



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: August 15, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-051

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of August 28, 2014

SUBJECT: **ITEM #7 – Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House**

APPLICANT: Vaughn Vargus and Regina Williams represented by Legacy 106, Inc.

LOCATION: 2555 Plum Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House located at 2555 Plum Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House located at 2555 Plum Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1940 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the 1967 two-story rear addition. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Colonial/Regency Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1940 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features symmetrical, two-story box-like massing; low-pitched hipped roof with moderate eave overhang and decorative rafters; standing seam metal canopy over the central entry; cladding of stucco and shingle; arched wall dormers; brick end chimney; and fenestration of symmetrically arranged divided light wood double hung and casement windows with decorative louvered shutters.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a demonstration of Torgerson's stylistic range and representative of his high-end, custom residential work.

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 two-story

single family residence built in 1940 in the Colonial/Regency Revival style on the east corner of Plum Street and Curtis Street in the Roseville Subdivision of the Peninsula Community.

The building is located on APN 450-081-11-00. The property was identified in the Quieter Home Program (QHP) Phase 2-Group 2 in 2005 and given a status code of 3D, “Appears eligible for NR as a contributor to a NR eligible district through survey evaluation.”

The historic name of the resource, the Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House, has been identified consistent with the Board’s adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Earle and Helen Brucker, who constructed the house as their personal residence, and the name of Benjamin Torgerson, a Master Builder.

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 and staff concurs. 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 resource is a two-story, single family residence with semi detached garage built in 1940 in the Colonial/Regency Revival style. It is of standard wood frame construction on a concrete foundation and exhibits a symmetrical box-like appearance and plan form. Exterior cladding is of stucco at the first floor, and shingle at the second. The gentle side slope of the site allows the primary façade to have commanding symmetry while still incorporating a single-story garage side wing in the same plane. The shallow hipped roof exhibits moderate eave overhang and decorative rafters. Fenestration consists of multi-light double hung and casement windows with decorative louvered shutters. An original brick stepped path leads to the central entry with standing seam canopy and paneled wood door with multi-light sidelights. The front of the second story is marked by three segmented arched wall dormers. The garage door appears original and above the garage is a wood and metal cupola matching the entry canopy. The secondary elevation facing Curtis Street is characterized by the brick end chimney and octagonal window.

Some discrepancies found between the subject building and the original architectural renderings and elevations are believed to have been changes made during the design process or in the field. First, the two pairs of louvered shutters on the first floor of the primary elevation appear taller and with lower inset panels in the rendering and elevation drawings. Second, the upper story arched double hung windows appear with louvered shutters that match others applied throughout. There are no shutters drawn for these three windows in the architectural rendering or elevation. Unfortunately, none of the shutters had yet been applied in the historic circa 1940 photo to provide clarification. Whether the shutters on the upper and lower levels are the result of design changes during construction or installed some time thereafter, the impact to the building’s character defining features is minimal and does not significantly impair integrity.

Some alterations are known to have occurred since construction but do not significantly detract from the building's character defining features or overall integrity. In 2008, 23 divided light double hung and casement wood window sashes were replaced in-kind and in original openings as part of the San Diego Quieter Home Program. The home was identified as potentially historic at that time and the window sash replacements were made to minimize the impact to the building's historic character. In 1967, a two-story addition was added to the rear elevation. This addition is not readily visible from the primary view shed. A permit also dating to 1967 indicates new roofing material was added. Finally, the decorative iron porch columns seen in architectural drawings and transitional photos were removed due to rust deterioration.

The Colonial Revival style of architecture was popular from the late 19th century and into the first half of the 20th century as the style drew inspiration from American architectural heritage and evoked patriotic nostalgia of America's past. Events such as the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago rekindled that interest in America's Colonial roots and spread this interest throughout the country. The subject resource has been identified in the applicant's report as a Regency Revival variant of the Colonial Revival style and staff concurs with this assessment. As noted in McAlester's "A Field Guide to American Houses," Regency variants drew more on English rather than American precedents, and are typified by metal canopy entry porches, octagonal windows, and simplified door surrounds. The subject resource retains its standing seam metal canopy over the entry and a relatively simple door surround. It makes use of the octagonal shape in the front door paneling and in the second story octagonal window on the secondary façade seen from Curtis Street. Other Regency variant characteristics are seen in the box-shaped massing; two stories delineated by different cladding types; low-pitched hipped roof; symmetrically arranged divided light windows; and one-story hipped roof garage wing.

Significance Statement: The house retains a good amount of architectural detailing and continues to convey the historic significance of the Colonial/Regency Revival style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including the symmetrical, two-story box-like massing; low-pitched hipped roof with moderate eave overhang and decorative rafters; standing seam metal canopy over the central entry; cladding of stucco and shingle; arched wall dormers; brick end chimney; and fenestration of symmetrically arranged divided light wood double hung and casement windows with decorative louvered shutters. Therefore staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the 1967 two-story rear addition.

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

Original owners Earle and Helen Brucker contracted with Benjamin Torgerson in 1939 to construct the subject resource. Benjamin Torgerson was granted Master Builder status by the HRB in February of 2012. Torgerson was born in 1894 in Slater, Iowa, and began working in carpentry and construction in San Diego around 1925. During the Great Depression, he found work as a builder constructing modest homes in University Heights, North Park, South Park, and Burlingame. Between 1931 and 1935, Torgerson was partnered with George Cooley. Together they built high-end custom homes in University Heights, Kensington Heights, Talmadge Park, and North Park. Torgerson and Cooley were also commissioned by developers during this time to build a number of other houses, commercial buildings and apartments. Torgerson continued to

mature as a builder in the late 1930s as he became a public figure in the building industry, espousing the importance of building high quality homes to encourage economic recovery. There are currently 3 houses built by Torgerson that are listed on the local register:

- HRB Site #749-Benjamin Torgerson/George Cooley Spec House #1, 4343 Adams Ave (Spanish Colonial Revival, 1930)
- HRB Site #1025-The Life House, 6025 Waverly Ave (Minimal Traditional or “California Colonial,” 1939)
- HRB Site #1039-George and Bertha Cooley/Benjamin Torgerson Spec House #1 (Spanish Eclectic, 1931)

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains good integrity to its original design and is notable as a highly distinctive example of Benjamin Torgerson’s work in the Colonial/Regency Revival style. The high quality of construction and design in the subject resource demonstrates not only Torgerson’s eye for craftsmanship but also his stylistic range. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject resource 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 Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House located at 2555 Plum Street be designated with a period of significance of 1940 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that exhibits the distinctive characteristics of the Colonial/Regency Revival style; and HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Builder Benjamin Torgerson. The designation excludes the 1967 two-story rear addition. 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
Junior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

CP/cw

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 8/28/2014

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 8/28/2014, to consider the historical designation of the **Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson House** (owned by Vaughn L. Vargus and Regina L. Williams, 2555 Plum Street, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **2555 Plum Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **450-081-11-00**, further described as BLK 250 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 Earle and Helen Brucker/Benjamin Torgerson 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 Colonial/Regency Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1940 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource features symmetrical, two-story box-like massing; low-pitched hipped roof with moderate eave overhang and decorative rafters; standing seam metal canopy over the central entry; cladding of stucco and shingle; arched wall dormers; brick end chimney; and fenestration of symmetrically arranged divided light wood double hung and casement windows with decorative louvered shutters. 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 Benjamin Torgerson and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a demonstration of Torgerson's stylistic range and representative of his high-end, custom residential work. 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 1967 two-story rear addition.

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: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney