



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 13, 2010 REPORT NO. HRB-10-016

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of April 22, 2010

SUBJECT: **ITEM #8 – Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House**

APPLICANT: Brown Family Trust represented by Legacy 106, Inc.

LOCATION: 575 San Geronio Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House located at 575 San Geronio Street as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House located at 575 San Geronio Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1941 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of late Colonial Revival architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1941 date of construction.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank and Master Architect Milton Sessions and retains integrity as it relates to the original design.



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## 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 residence located in the La Playa community of Peninsula.

The historic name of the resource, the Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and includes the name of Wills and Jane Fletcher who constructed the house as their personal residence and the names of Ralph L. Frank, a Master Architect and Milton Sessions, a Master Landscape Architect.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Legacy 106, Inc., 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, as follows:

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

Willis and Jane Fletcher built the subject property in 1941 and lived there until their deaths in 2000 and 2006, respectively. Willis was the son of Col. Ed Fletcher (established by the Board as a historically significant individual) and Jane was the daughter of Oscar Cotton (also established by the Board as a historically significant individual). Willis developed his own career as president of the Wills H. Fletcher Company, a major insurance agent and broker firm involved in real estate development. His success allowed him to participate in numerous philanthropic activities, as identified in the applicant's report. Jane was a school teacher prior to marrying Willis. Later in life she pursued her love of art and painting, obtaining advanced degrees and focusing on art as therapy. Her work was exhibited in one woman shows and in exhibitions. Jane shared her husband's love of philanthropic endeavors and participated in many of them. Extensive research by the applicant clearly shows that Wills and Jane Fletcher were successful and were able to parlay that success into a wide and far reaching array of charities and charitable organizations and efforts. While these efforts were significant to those who benefitted from them, it is unclear based on the information provided in the report that Wills and Jane Fletcher would be considered historically significant individuals within San Diego history. 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 house located at 575 San Geronimo is a two story late Colonial Revival style house built in 1941 that features a stepped façade; side gable roof with asphalt shingles; clipped eaves; a combination of flagstone veneer and wide asbestos shingle siding; and a concrete foundation. The wood entry door with glass lites is set flush on the front façade with a small shed roof cover supported by decorative corbels. Two small wood benches flank the entry. Fenestration consists

of six-over-six double hung wood frame and sash windows with decorative wood shutters and diamond-pattern leaded glass windows. Flagstone is used to form a decorative grill over the smaller window to the right of the entry door. A wide flagstone chimney is centered on the north (side) façade. The two-car garage projects forward of the house and features a front-gable roof with cornice returns and a decorative cupola.

Modifications to the house include a small room addition at the rear in 1953 and a 14-foot expansion at the rear of the garage in 1957 which connected the previously detached garage to the house. The garage width and appearance remains the same. The garage cupola was reconstructed at some point to match the original. A new deck and stairway was constructed and some rear fenestration modified in 2008. The modifications are not readily visible and do not significantly detract from the resource or impair its ability to convey significance as a Colonial Revival structure with a 1941 period of significance. Therefore, staff recommends 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 house was designed by established Master Architect Ralph L. Frank in 1941. Frank was established as a Master Architect by the Board in 2002, and to date three properties have been designated under HRB Criterion D as the work of this Master Architect. The applicant's report states that the subject property is notable for Frank's "innovative massive expression of native flagstone veneer, which he used on his own home at 2288 San Juan Road." The house is one of only two known Frank designs which utilized this extensive, intricate and unique combination of flagstone and asbestos shingle. "Other Frank-designed houses tend to exhibit a combination of stucco, vertical board and batten, and wide horizontal shingle." The house retains a good degree of integrity with some alterations at the rear and continues to reflect Frank's original design intent and aesthetic. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank.

As a side note, the three previous properties designated under HRB Criterion D for an association with Frank identified him as a Master Architect. The information provided in the report calls into question whether or not Frank was a licensed architect, or whether he should be considered a Master Designer. Until this question is answered, staff is proposing to continue to identify Frank as a Master Architect. If it is found that he was not licensed, his status can be changed to Master Designer in the future.

The landscaping was originally designed by established Master Landscape Architect Milton Sessions concurrent with the construction of the house in 1941. M. Sessions was established as a Master Landscape Architect by the Board in 2002 and to date three properties have been designated under HRB Criterion D as the work of this Master Landscape Architect. The original landscape plan prepared by M. Sessions is still extant and in the possession of the current owners, which is uncommon. The landscape plan illustrates that the general layout and much of the hardscape features, including the flagstone walkways in the front and rear yards and the cobble retaining wall in the rear yard, remains intact. In addition, many plant elements remain

intact or were replaced in-kind by the current owners based on the original landscape plan. Notable as a remarkably intact example of Milton Session's landscape design with a corresponding extant landscape plan, staff recommends designation of the landscape and hardscape elements attributable to Master Landscape Architect Milton Sessions 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.

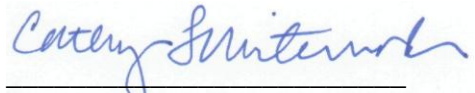
#### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House be designated under HRB Criterion C as a house which embodies the distinctive characteristics of late Colonial Revival architecture with a 1941 period of significance; and HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank and Master Landscape Architect Milton Sessions. 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.



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Kelley Saunders  
Senior Planner



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Cathy Winterrowd  
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

Attachment(s): Draft Resolution  
Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 4/22/2010

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/22/2010, to consider the historical designation of the **Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House** (owned by Brown Family Trust 11-30-01, 575 San Geronio Street, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **575 San Geronio Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **532-273-01-00**, further described as BLOCK 159 LOT 2 NLY ½, 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 Wills and Jane Fletcher/Ralph L. Frank and Milton Sessions House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as it embodies distinctive characteristics of late Colonial Revival Cottage style architecture through the retention of character defining features and retains architectural integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1941. Specifically, the house retains a stepped façade; side gable roof; clipped eaves; a combination of flagstone veneer and wide asbestos shingle siding; a wood entry door with glass lites under a small shed roof cover supported by decorative corbels; six-over-six double hung wood frame and sash windows with decorative wood shutters and diamond-pattern leaded glass windows; a wide flagstone chimney; and a two-car garage with a front-gable roof, cornice returns and a decorative cupola. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing; and

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect Ralph L. Frank. Specifically, the house stands out as one of only two known Frank designs which utilized this extensive, intricate and unique combination of flagstone and asbestos shingle. 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 Landscape Architect Milton Sessions. Specifically, the house stands out as a remarkably intact example of Milton Session's landscape design with a corresponding extant landscape plan. 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, including those landscape and hardscape features attributable to Master Landscape Architect Milton Sessions 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: 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