



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: March 17, 2016 REPORT NO. HRB-16-021

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of March 24, 2016

SUBJECT: **ITEM #16 – Thomas Russell House**

APPLICANT: Marija Mikic and Nenad Medvidovic represented by Johnson & Johnson

LOCATION: 1611 Myrtle Avenue, Uptown Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Thomas Russell House located at 1611 Myrtle Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Thomas Russell House located at 1611 Myrtle Avenue as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1925 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the rear-facing detached garage structure at the rear of the property. 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 Eclectic style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1925 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features asymmetrical façades; stucco exterior; flat roof with decorative parapet; tripartite focal windows and main entry accented by tiled roof covers and arches; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-lite wood double-hung windows accented with decorative wood lintels and recessed reveals.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Thomas Russell, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality works in the City, and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1925 design. Specifically, the house was designed later in his long career as a builder, and effectively demonstrates a matured taste in the Spanish Eclectic style brought to a custom home designed for his personal use, and expresses a quality of craftsmanship seen in his other known works.

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 is a one-story with partial basement single-family residence built in 1925 in the Spanish Eclectic style on the south side of Myrtle Avenue, just east of Herbert Street in the University Heights Subdivision of the Uptown Community.

The building is located on APN 452-481-15-00. The property was identified in the 2007 Draft Uptown Survey and given a Status Code of 5D3, "Appears to be a contributor to a district that appears to be eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historic name of the resource, the Thomas Russell House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Master Builder Thomas Russell, who constructed the house as his personal residence.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Johnson & Johnson, 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.

Thomas and Leora Russell occupied the subject property from its construction in 1925 to their deaths in 1948 and 1956 respectively. Thomas Russell was a prominent business man and accomplished building contractor in San Diego. Both Thomas and Leora were very philanthropically active in the later years of their lives and joined many civic organizations and clubs in San Diego. Thomas Russell was primarily active with the Boy Scouts of America and the San Diego Zoological Society, and was also a member of the Al Bahr Shrine, the Kiwanis Club, the San Diego Athletic Club, and others. Leora Russell was a member of San Diego's social elite and associated with many other prominent San Diego families. She contributed to a wide variety of organizations including the Young Women's Christian Association, the Red Cross, the Community Chest, the San Diego Women's Civic Center, the Ten-Twelve Club, and the Kiwani-Annes Club.

The report asserts that the Russells were significant in local history for their cultural and civic contributions and that the subject residence is significant for its association with them. The report provides a good deal of information on the activities of the Russells as well as biographical data, but does not adequately expand on their significance. The report does not illustrate how the Russells and/or their contributions are demonstrably important to San Diego's history in a way that surpasses their many prominent contemporaries who were also philanthropically active in local organizations. Philanthropic and civic contributions are indeed important to communities, to the continuation of certain cultural standards, and invariably require the efforts of many different people; however the report does not effectively express the individual historic significance of the Russells, or why their contributions were of any greater impact than those made by others.

Furthermore, the report provides little clarification on how the subject property is best resource identified as a reflection of any historic significance the Russells may represent. 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.

The subject resource is a one-story with partial basement single-family residence built in 1925 in the Spanish Eclectic style of standard wood frame construction on a concrete foundation. The building is sited on a rectangular, rearward sloping lot and features an irregular plan form with asymmetrical façades. The house is clad in a light sand finish stucco and exhibits a flat roof form with a decorative stepped parapet design.

The primary façade presents variable massing and wall planes, including a small walled-in patio area adjacent to the entry. The front door is sheltered by small, hipped roof porch cover marked by arched entries. Two tripartite focal windows on either side of the entry porch are marked by shallow decorative carved mullions and shed roof covers with Mission clay tile. To the left of the entry porch, an ornate plaster relief detail is centered below the parapet. Along the driveway, the east elevation offers a small shed roof-covered bump-out with a picture window and a small recessed patio area beyond. Fenestration consists primarily of multi-lite wood double-hung windows. Many windows feature a distinct, recessed reveal detail below the sills, and decorative, carved wood lintels.

At the end of the driveway, a detached garage is connected to the southeast corner of the main house and features a matching stucco finish and stepped parapet design. At the far southeast corner of the property is a second, rear-facing detached garage structure that is pending future alterations recently approved by staff. This rear-facing detached garage at the rear of the property does not contribute in any meaningful way to the significance of the resource and is not recommended for inclusion in the historic designation.

Modifications to the resource are fairly limited and do not significantly impact critical character defining features or overall integrity of the resource. Two windows on the west (side) elevation and one window at the rear of the east (side) elevation have been removed but are all clearly indicated by scarring and stucco differentiation. The removal of these three windows does not significantly impact the primary view shed and does not generate any meaningful false sense of history. Outside the primary view shed, at the rear elevation, are two non-historic windows. Next to these windows is a rear entry door with shed roof cover. It has not been verified whether the rear entry shed roof cover is original at this time. Overall, the modifications have not significantly impacted integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling to the extent that the building no longer conveys the significance of the Spanish Eclectic style.

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, an 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.

Significance Statement: The house retains a great deal of architectural detailing and continues to convey the historic significance of the Spanish Eclectic style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style including the asymmetrical façades; stucco exterior; flat roof with decorative parapet; tripartite focal windows and main entry accented by tiled roof covers and arches; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-lite wood double-hung windows accented with decorative wood lintels and recessed reveals. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the rear-facing detached garage structure at the rear of the property.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

Thomas McLain Russell came to San Diego from Maine in 1907. At that time he was 36 years old and already experienced as a carpenter and builder, having learned the trade from his father and older brothers who were also carpenters. Russell established his business as a builder building custom homes and high rise hotels downtown before his brothers arrived and joined him, forming the Russell Brothers construction company. As the primary craftsman of the firm, Thomas was highly sought after as a contractor and held business relationships with many notable architects and builders during his career, including William Wheeler and the Rice-Landswick Company.

Russell's works included many residences, hotels, office buildings, and churches in San Diego and covered a wide range of styles including Craftsman Prairie, American Foursquare and Spanish Eclectic. His works demonstrate a commitment to high quality and attention to detail. According to a list of Russell's projects included in the report, there are eight resources in San Diego that have been historically designated:

- HRB Site #546 – Webster D. Crum Spec House #1, 1446 Grove Street built in 1912 in the American Foursquare/Craftsman style
- HRB Site #478/526-001 – Duvall/Lee House, 3105 Kalmia Street built in 1912-13 in the Prairie Craftsman style
- HRB Site #526-017 – Burlingame District Contributor, 3127 Kalmia Street built in 1912 in the Craftsman style
- HRB Site #526-062 – Burlingame District Contributor, 3139 Kalmia Street built in 1912 in the Prairie Box style
- HRB Site #430/526-117 – Benbough/Adams House, 3147 Kalmia Street built in 1912 in the International/Modern style
- HRB Site #435/526-002 – William A. McIntyre Speculation House, 3155 Kalmia Street built in 1912-13 in the Prairie style
- HRB Site #1035 – T.M. and Leonara H. Russell Speculation House No. 1, 3141 Dale Street built in 1922 in the Craftsman style
- HRB Site #957 – Irving and Anna Brockett House, 3725 Wellborn Street built in 1927 in the Spanish Eclectic style

The subject resource was built in 1925 by Thomas Russell as a personal residence for him and his wife during the last decade of his productive career as a builder. The building shares a quality of design and craftsmanship seen in Russell's other known works that are historically designated. Russell's eye for the Spanish Eclectic style is readily conveyed in the many small details and decorative features included in the home's plan, massing, fenestration and roof form.

Significance Statement: The subject building reflects the notable work of Master Builder Thomas Russell, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality works in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the resource was designed later in his long career as a builder, and effectively demonstrates a matured taste in the Spanish Eclectic style brought to a custom home designed for his personal use, and expresses a quality of craftsmanship seen in his other known works. Therefore, staff recommends the establishment of Thomas Russell as a Master Builder, and designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 Thomas Russell House located at 1611 Myrtle Avenue be designated with a period of significance of 1925 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Spanish Eclectic style, and Criterion D as a notable work of Master Builder Thomas Russell. The designation excludes the rear-facing detached garage structure at the rear of the property. 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.



Camille Pekarek
Associate Planner



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison

CP/ks

Attachments:

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 3/24/2016

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 3/24/2016, to consider the historical designation of the **Thomas Russell House** (owned by Marija Mikic and Nenad Medvidovic, 1300 Lynngrove Drive, Manhattan Beach, CA 92066) located at **1611 Myrtle Avenue, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **452-481-15-00**, further described as BLK 245 LOTS 28 & 29 ST CLSD ADJ & 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 Thomas Russell 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 Spanish Eclectic style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1925 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features asymmetrical façades; stucco exterior; flat roof with decorative parapet; tripartite focal windows and main entry accented by tiled roof covers and arches; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-lite wood double-hung windows accented with decorative wood lintels and recessed reveals. 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 Thomas Russell, a prominent and accomplished building contractor responsible for the construction of many quality works in the City, and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1925 design. Specifically, the was designed later in his long career as a builder, and effectively demonstrates a matured taste in the Spanish Eclectic style brought to a custom home designed for his personal use, and expresses a quality of craftsmanship seen in his other known works. 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 rear-facing detached garage structure at the rear of the property.

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: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney