



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: June 14, 2007 REPORT NO. HRB-07-034

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of June 28, 2007

SUBJECT: **ITEM #11 – Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House**

APPLICANT: Ruth Alter, on behalf of San Ysidro Investment Company, owners

LOCATION: 123 East Seaward Avenue, San Ysidro Community, Council District 8

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House, located at 123 East Seaward Avenue, as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House, located at 123 East Seaward Avenue, as a historical resource under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's historical and social development, reflecting development of the Little Landers Colony, and HRB Criterion C as a good example of vernacular Craftsman architecture.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed building modification or demolition of a structure of 45 years or more under San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212. The Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House was constructed c. 1912 in the Craftsman style for Harry Rundell and his mother Amanda Rundell, who purchased a roughly one acre lot in the Little Landers Colony.



## ANALYSIS

A site specific historical resource research report has been prepared by Ruther Alter of Archaeos for the owner, San Ysidro Investment Company. The report concludes that the Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House is significant under HRB Criterion A. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's historical and social development, reflecting development of the Little Landers Colony, as well as HRB Criterion C as a good example of vernacular Craftsman architecture, 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.*

In 1909, William F. Smythe, journalist and newspaper editor, social organizer, and the chief local proponent of the self-sustaining agricultural movement, established a utopian colony on the site of present-day San Ysidro. The colony, called the Little Landers, was predicated on the belief that "on as little as one acre of land an industrious family can make a good living if they proceed the right way." The Little Landers Corporation was created in August 1908 to provide capital for implementation of the project. A site for the colony was then selected on the old Belcher Ranch in the Tijuana River Valley. The 550 acre property consisted of 150 acres along the valley floor and 400 acres along the hillside. Smythe determined that the colony would function on small land holdings under intensive cultivation, expert agricultural tutelage, a system of direct marketing of colony produce, and the concentration of colony residents separate from the agricultural lands. The residential district was to have conveniences and improvements comparable to the finest found in the best areas of San Diego.

On Distribution Day, January 11, 1909, three car-loads of Little Landers and their friends arrived on site. The colony lands were distributed by numbers drawn from a hat. Town lots (50' x 120') sold for \$250 and agricultural lots sold for \$250 to \$550. Fifty families, twenty from San Diego and the remainder from the Little Landers Society of Los Angeles, comprised the original population. Many of the first houses were constructed by contractor J.W. Lewis, who was also the colony's general manager.

During 1911 and 1912, the colony set out on a nationwide campaign to attract new members. The campaign literature explained that the land was not held in common and that participation in cooperative produce marketing was voluntary. In addition, the price of all lots was reduced. By the end of 1911, there were sixty-nine families residing in the community; forty-seven new houses were built in 1912 and San Ysidro swelled to 300 residents. It was at this time that the subject lot was purchased by Rundell and the home built.

The success of the colony was mixed. Those who came to the colony with previous agricultural experience and a willingness to work hard were generally successful. Initially, surplus crops were collected daily by a colony wagon and cart that transported the produce to San Diego. In 1913, the colony opened the Little Landers Market. Problems arose when some colonists were not paid adequately and began marketing their produce on their own in the city. At the end of

1915, it appeared the colony was attaining permanency, even though about half the population still supplemented their income with outside employment.

On January 18, 1916, the flood at the Morena Reservoir rushed down the Tijuana River Valley, killing two residents, destroying the homes of at least 100 colony families, and washing out the crops. Along with the houses, the flood destroyed the pumping plant, the cement water main and the water distribution system. Despite widespread financial assistance from the citizens of San Diego who recognized the City's dependence on surrounding agricultural communities like Little Landers, the community was never able to recover. Little Landers, Incorporated was dissolved in 1917 after being unable to meet its state franchise tax obligation, and by 1918, the social experiment had largely ceased. Although a brief expression of agrarian life in San Diego, the Little Landers created the foundation for the development of the San Ysidro community.

The house at 123 East Seaward Avenue was built on one of the larger agricultural lots in Little Landers, and the home itself was more substantial than the majority of simple craftsman and vernacular residences built by their neighbors. A 1989 survey of the San Ysidro community revealed only 22 extant properties that were associated with the Little Landers colony which could be considered eligible for designation. Therefore, staff recommends that the Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House be designated under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's historical and social development, reflecting development of the Little Landers Colony.

*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 Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House was built c. 1912 in the Craftsman style in a vernacular expression, reflective of the agricultural use of the property. The house is a 926 square foot, two story Craftsman residence with a steeply pitched side gable roof with a large, front-gable dormer; asphalt roof sheeting; exposed rafter tails; wood lattice vents; wood knee brackets; a brick chimney; wide horizontal wood clapboard siding; and a full width porch supported by squared tapered columns on a half-height wall. Fenestration consists of single and paired 1-over-1 double-hung windows with decorative wood frames. Modifications to the house include replacement of a few of the original windows with metal frame windows and a likely addition at the rear of the property. Modifications to the site include the addition of a chain link fence.

The house retains a high degree of integrity and remains a very good example of Craftsman architecture in a vernacular expression. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Harry Rundell and Amanda Rundell House, located at 123 East Seaward Avenue, be designated as a historical resource under HRB Criterion A as a special element of San Diego's historical and social development, reflecting development of the Little Landers Colony, and HRB Criterion C as a good example of vernacular Craftsman architecture. 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  
Program Coordinator

KS/cw

Attachment(s): 1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover