or national history. Furthermore, no events of local, state or national significance are known to have occurred at the subject property. Therefore, the property is not eligible for 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.*

The subject resource is a four-story with basement warehouse displaying Art Deco influences constructed in 1929. The building was designed by Master Architect Eugene Hoffman for the San Diego Board of Education. Constructed of cast-in-place poured concrete, the warehouse features a flat roof and minimal exterior ornamentation. At the northeastern corner of the edifice is a stair and elevator tower that adds a fifth floor to this portion of the structure. The building was designed with the potential for expansion and this can be seen in the use of easily removed brick on the east façade rather than concrete. The interior of the building has been minimally modified; however, the building still retains large open spaces and an elevator that reflect its original use as a warehouse. Fenestration consists of large, rectangular, divided lite steel windows that operate in both the awning and hopper methods. The main entrance is located on the west façade and is elaborated by an Art Deco influenced surround with an entablature which reads "CITY SCHOOLS WAREHOUSE SAN DIEGO CALIFORNIA A.D. 1929." Two loading bays are located on the first floor of the north elevation, one of which was called out on the original building plans as providing access to the "truck and R.R. car unloading platform." The west façade features an opening filled with a roll-up metal door which was designed to provide vehicular access to the basement. Other ornamentation includes a belt course which distinguishes the first and second floors and vertical pilasters that extend beyond the roofline.

As revealed in the discussion of Criterion A, the resource has had limited modifications since its 1929 date of construction. These modifications include the addition of a concrete ramp and the infill of a former loading bay both on the north façade. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, material, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

Warehouses are structure designed for the storage of commodities or merchandise and the practical design of these buildings reflect their function. The architectural style of a warehouse, if one can be identified, generally reflects a popular style at the time of construction and is secondary to the functional qualities of the building. Other features such as windows and materials are often a product of popular building trends and can reflect availability and cost. Character defining features of the warehouse type of building are box-like massing; large, open interior spaces; skylights; flat or barrel-vaulted roofs; and large portal bays used for loading and transportation docks.

Significance Statement: The building continues to convey the historic significance of the warehouse building type with Art Deco influences by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the type; including box-like massing, a flat roof, multiple large portal bays, elevator tower, elaborated door surround at the front entrance, vertical pilasters that project beyond the roofline, belt course and divided lite steel windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject resource 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.

Born 1870 in Dresden, Germany, Eugene Hoffman immigrated to the United States with his mother at the age of seven in 1877. He received his degree at New York City College and trained as an architect with McKim, Mead & White before landing an apprenticeship with Carreer & Hastings. Hoffman married his wife, Eva K. Allen in 1888 and the two had two daughters. He went on to design several power plants, office buildings, department stores and homes throughout New Jersey and New York. Hoffman moved to San Diego in 1910 after establishing himself as a notable architect in New York. His first project when he arrived was to build power plants and boiler rooms for San Diego's electric railway as commissioned by John D. Spreckles.

Spreckles commissioned Hoffman to design a variety of buildings, ranging from industrial to commercial and office structures including the Wonder Bread Building. Hoffman also began his own practice in San Diego while still working on projects for Spreckles. In 1912 Hoffman designed the Oxford Hotel, also known as the William Penn Hotel and the classic revival style SDG&E substation B building; an important addition to San Diego's industrial history. Other Spreckles projects include a remodel of the Coronado Hotel, the Mission Cliff Gardens, and the San Diego Electric Machine shop.

Eugene Hoffman is best known for his work on the John D. Spreckles Building in 1913. Later in his career, Hoffman partnered with fellow architect George S. Walker working on hotel remodeling and individual residences. Hoffman's list of clients grew as he designed and supervised construction of a warehouse for the Thum Brothers, the Knickerbocker and Belmont Hotels, the remodeling of the Waldorf Hotel, and the Savage Tire Plant. In 1916 his wife tragically passed away and two years later he remarried Dorothea Gamble Martenis. Together they had one son.

With the depression halting development, Hoffman moved his family to Santee. His wife was able to return to teaching and Hoffman managed to remain somewhat active in the Santee community designing various buildings (despite his failing health). The last part of his career Hoffman designed Santee Elementary School, as well as several other residences, department stores and office buildings in Santee where he resided from 1933 until he passed away in 1948 at the age of 78.

One of Hoffman's earliest works in San Diego, the Romanesque Revival SDG&E Substation A (1911) was locally designated in 1997, however, the designation was overturned. There are currently four properties on the San Diego Register that are associated with Hoffman including:

- HRB #141 – Hotel Knickerbocker (1913), 315 E Street (non extant)
- HRB #354 – SDG&E Station B (1911), 903 Kettner Boulevard
- HRB #440 – Barcelona Apartment Hotel (1923), 326 East Juniper Street
- HRB #458 – The Wonder Bread Building (1924), 171 14th Street

The subject resource was designed by Eugene Hoffman in 1929 as a warehouse with Art Deco influences. While his earlier works in San Diego including SDG&E Substations A and B were designed in classical revival styles, likely influenced by his work in New York with McKim, Mead & White and Carreer & Hastings; his work evolved as popular styles changed. The 1915 Panama-California Exposition, which introduced the Spanish Colonial Revival style to Southern California, was

likely a great influence on the Spanish design of the Barcelona Apartment Hotel. When 2101 Commercial Street was constructed in 1929, just before the Great Depression, the Art Deco style was widely popular. The subject resource is significant as it reflects the influence of popular styles on his designs and illustrates his evolution as an architect.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Eugene Hoffman's original design, intent and aesthetic. The property is significant as it reflects the influence of popular architectural styles on Hoffman's designs and illustrates the evolution of his San Diego work from classical revival styles to modern styles such as Art Deco. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Eugene Hoffman.

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 2101 Commercial Street 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 2101 Commercial Street 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 Board of Education Warehouse Building located at 2101 Commercial Street be designated with a period of significance of 1929 and 1929-1939 under HRB Criterion A as a special element of the City and Southeastern Community's development, Criterion C as a good example of the warehouse building type with Art Deco influences and Criterion D as a notable example of Master Architect Eugene Hoffman's work.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner
Development Services Department

SS/ss

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 7/23/2020

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 7/23/2020, to consider the historical designation of the Board of Education Warehouse Building (owned by COMM 22 Lot 1 LLC, 600 California Street #900, San Francisco, CA 94108) located at **2101 Commercial Street, San Diego, CA 92113**, APN: **535-640-1800**, further described as 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 Board of Education Warehouse Building on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A is a special element of the City and the Southeastern Community's historical and economic development revealing the influence of the automobile on residential and industrial expansion and retains integrity to its 1929 – 1939 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is the only known extant educational associated building from Southeastern's 1917-1939 period of automobile related expansion and continues to convey the significant character defining features of automobile related industrial development as identified in the Southeastern San Diego Historic Context Statement, including location near a rail line, utilitarian design and large portal bays for vehicular access. 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 C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of warehouse building type with Art Deco influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1929 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits box-like massing, a flat roof, multiple large portal bays, elevator tower, elaborated door surround at the front entrance, vertical pilasters that project beyond the roofline, belt course and divided lite steel windows. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect Eugene Hoffman and retains integrity as it relates to the original design and 1929 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is significant as it reflects the influence of popular architectural styles on Hoffman's designs and illustrates the evolution of his San Diego work from classical revival styles to modern styles such as Art Deco. 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 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: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney