



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: February 10, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-013

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of February 23, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #9 – George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin
Torgerson Spec. House #1**

APPLICANT: Owner represented by Legacy 106, Inc.

LOCATION: 5158 Marlborough Drive, Kensington-Talmadge Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1 located at 5158 Marlborough Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1 located at 5158 Marlborough Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1931 under HRB Criteria C and D. The 184 square foot and 35 square foot additions at the rear of the structure were constructed c.1947 and are excluded from this designation. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Eclectic architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1931 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a hipped, red clay Mission tile roof; minimal overhanging roof eave; slightly textured stucco; scrolled wrought iron railings; second floor colonnade of spiral columns at the balcony; a recessed entry door with decorative quoin surround; and wood framed casement, fixed and double hung windows.

2. The resource is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson who constructed high quality speculation and custom-designed buildings that ranged from houses to commercial buildings and bungalow courts. Specifically, the resource at 5158 Marlborough Drive represents one of the early notable buildings created by Torgerson and is a good example of his style and detailing.

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 house is a two story single family home located in the residential subdivision of Kensington Heights within the Kensington-Talmadge Community.

The historic name of the resource, the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1 has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the names of owners Benjamin and Lois Torgerson and George and Bertha Cooley, who built the house on speculation, and proposed Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Legacy 106, Inc., which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria C and D. 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 property located at 5158 Marlborough Drive is a two story, rectangular Spanish Eclectic style home constructed in 1931 and features a low-pitched, hipped Mission tile half-barrel roof with minimal eave projections and a slightly textured stucco on the exterior façade. The heavy wood front door is inset from the exterior walls and is centered with a faux cut stone quoin surround made of sculpted stucco. To the left of the front door is a fixed, single lite, low-point arched window under a cantilevered second floor with a pair of 3-lite wood casement windows above. To the right of the front door is a row of three tall 4-lite casement windows separated by square columns. Above these windows and columns is an inset covered porch under the tile roof supported by spiral columns on stucco bases and topped by Corinthian capitals. Spanish style wrought iron balustrades with a scroll pattern separate the columns, and to the left of this colonnade is a decorative stucco privacy grille with fan detailing. Remaining fenestration consists of single casement windows and a combination of fixed and double hung wood frame and sash windows. A detached garage original to the house is located at the southwest corner of the lot.

Modifications consist of two room additions on the west or rear elevation of the structure. Both these additions are located on the first floor with the smaller addition at 35 square feet and the larger addition at 184 square feet. Although the 1950 and 1956 Sanborn Maps do not show the addition, the County Assessors Residential Building Record does identify these additions and has an approximate date of construction of 1947. Since building permit records were not found for these additions, staff determined that the date of construction should be circa 1947. Since these additions were constructed outside of the 1931 period of significance, they are excluded from the proposed designation.

The house retains a high degree of integrity to the 1931 date of construction and embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style including the second floor colonnade porch with spiral columns; first floor squared columns separating the tall narrow windows; the faux stone quoins around the inset front door; and the stucco grille with fan detailing. These details are a unique and significant expression of the Spanish Eclectic style. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion C. The 184 square foot and 35 square foot additions at the rear of the structure were constructed c.1947 and are excluded from this designation.

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

Benjamin M. Torgerson was born to Abraham Torgerson and Serina Oldsdtr Roe on November 10, 1894 in Slater, Iowa. Benjamin and his wife Lois came to San Diego in 1915 to experience the Panama-California Exposition and by 1925, they moved to San Diego where Torgerson started work as a salesman.

Between 1925 and 1927, records show Torgerson working in the carpentry and construction business and the earliest building permit in his name dates back to 1927 for a house on Palm Street. The 1929 directory listed him as a carpenter living at that same house. After the stock market crashed in 1929 and during the Great Depression, Torgerson was able to find work as a builder and began to construct modest houses in University Heights, North Park, South Park, and Burlingame.

In 1931, Benjamin Torgerson formed a business partnership with George A. Cooley. Torgerson and Cooley along with their wives, Lois Torgerson and Bertha Cooley, co-invested in the drastically reduced real estate market, taking further advantage of depressed building material costs and eager skilled workers seeking employment. Between 1931 and 1935, Torgerson and Cooley built high-end custom houses in University Heights, Kensington Heights, Talmadge Park, and North Park. An unknown number of developers commissioned Torgerson and Cooley to build houses, commercial buildings, and apartments until 1935 when their business partnership dissolved.

With the economic recovery in San Diego by the late 1930s, Torgerson rose to be a public figure in the building industry from 1937 to the beginning of World War II. He was elected president of the Association of Building Contractors in 1937 and he went on the public speaking circuit to promote his theory of high quality homes as the answer to economic recovery in the Great Depression.

The Better Homes Movement of the Great Depression stimulated "Life Magazine" to retain The Architectural Forum and eight architects in 1939 to design affordable homes that were then built and featured in "Life Magazine." Lois Torgerson who worked with one of the major advertisers of "Life Magazine," Whitney and Company, provided the connections for Benjamin Torgerson to be selected as the builder of the Roy Keller, AIA, architectural plans. This publicity put Torgerson in the local limelight and a great many high end construction commissions came his way. He changed the plans for the "Life House" and built different versions of the revised "Life House" which he called "California Colonial" style which he began building throughout San Diego.

Benjamin Torgerson built a number of Spanish style houses, apartments, and commercial buildings such as the one-story Spanish Colonial commercial building in South Park at 2361-2367 30th Street (Burlingame Villas Bungalow Court) which exhibits detailed decorative design elements along the parapet. Torgerson's Spanish Eclectic designs also include the "Casa de Torres" apartments and the Utah Street bungalow court. Torgerson then went on to build the De Anza Court Apartments in Burlingame, located at 2444 30th Street. When Congress terminated private construction and diverted all building materials to the war effort in 1942, Torgerson retired.

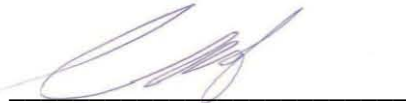
The historical report provides an attached survey conducted by Janet O'Dea and Allen Hazard of Happy Hazard, LLC (Attachment E.4) which revealed at least 98 houses, apartments, and commercial buildings constructed under Torgerson's supervision. Although Torgerson built a large number of modest houses throughout his career, he began constructing high quality speculation and custom-designed buildings in 1931 that ranged from houses to commercial buildings and bungalow courts. There are currently two designated resources that were constructed by Benjamin Torgerson. The resource located at 4343 Adams Avenue named "Benjamin Torgerson/George Cooley Spec House #1" [HRB Site #749] and the resource located at 6025 Waverly Avenue named "The LIFE House" [HRB Site #1025]. The house at 5158 Marlborough Drive represents one of the early notable buildings created by Benjamin Torgerson and is an excellent and significant example of Torgerson's body of work in the Spanish Eclectic architectural style. Therefore, staff recommends establishment of Benjamin Torgerson as a Master Builder and designation of the subject property as a notable example of his work under Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

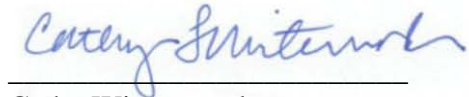
If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1 located at 5158 Marlborough Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1931 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style and retains integrity to its date of construction; and Criterion D as a notable work of Benjamin Torgerson who is proposed to be established as a Master Builder for his work in high quality speculation and custom-designed buildings. The 184 square foot and 35 square foot additions at the rear of the structure are excluded from this designation. 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.



Jeffrey E. Oakley
Associate Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

JO/ks/cw

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 2/23/2012

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 2/23/2012, to consider the historical designation of the **George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1** located at **5158 Marlborough Drive, San Diego, CA 92116**, APN: **440-191-11-00**, further described as BLK 9 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 George and Bertha Cooley/Lois and Benjamin Torgerson Spec. House #1 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 Spanish Eclectic architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1931 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a hipped, red clay Mission tile roof; minimal overhanging roof eave; slightly textured stucco; scrolled wrought iron railings; second floor colonnade of spiral columns at the balcony; a recessed entry door with decorative quoin surround; and wood framed casement, fixed and double hung windows. 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 proposed Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson who constructed high quality speculation and custom-designed buildings that ranged from houses to commercial buildings and bungalow courts. Specifically, the resource at 5158 Marlborough Drive represents one of the early notable buildings created by Torgerson and is a good example of his style and detailing. 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, exterior of the building and the detached garage as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**. The 184 square foot and 35 square foot additions at the rear of the structure were constructed c.1947 and are excluded from this designation.

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 AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
KEITH BAUERLE
Deputy City Attorney