



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: March 12, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-021

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of March 26, 2009

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – Walt Mason House**

APPLICANT: RR 85 Trust 12-19-06, owner; represented by Vonn Marie May

LOCATION: 1411 Virginia Way, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Walt Mason House located at 1411 Virginia Way as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Walt Mason House located at 1411 Virginia Way as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1921-1939 under HRB Criterion B. The retaining walls in the front garden, which were present during Mason's ownership, shall be included in the designation. This recommendation is based on the following findings (Attachment 1):

The resource is identified with Walt Mason, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association.

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 one story Craftsman



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style residence built in 1912 by builder Alfred Bowman for owner Addie M. Lewis, who appears to have built the house as an investment and may have lived in it sporadically.

The historic name of the resource, the Walt Mason House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and includes the name of Walt Mason who is a historically significant individual who owned and lived in the house from 1921 until his death in 1939.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Vonn Marie May and Robert Broms, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, B, C, and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion B, but not HRB Criteria A, C and D, 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 applicant's report states that the property is significant under HRB Criterion A as a special element of La Jolla's real estate development and cultural development. In regard to the former, the report provides information on the early development of La Jolla and the Villa Tract of La Jolla Park, but there is no evidence to suggest that the subject property reflects a special element of that development. Likewise, in regard to the cultural development of La Jolla, the report discusses some of the key figures in early La Jolla history, but does not draw a direct and significant connection between these individuals and the house at 1411 Virginia Way. Lastly, the report discusses the prominent role of women in the development of La Jolla and appears to imply that the house is significant because it reflects the cultural development of La Jolla through the original owner, Addie M. Lewis, who commissioned the design of this house and others. However, the fact that the property was owned and the house commissioned by a woman does not in and of itself establish significance under Criterion A. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation of the property at 1411 Virginia Way under HRB Criterion A.

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

Walt Mason bought the subject property in 1921 and took up residence the same year. He moved from Emporia, Kansas to the milder climate of La Jolla, which he hoped would help alleviate his rheumatism. Mason was born in 1862 in Ontario, Canada and immigrated to the United States in 1880. He held a number of writing and editorial positions with newspapers in Kansas and Nebraska before coming to work for William Allen White, editor of the *Daily Gazette* in Emporia, Kansas in 1907. In Mason's own words:

I came to Kansas, and went to work for William Allen White, writing stuff for the editorial page of the "Emporia Gazette". The "Gazette" always printed on its first page an item of local news with a border around it, called a star-head. One day the city editor was shy of the necessary item, and asked me to

write something to fill that space. I wrote a little prose rhyme, advising people to go to church next day, which was Sunday. The prose rhyme attracted some attention, and on Monday I wrote another one, and a third on Tuesday, and so on, and the star-head rhyme became a feature of the "Gazette". Thus originated the prose poem.

According to the National Register Nomination for Mason's house in Emporia, Mason's work began to be published under the name "Uncle Walt". "These verses, printed in a single paragraph, appeared to be prose, but readers soon discovered a drumbeat rhythm and a regular pattern of rhyme. Dealing with topical news, public personages, historical events, literary characters, life's foibles, the seasons and holidays, Mason's prose poems quickly won popular acceptance far beyond Emporia, for they were widely copied in other newspapers. By 1910 'Uncle Walt' was appearing in more than two hundred newspapers with a combined daily circulation of five million copies." Mason published his first collection of verse, *Uncle Walt: The Poet Philosopher* in 1910. Other collections followed, including *Business Prose-Poems* (1911), *Rippling Rhymes* (1913), *Horse-Sense* (1915), *Terse Verse* (1917) and *Walt Mason, His Book* (1918). Mason became the most widely read, and financially successful, poet in America.

Mason reluctantly left his home in Emporia for La Jolla in 1921, where he settled at the subject property. Mason continued to write for daily syndication from his home in La Jolla. He also produced yet another compilation, entitled *Fifty-Two Sermons* (1929). In June 1930 the La Jolla Journal began to run Mason's syndicated column of prose poetry, Rippling Rhymes, on its front page. Mason became a fixture in La Jolla, and contributed to its business and philanthropic communities. He passed away in 1939 while still owning and residing in the subject property. His death made headlines both locally and nationally.

Walt Mason was a nationally significant literary figure. The property at 1411 Virginia Way is the only property in San Diego which can be associated with him, and reflects a period in his life in which he was still actively writing and contributing to his craft. Furthermore, the modifications to the house discussed in detail under Criterion C have not altered the house to such an extent that its integrity as it relates to association is significantly compromised. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion B for its association with Walt Mason, with a period of significance from his ownership in 1921 through his death in 1939. The retaining walls in the front garden, which were present during Mason's ownership, shall be included in the designation.

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 house is a one story Craftsman style residence built in 1912 in a "U" configuration and features a side gable roof; asphalt shingles; overhanging eaves; wide clapboard siding; and a concrete foundation. The front façade is generally symmetrical, with a central entry porch, accessed from the side, under a medium-pitch front gable roof supported by clapboard-clad posts on a half-height wall. A shed-roof dormer with horizontal slats for attic ventilation sits on either side of the central gable. The entry door is centered under the gable and is flanked by one-over-

one double hung wood frame and sash windows. To the left of the entry door is a series of four three-over-one casement windows, which is repeated to the right of the entry door in a forward-projecting bay. Fenestration elsewhere on the house consists of fixed 15-lite wood frame windows; a single-pane wood frame awning window; single-pane wood frame fixed windows; single-pane wood frame French doors; six-lite wood frame casement windows; and 10-lite wood frame French doors. A low retaining wall running the width of the property at the front yard is original to the house.

Modifications include a 7'x7' bathroom addition in 1954 (mistakenly identified as a bedroom addition in the report) at the end of the southern arm of the "U", which was later subsumed by a 1986 addition; interior kitchen and bathroom remodels in 1971; the demolition of the original garage which was replaced with the existing garage and storage structure in 1985/1986; and additions to the back of the house at the center of the "U" and at the end of the southern arm of the "U" in 1986. This last modification resulted in the greatest change to the house. In order to accommodate the new addition at the center of the "U", the roof was extended up so that the gable could extend over the new addition seamlessly. This raised the height of the house by several feet. It also changed the relationship between the ridgeline of the house and the shed roof dormers. As originally designed, the dormers began at the ridgeline and extended forward to the front of the house, as seen in the historic photographs provided in the report. With the change to the ridgeline, several feet of roof is visible between the back of the dormer and the ridgeline. This relationship appears to have been significant to the builder, who incorporated a similar design feature on his own house at 601 Marine Street. The 1986 additions resulted in another significant modification, the demolition of the original concrete chimney, which was centered on the house with the broadside visible from the street. The new wood-clad metal chimney was rotated 90 degrees and set to the right side of the porch gable. Attachment 2 provides excerpts from the 1986 building plans which help to illustrate these modifications.

The 1986 modifications significantly alter the height of the roof and the spatial relationships of the roof and its elements. In addition, the seamlessness of these modifications creates a false sense of history, as the modifications are only readily apparent when the house is contrasted against a historic photo. Due to the significant impact of these modifications to the original design of the house, staff does not recommend 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's report states that the property is significant under HRB Criterion D as the work of builder Alfred Bowman. Bowman came to the United States from Sweden in 1902 and settled in California where he worked as a delivery man. He began work in construction as a carpenter in La Jolla a few years later and started a family. By 1911 Bowman was working as an independent contractor with a small crew of his own. Buildings which can be attributed to Bowman include his personal residence at 601 Marine Street; the subject property at 1411 Virginia Way; a residence at 1250 Prospect Street (demolished); three residences at unknown addresses (according to family photos); and the old Post Office building at 7824 Girard Avenue (heavily

altered). Only two of these buildings, Bowman's house at 601 Marine Street and the subject property, are known to be extant and generally intact.

Around 1925 Bowman opened Bowman Hardwood Company, which he sold in 1930 and retired to Sweden. When the buyers failed, Bowman returned to San Diego in 1931. He gradually returned to hardwood sales and building supplies, establishing the Bowman Building Supply Company, which he would manage until his death in 1942.

With only a handful of buildings which can be credited to him, and still fewer which remain intact, there is insufficient information at this time to establish that Bowman's work was that of a Master Builder. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation 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 Walt Mason House be designated under HRB Criterion B for its association with historically significant individual Walt Mason. The retaining walls in the front garden, which were present during Mason's ownership, shall be included in the 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.



Kelley Saunders
Senior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Senior Planner/Program Coordinator

KS/cw

- Attachments:
1. Draft Resolution
 2. Excerpts from the 1986 building plans
 3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 3/26/2009

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 3/26/2009, to consider the historical designation of the **Walt Mason House** (owned by R R 85 Trust, 1411 Virginia Way, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **1411 Virginia Way, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **350-370-07-00**, further described as Lot 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.**, 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 Walt Mason House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B for its association with Walt Mason, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association.

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.** .

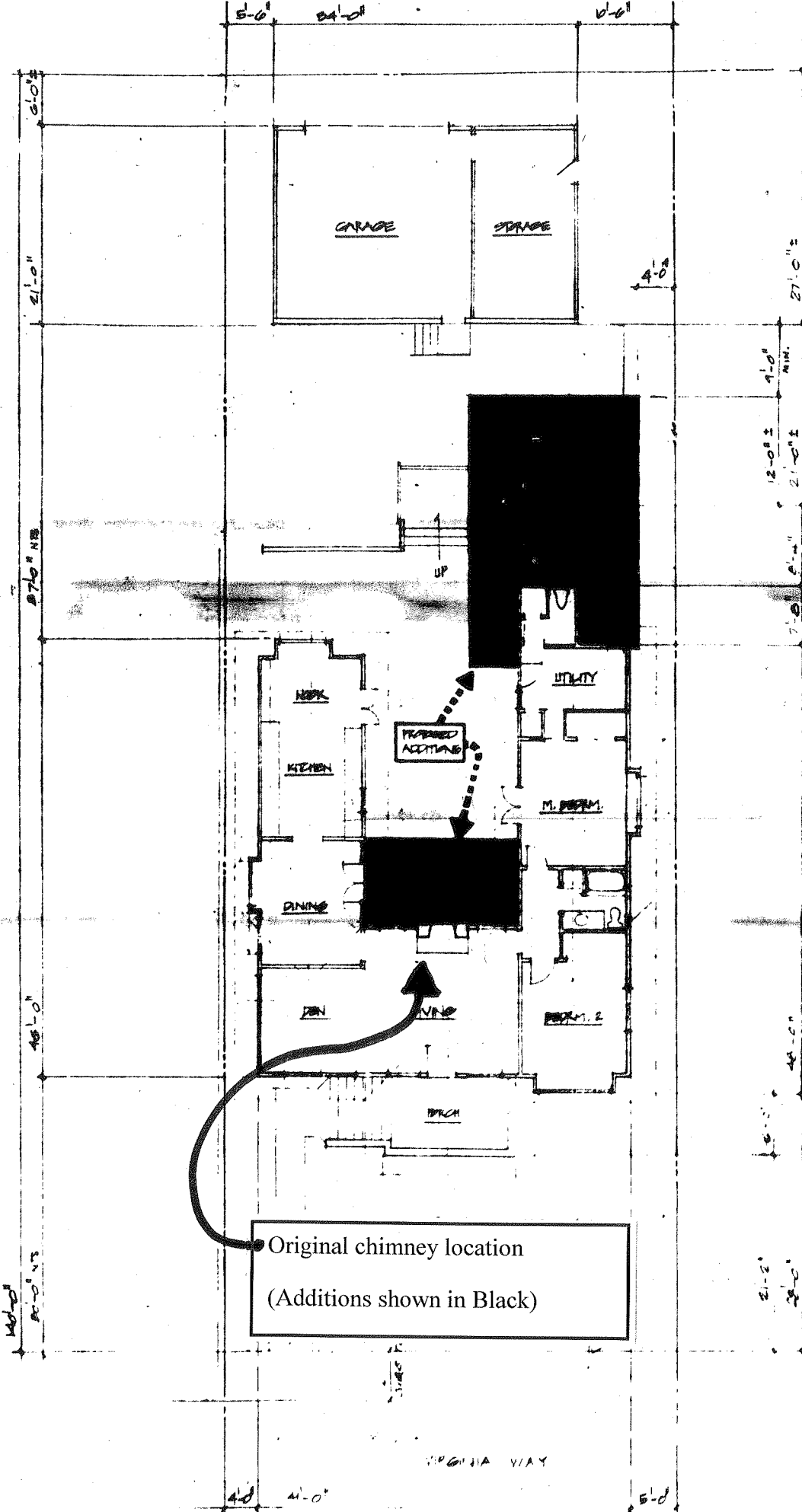
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

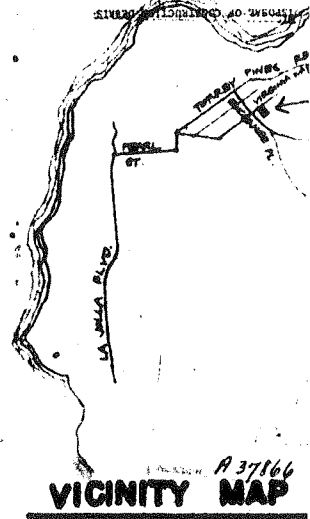
APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
NINA FAIN
Deputy City Attorney



LOCATION PLAN EXISTING PLAN

Date Received _____
 The information regarding such locations, approved locations, and this I have received and by this document and is intended only as a reference. The information is not intended to be used as a basis for any action. The information is provided for your information only and is not intended to be used as a basis for any action. The information is provided for your information only and is not intended to be used as a basis for any action.



VICINITY MAP

OWNERS & ADDRESS

CHRISTOPHER & PEGGIE NEU
 411 VIRGINIA WAY, LA JOLLA

LOT DESCRIPTION

MAP 720 VILLA TRACT B1

HOUSE DATA :

- LOT -- 50x140
- EXISTING AREA OF HOUSE
- REMOVAL & ADDITION
- PROPOSED ADDN A BUDGTS AREA:
- EXISTING GLAZING
- NEW GLAZING PLUS NET EXIST OF OTHER GLAZING
- PERCENTAGE OF GLAZING 3
- ALL NEW GLAZING SHALL

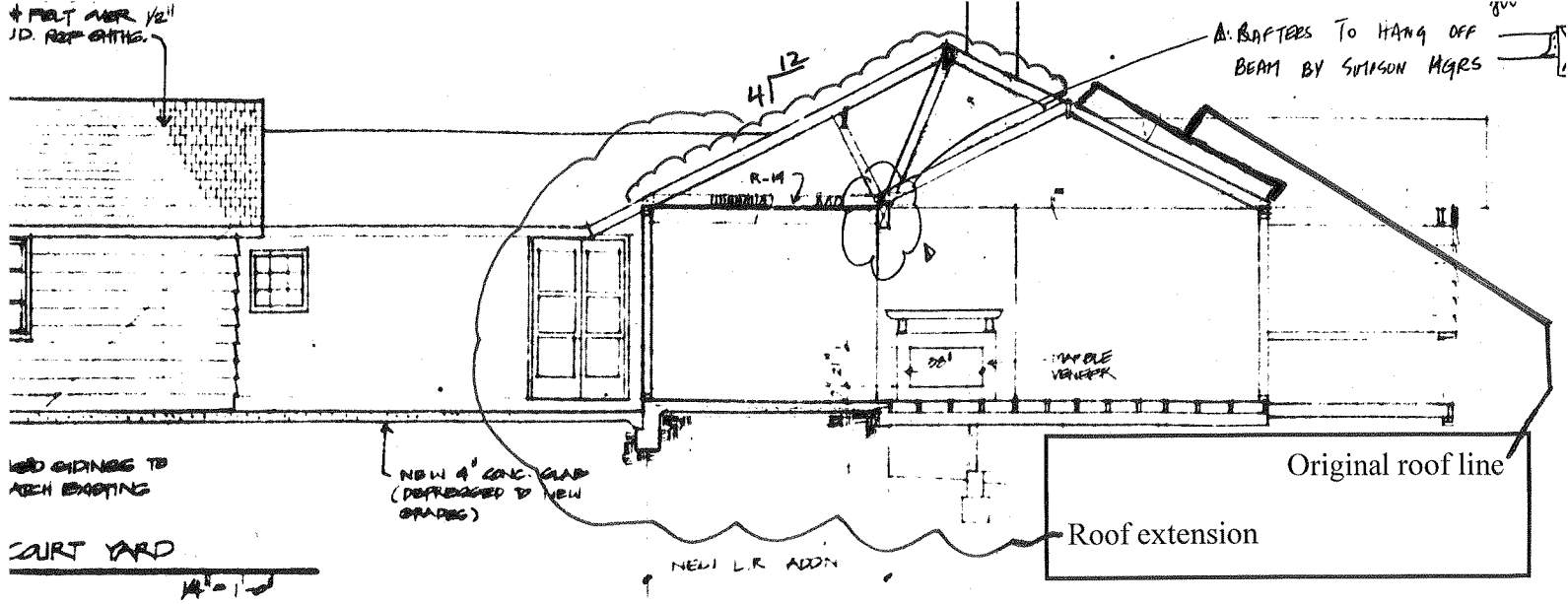
NOTE: THE HIGHEST PG INCLUDING CHIM

PLANS CONFORM TO TITLE



4" FIBER OVER 1/2" ID. RFP GUTTER

A. RAFTERS TO HANG OFF BEAM BY SIMON MGRS



LEAD CHIMING TO ARCH EXISTING

NEW 4" CONC. SLAB (DEPRESSION TO NEW GRADES)

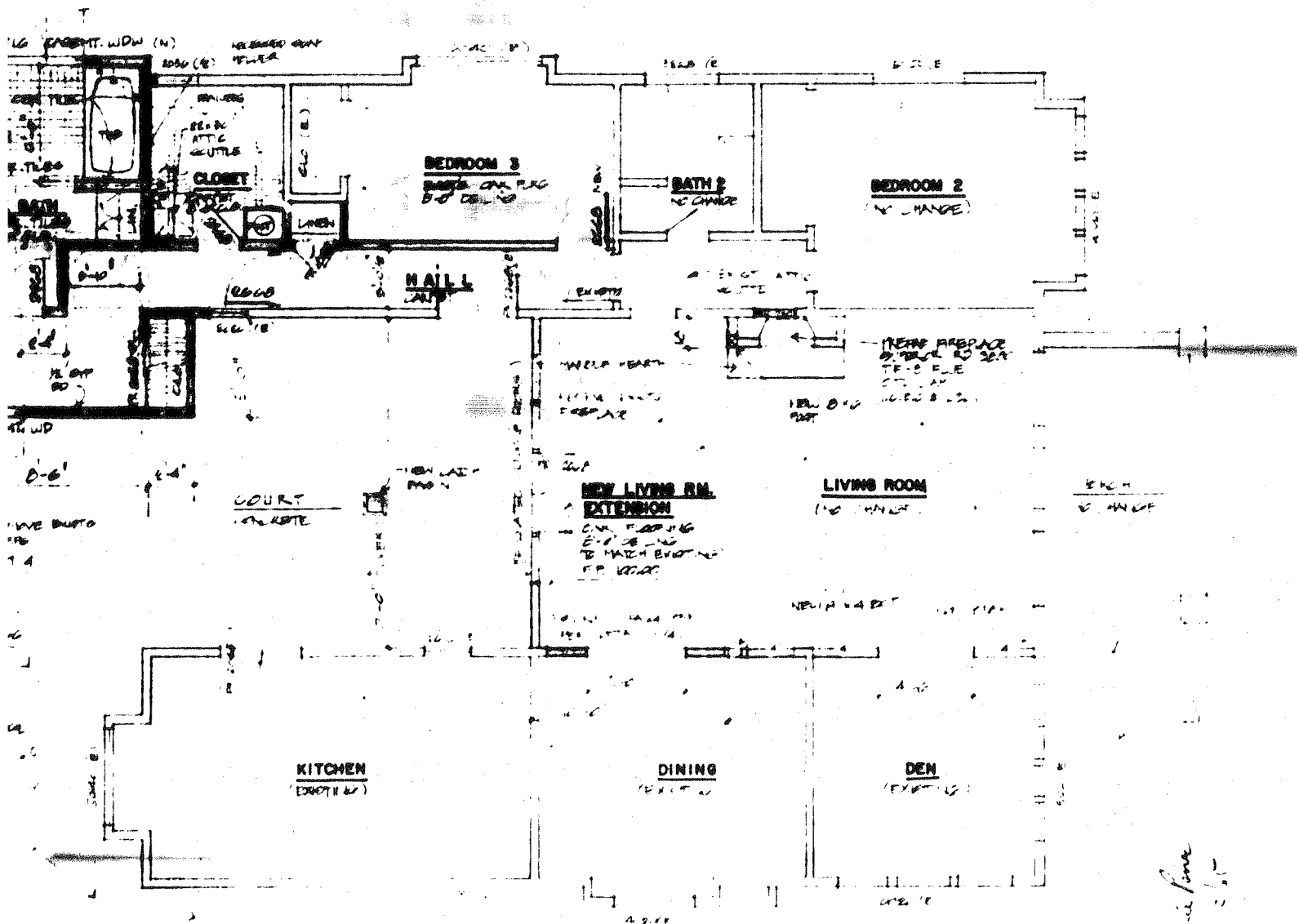
Original roof line
Roof extension

COURT YARD

NEW L.R. ADDN

NOTE

GRADE SHOULD BEK TO REMOVAL OF EXISTING CONCRETE SLAB & REINFORCEMENT MEMBER.



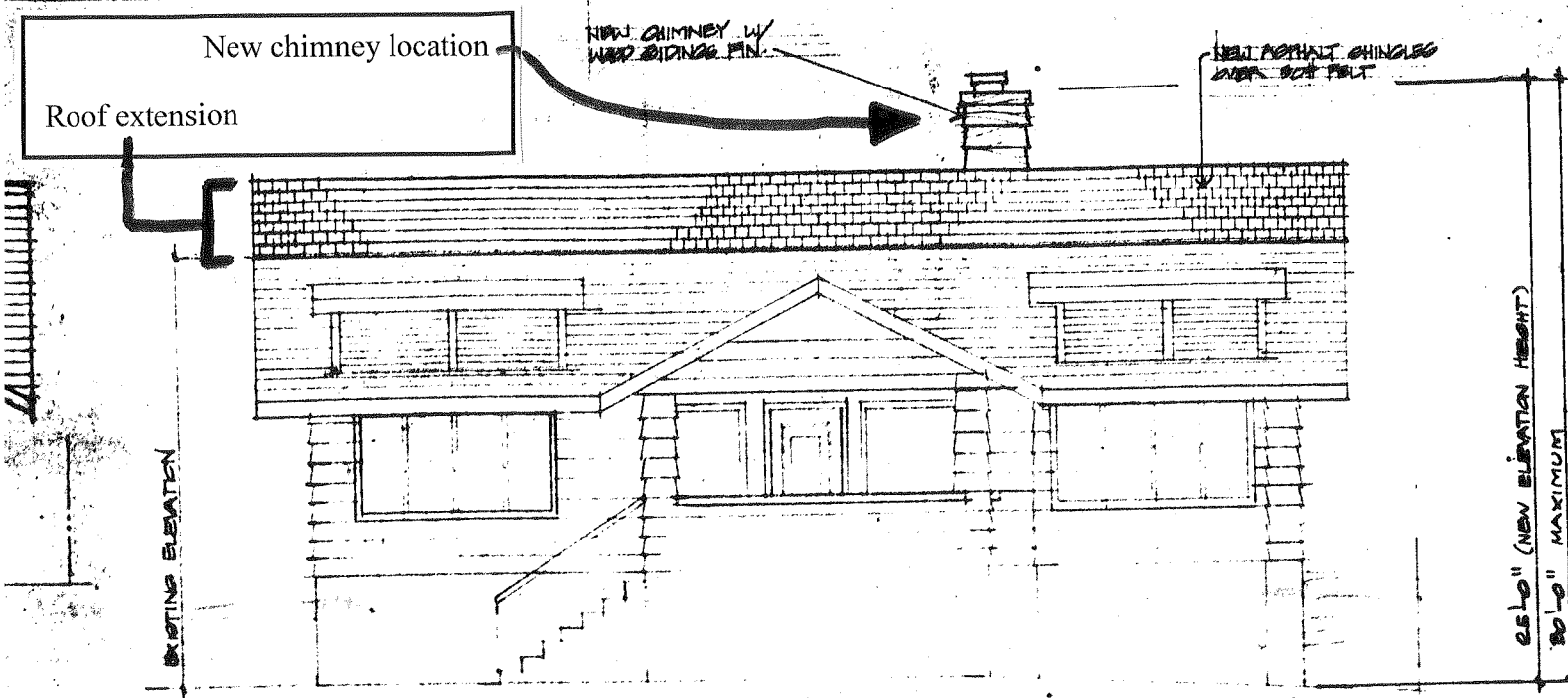
FLOOR PLAN

1/4" = 1'-0"



Final floor plan

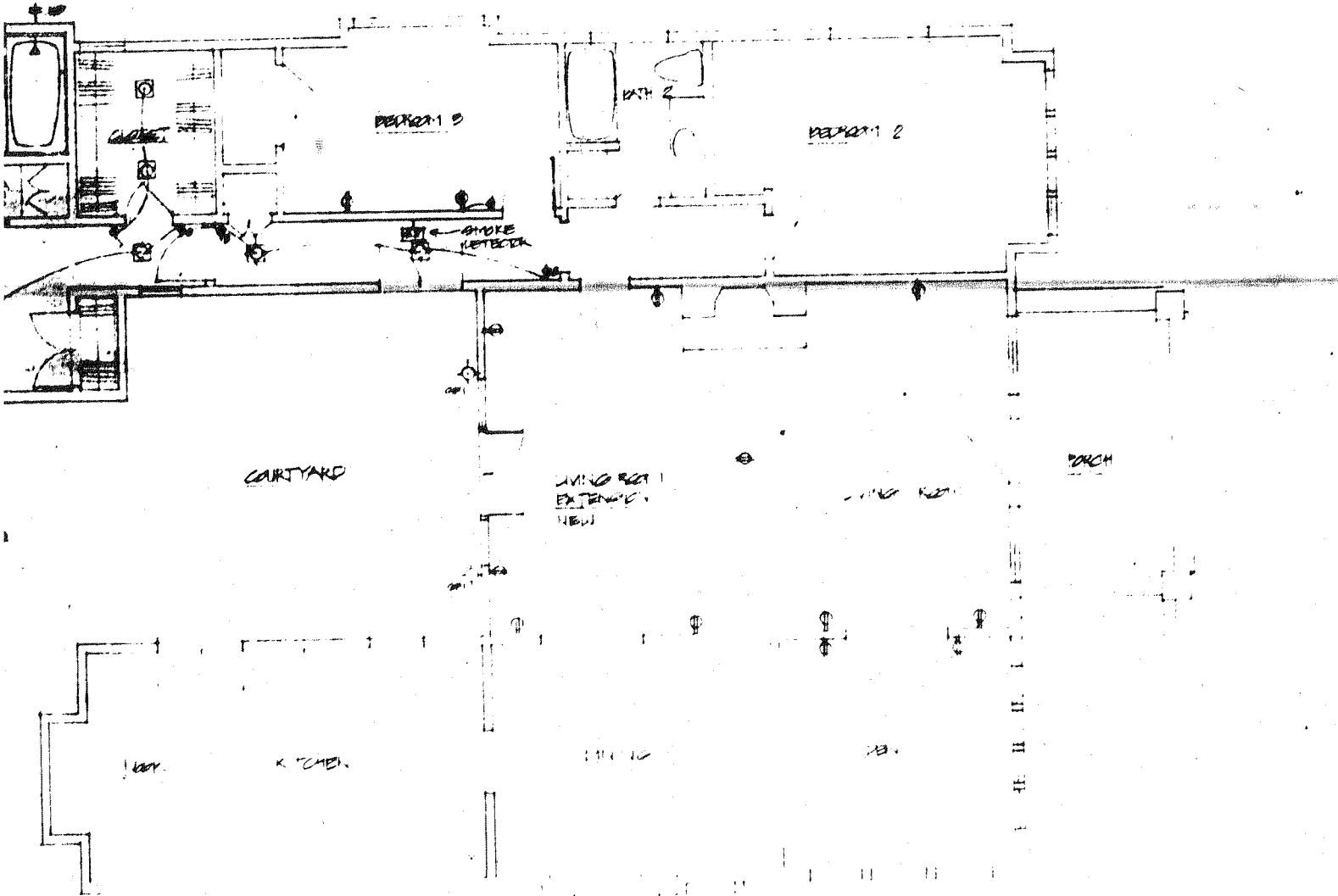
EXISTING FLOORING TO REMAIN



FRONT ELEVATION

EXIST'G ELEVATION TO REMAIN EXCEPT AS NOTED

1/4" = 1'-0"



ELECTRICAL PLAN