



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 20, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-067

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of December 4, 2014

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – John O’Day Commercial Building**

APPLICANT: Beardsley Family Trust represented by Marie Burke Lia

LOCATION: 2119 Kettner Boulevard, Downtown Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the John O’Day Commercial Building located at 2119 Kettner Boulevard as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the John O’Day Commercial Building located at 2119 Kettner Boulevard as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Mission Revival style expressed in a One-Part Commercial Block type building and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1927 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits arched storefront openings and original bulkheads; tri-partite transoms with decorative mullion detailing; an arched false front parapet wall topped with original decorative urns; exterior stucco cladding with tile detail; decorative quatrefoil-like roof vent centered on the façade; hollow clay tile construction in a simple one-story form; and light steel truss roof.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The subject resource is a One-Part Commercial Block building in the Mission Revival style built in 1927 on the east side of Kettner Boulevard in the Middletown Subdivision of the Downtown Community.

The building is located on APN 533-124-11-00. The property was previously reviewed by the Historical Site Board (HSB) in June and July of 1990 as part of the Harborview/Little Italy Historical Resources Inventory. The subject property was added to the Inventory by HSB staff for consideration by the Board. At the July 25, 1990 HSB hearing, a motion to designate only the façade of the subject property failed to pass by a vote of 4 to 7.

The historic name of the resource, the John O’Day Commercial Building, has been identified consistent with the Board’s adopted naming policy and reflects the name of John O’Day, the first owner who commissioned the building.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Marie Burke Lia, which concludes that the resource is not eligible for designation under any HRB Criterion. Staff disagrees with the conclusion of the Research Report and finds that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion C. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, 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 provides information on the historical context of the part of Middletown and Little Italy in which the subject resource is located and asserts that the resource does not exemplify or reflect any special elements of an aspect of the area’s development. Using information provided in the applicant’s listing of the building’s occupants, staff briefly conducted additional research on what is understood to be the resource’s first tenant after construction was completed in December of 1927 – Pacific Technical University, Inc. – and found that the resource may have been used as the facility for conducting ground school courses for the nascent T.C. Ryan Flying School upon its inception in 1928.

Four historic photos were found from the San Diego Air and Space Museum online photo archive (Attachment 2). These photos show the interior and exterior of the subject resource in use by Pacific Technical University students and faculty and were described by the Air and Space Museum as “Ryan Flying Ground School Classes at Pacific Technical University on Kettner,” dated ca. 1929.

Additional primary source material concerning Pacific Technical University was found in numerous magazines and technical publications – most of which were paid advertisements or general announcements on the availability of technical courses in the aviation field; including, but not limited to airplane drafting, airport management, navigation, and airplane engines and mechanics. A sample of these advertisements is provided (Attachment 3). Advertisements were found in a number of magazines including *Aeronautics*, *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Popular Aviation*; and ranging in publication date from August 1928 to March 1930. This revealed that Pacific Technical University was also providing classes to students independent of the Ryan Flying School.

Various publications relating to the aviation industry also reveal arrangements made between Ryan Flying School and the subject building's first tenant – one such publication of *Aviation, Volume 24* from 1928 notes: “in conjunction with the Pacific Technical University, the Ryan Aeronautical Corp. will operate a modern and complete flying school beginning May 1 at San Diego, Calif. Until the completion of Lindbergh Field, the school will be conducted at the Ryan Flying Field on Barnett Ave.”

Of particular note is a biographical article on T. Claude Ryan found in a May 1939 issue of *Popular Aviation* by William Wagner titled “T. Claude Ryan – His Life Story” (Attachment 4) This article explains that the Ryan Flying School conducted flight instructions at the “old Ryan airport, with ground school classes given in connection with the Pacific Technical University.”

T. Claude Ryan is well-known as a pioneer aviator and businessman significant to San Diego's early aviation history. He established Ryan Airlines, Inc. in 1925 and began in the manufacturing of commercial airmail planes as well as providing year-round scheduled air service for passengers between San Diego and Los Angeles. In 1927, Ryan's company built the *Spirit of St. Louis* for Charles Lindbergh, whose historic trans-Atlantic flight made the company famous. After Ryan's marriage and European honeymoon in 1928, he returned to San Diego and established one of the country's first commercial flying schools, the T.C. Ryan Flying School.

Separate from the Historical Resource Research Report, the applicant later provided staff a copy of the President's first annual report to the stockholders of Pacific Technical University dated January 1929 (Attachment 5). This document further verifies the university's affiliation with T. Claude Ryan's flying school. Reportedly, Ryan's flying school was to furnish about 25 students per month for ground school classes to be conducted at Pacific Technical University. According to the President's report, Ryan was never able to meet that quota. The book titled *Images of Aviation: San Diego International Airport, Lindbergh Field*, notes that Ryan decided in 1932 to move operations for the school to Lindbergh Field's new administration building which he helped to fund.

Additional research revealed connections Pacific Technical University had with other notable individuals in the aviation field. Among these are Ruth Alexander and Jerome J. Green. Ruth Alexander was a pioneer aviator and a student at the Ryan Flying School. She completed her ground schooling at Pacific Technical University in 1929. Among other things, Alexander became famous for breaking the light plane altitude record in 1930 from 26,600 feet above San Diego. Jerome J. Green was Pacific Technical University's professor of Electrical Engineering and Dean of Faculty. Green was a renowned electrical engineer who, in 1899 on the campus of University of Notre Dame, successfully completed America's very first radio-telegraphic (wireless) transmission.

The limited information gathered seems to indicate that Pacific Technical University may have dissolved or gone out of business by 1932 when tenancy of the subject building was transferred to “Rollins E E”. Further research and analysis may reveal that the subject resource and Pacific Technical University were significant to San Diego's early development in the aviation industry. As the site of ground schooling for T.C. Ryan Flying School in the school's early days before the

completion of Lindbergh Field, the resource certainly played a part in early San Diego aviation and helped Ryan develop the school into a successful business, as well as provide a source for technical education to students of a burgeoning aviation industry.

It should also be noted that the site where flight instruction was first conducted for Ryan Flying School was given a commemorative historic designation by the HSB in 1990 for its association with Ryan and early aviation history (HRB Site #249, Dutch Flats/Ryan Field). This designation was only commemorative in nature and there are no original structures remaining that are associated with the site's significance. Among locally listed historic sites, the subject building is the only known extant structure associated to some extent with the T.C. Ryan Flying School.

At this time, there is some evidence to suggest that the resource may be eligible for designation under Criterion A. However there is not yet sufficient information and analysis provided by the applicant to establish historic significance of the subject property under HRB Criterion A for its association with the T.C. Ryan Flying School and as a special element of San Diego's early development in aviation. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion A at this time. Should the Board be inclined to designate the resource under this Criterion, staff strongly recommends that the Board return the report to the applicant for further research and analysis.

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

Research provided by the applicant on the owners and tenants of the property at 2119 Kettner Boulevard did not reveal any individuals who could be considered historically significant in local, state or national history. Furthermore, no events of local, state or national significance are known to have occurred at the subject property. Any possible significance related to the building's first tenant Pacific Technical University would likely be addressed under HRB Criterion A for its role in San Diego's early development in the aviation industry. Therefore, the property is not recommended for 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 subject resource is a One-Part Commercial Block type structure built in the Mission Revival style. The resource was built in 1927 of hollow clay tile construction on a reinforced concrete foundation. The building exhibits a simple rectangular plan form and exterior stucco cladding. The arched roof is supported by light steel trusses and hidden behind a distinct, Mission Style arched parapet wall topped by a pair of original urns. A decorative quatrefoil-like roof vent element is located above the central entrance bay. Three arched openings make up the primary elevation. Original bulkheads are intact and the original storefront window and door configurations are still evident on the two outer entrance bays. Tri-partite transoms are elaborated with decorative mullions and the three bay openings are marked on either side with simple, decorative tile set in the stucco cladding.

The One-Part Commercial Block type was a popular commercial architectural typology/style across the United States from the 1850s through the 1940s. It is typically one story, free

standing, which is treated in much the same variety of ways as the lower zone of the two-part commercial block. It consists of a storefront and an upper wall featuring a false parapet roof often used to display signage. Exterior front façade elements may also include decorative features.

California was the birthplace of the Mission style and many of its landmark examples are concentrated there. The earliest were built in 1890s; by 1900 houses in this style were spreading eastward under the influence of fashionable architects and national builders' magazines.

Although never common outside of the southwestern states, scattered examples were built in early 20th-century suburbs throughout the country. Most date from the years between 1905 and 1920. Commonly found features of the Mission Revival style include: Mission-shaped dormer or roof parapet commonly with red tile roof covering; widely overhanging eaves, usually open; porch roofs supported by large square piers, commonly arched above; wall surfaces usually smooth stucco. The shift from Mission Revival to Spanish style is well established with the design and completion of the Panama California Exposition and public debut in 1915.

But there are very few residential examples of non-Mission Revival, Spanish style residential architecture before World War I. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, an unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile; focal windows; arched windows and other openings; and accented entries.

The One-Part Commercial Block typology is inherently simple – a single story commercial building with a no-frills façade and layout that are purpose-built and functional above all else. The subject building was built as a “concrete and tile public garage building” according to the Notice of Completion. It utilizes light steel trusses for basic strength needed to provide a very broad, usable enclosed space to accommodate and protect large machines, parts, or commercial products typically found in a commercial garage type building. Accordingly, the building was initially used to house, maintain and construct airplane parts. Later, the large open space was used to house large quantities of commercial products during its tenancy by De Falco's Market, and then for auto body repair. Also typical in commercial garage settings are hazardous and flammable materials, or otherwise high-value materials that require a fitting degree of protection – the subject structure was built for fire resistance through the use of stucco cladding and hollow clay tile over a concrete slab. The building's integrity as a One-Part Commercial Block type is excellent as it has been in continuous use as commercial garage or warehouse from its construction.

Modifications to the structure have had little impact to the building's character defining features and ability to convey the Mission Revival style and One-Part Commercial Block typology. A single door opening in the left bay has been infilled with glass block. In the right bay, a single door has been replaced and a security door added. The storefront window in the right bay remains but has been boarded over, and portions of the original transoms in both bays appear to have been reglazed. The large wood central bay door has been replaced with a contemporary metal roll-up door. Finally, metal railings over the bulkheads and the tops of the decorative urns have been removed. These alterations do not singularly or cumulatively impact the building's

integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling to the extent that it no longer conveys the Mission Revival style or the One-Part Commercial Block type. The building retains a great deal of original fabric, and modifications have been limited such that the façade and its openings read much the way it did originally – there is no impact to composition, massing, scale or critical decorative or storefront elements.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of the Mission Revival style expressed in a One-Part Commercial Block type building by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style and type; including arched storefront openings and original bulkheads; tri-partite transoms with decorative mullion detailing; an arched false front parapet wall topped with original decorative urns; exterior stucco cladding with tile detail; decorative quatrefoil-like roof vent centered on the façade; hollow clay tile construction in a simple one-story form; and light steel truss roof. 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.

According to the Notice of Completion, Joseph C. Kelley was contracted to construct the subject building in 1927. Kelley has not been recognized by the HRB as a Master Builder and the applicant's report does not provide information sufficient to grant Master status. The architect (if one was obtained) could not be identified. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D.

CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.

The property at 2119 Kettner Boulevard has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E.

CRITERION F - Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character, historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.

The property at 2119 Kettner Boulevard is not located within a designated historic district, and is therefore not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

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 John O'Day Commercial Building located at 2119 Kettner Boulevard be designated with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Mission Revival style expressed in a One-Part Commercial Block type building. 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
Associate Planner



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison

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Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution
2. Historic Photos from San Diego Air and Space Museum
3. Pacific Technical University magazine advertisements
4. Excerpt from May 1939 *Popular Aviation* article
5. President's Report to the stockholders of Pacific Technical University
6. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover