



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 15, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-003

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of January 22, 2009

SUBJECT: **ITEM #5 – Old Fire Station #19**

APPLICANT: City of San Diego, represented by Brothers United Firefighters Inc.

LOCATION: 3601 Ocean View Boulevard, Southeastern Community, Council District 4

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of Old Fire Station #19 located at 3601 Ocean View Boulevard as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate Old Fire Station #19 located at 3601 Ocean View Boulevard as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 – 1951, under HRB Criteria A and B. In addition, designate the interior of Old Fire Station #19 (excluding the bathrooms and any contemporary alterations in the kitchen) with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of social history of the African American community in San Diego for its association with segregation.
2. The resource is identified with the history of the first African American firefighters in San Diego, and retains integrity for that association.
3. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of fire station construction and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1927 period of significance



## 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 one-story Spanish Eclectic fire station was designed in 1926 by the Quayle Brothers for the City of San Diego. The fire station is located along a commercial corridor of Ocean View Boulevard.

The historic name of the resource, Old Fire Station #19, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and indicates the historic use of the building.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by HRB Staff, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A and B. In addition, the interior (excluding contemporary modifications to the bathrooms and kitchen) of the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C. A discussion of relevant criteria is provided below:

*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.*

Old Fire Station #19 is eligible for the City of San Diego Historical Register under Criterion A as it reflects special elements of social history in the development of the African American community in San Diego. The building reflects the racial segregation African Americans experienced in San Diego prior to the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement. African American firefighters were moved to Old Fire Station #19 in the late 1920s and were not allowed to work out of any other fire station in the City, thus reinforcing segregation and discrimination. For over two decades, African American firefighters worked out of Old Fire Station #19 and faced discrimination from fellow firefighters and the citizens of the City. Men who worked out of Station #19 were given little opportunity to advance in the department and forced to carry out the most difficult tasks. Old Fire Station #19 is eligible under Criterion A for its representation of segregation and discrimination, special elements in the social history of San Diego's African American community.

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

Old Fire Station #19 is eligible for the City of San Diego Historical Register under Criterion B for its association with the early history of the City's African American firefighters. The first African American firefighter, Timothy Williams, was hired on September 1, 1919 and he was assigned to Station #3 located at 5<sup>th</sup> and Palm Streets. On September 16, 1919, two other African Americans, Sandy Baker and James Cross were hired. These men faced discrimination because of their race, were segregated from others in the same department, and forced to work out of one station. By the late 1920s, due to racial segregation and discrimination, African American firefighters were transferred to Old Fire Station #19. For over the next two decades, African Americans were required to work out of Old Fire Station #19, and could not be assigned to any other station in the City of San Diego. Though the station became a community center for

residents and other African Americans working in other City departments, institutional discrimination did not allow firefighters to advance or earn promotions in the department.

In 1951, Fire Chief George Courser sent an African American firefighter to Station #14 to provide a relief. The backlash and lack of acceptance of this firefighter led Chief Courser to issue an order stating that from that moment forward, the San Diego Fire Department would be integrated. Any man not willing to abide by the order was forced to quit. Courser hired more African Americans and provided opportunities and promotions for them that previously had been unattainable

The San Diego Fire Department was the first to attempt integration based on Courser's order as it was several years before the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) would take shape. Though, Courser laid the foundation for an end to discrimination, African American firefighters continued to be harassed by their colleagues for many years until integration was widely accepted.

By removing the station assignment requirements, African American firefighters were able to compete in the promotional process. In addition, more African Americans would have the opportunity to become firefighters. Based on its association with early African American firefighters and the discrimination they faced, Old Fire Station #19 is eligible under 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 one-story Spanish Eclectic building was constructed in 1927 as a fire station. The building has a flat, slightly pitched roof with a stepped parapet. The building is clad with stucco, but the stucco finish and texture is not original to the building. The front façade of the building faces north and is divided into three bays. One bay, located on the west end of the north facade side, consists of a large garage door. This large garage door indicates the location of the former engine room that held the fire truck/rig when the building was an operating fire station. The center bay consists of the main entry which is framed by a front porch arcade.

The north side of the front porch features two arched openings while the east and west ends feature one arched opening. This arcade is covered by a barrel roof with a red tiled parapet. The third bay, located on the east end of the north façade, features a pair of double hung wood windows.

The west facing façade features 4, divided-lite, pivot style steel windows. A hose drying tower is located at the southwest corner of the building. This masonry tower is approximately two-stories in height. Fenestration throughout the building consists of a combination of wood frame, double-hung windows and divided-lite steel windows.

Though Old Fire Station #19 reflects elements of the Spanish Eclectic architectural style, the exterior of the building is not eligible under HRB Criterion C due to inappropriate modifications to the building's stucco texture. As noted in the original Specifications, the exterior stucco was to have a fine troweled finish of "Expo" quality. This was likely a reference to the Panama-California Exposition of 1915. In addition, photographs from the 1950s indicate the building has

a smooth stucco texture. It is not known when the City of San Diego re-finished the building. The texture may be reversed and if this work is undertaken, the building may be re-considered for designation under Criterion C.

The interior of Old Fire Station #19 retains a high degree of integrity and reflects the organization of the Fire Department in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The original floor plan of the station featured a lobby, engine room, hose drying tower, kitchen, men's restroom, sleeping quarters for the firefighters, and a small room and separate restroom for the Captain of the station. Built in wood lockers were used to hold uniforms and equipment. The floor plan remains intact, with the engine room home to a 1952 Seagrave (put into service in 1954) and a hose cart that dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1880s). Portions of the kitchen and restroom have been remodeled, but original lockers remain in the kitchen space. The restroom area has been remodeled to accommodate two restrooms, one for women and one for men. The Captain's room and attached bath remain unaltered. In addition, many of the interior wood panel doors and windows remain in place. Today, the lobby is used to display memorabilia and items related to fire history. The interior of Old Fire Station #19 is eligible under HRB Criterion C for its representation of fire station construction.

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

Old Fire Station #19 is not eligible under HRB Criterion D. Though designed by the Quayle Brothers, master architects, due to the stucco modification, the building does not reflect a notable work of the Quayle Brothers. It is likely that if restoration of the stucco finish is completed, the building could be reconsidered under Criterion D.

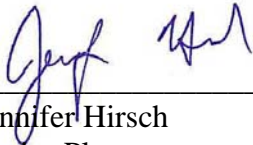
#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If the rough stucco texture is removed and an appropriate smooth stucco finish is applied, the exterior of the building may be re-considered for designation under HRB Criteria C and D.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that Old Fire Station #19 be designated under HRB Criteria A, for its association with African American history in San Diego and under Criterion B, for its association with early African American firefighters. In addition, the interior of Old Fire Station #19 is eligible under HRB Criterion C as it reflects fire station construction methods. 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 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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Jennifer Hirsch  
Senior Planner



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Cathy Winterrowd  
Senior Planner/Program Coordinator

Attachment(s):

1. Letter from Anthony Young, Councilmember District 4
2. Historical Report under separate cover