



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: August 14, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-053

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of August 27, 2009

SUBJECT: **ITEM # 9 – The Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House**

APPLICANT: Joanna & Howard Smith Family Trust; represented by Legacy 106, Inc.

LOCATION: 4615 Norma Drive, Kensington-Talmadge Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House, located at 4615 Norma Drive, as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House at 4615 Norma Drive as a historical resource under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and retains architectural integrity from its 1936 period of significance.



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BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board at the owners' request to have the property designated as a historical resource. The house at 4615 Norma Drive is a one-story, single family residence that was constructed in 1936 and exhibits character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture.

4615 Norma Drive was constructed in the residential subdivision of Talmadge Park Unit 3 by Edward and Arthur Dennstedt, both of The Dennstedt Company. While the subject house was built as the personal residence of Edward Dennstedt and his wife, Gertrude, it was briefly showcased as a model home when construction was complete.

Staff concurs that the historic name, the Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House, is consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy as it recognized the Dennstedts, who designed, built and resided in the subject house.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report prepared by Legacy 106, Inc. concludes that 4615 Norma Drive is historically significant under HRB Criteria A, C and D. Staff concurs that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C, but not Criteria A and D, 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.

According to the applicant's report, 4615 Norma Drive reflects special elements of Talmadge Park's architectural development and is significant under HRB Criterion A. Specifically, the report concludes that the house contributes to a better understanding of the community's architectural progression over the course of the 1930s. While staff does not dispute this point, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that the subject property possesses an element of history distinct from other Depression-era properties in the community.

The report also indicates that the subject house is significant as its plans were approved by the architectural supervisor of Talmadge Park. Staff does not believe that this constitutes a special element of the community's architectural development, however, as all homes constructed in the subdivision required approval and were presumably upheld to the same set of standards. In this context, the subject house cannot be regarded as any more significant than adjacent residences.

After its completion, the subject house was briefly showcased as a model home, and the report suggests that this reflects a special element of the community's architectural development. It is important to note, however, that the house was initially constructed as a personal residence – not as a model home – and newspaper advertisements indicate that the house was only open to the public for one week after construction was complete. In this time, the house was reportedly toured by thousands of visitors, but staff does not believe there is sufficient evidence to link its construction with future growth and development in Talmadge Park.

For these reasons, staff does not believe that the subject house reflects any special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's development, and does not support designation under HRB Criterion A.

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.

4615 Norma Drive occupies an irregular, triangular-shaped lot in Talmadge near the intersection of Norma and Constance drives. The house embodies many distinctive characteristics of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and merits designation under HRB Criterion C.

Constructed in 1936, the stucco-over-wood-frame house is single storied, asymmetrical in plan and rests on a concrete foundation. Among the most salient features of the structure includes its rambling floor plan, which spans the length of the property and conforms to the parcel's irregular shape. A low-pitched gabled roof is sheathed in red clay tile, features slightly overhanging eaves and is complimented by decorative rafter tails. Exterior surfaces are clad in a smooth, off-white stucco finish characteristic of the Spanish Eclectic style.

Along the front elevation of the subject house is a recessed, red-tinted tile porch, which provides access to a solid wood, paneled front door with original hardware. Both the porch and entryway are situated within a landscaped courtyard, and are obscured from public view by an off-white stucco retaining wall. Two handcrafted wooden gates – which are set in the center of the wall – grant access to the enclosed courtyard and are sheltered by a side-gabled, red clay tile roof with slightly overhanging eaves and ornamental rafter tails.

Fenestration consists primarily of casement and double hung wood windows, and near the northwest corner of the subject house are two nine-paned fixed windows. Decorative wooden grilles and yellow-tinted wooden shutters adorn several windows, and others – in addition to a screen door on the front façade – are protected by wood-framed screens.

Attached to the south end of the house is a two-car garage, which is accessed by a cobblestone staircase in the exterior courtyard. In the same manner as the main house, the garage is designed in the Spanish Eclectic style and features a hipped roof sheathed in red clay tile, a smooth stucco exterior, slightly overhanging eaves and decorative rafter tails. Two handcrafted, sliding wooden garage doors face the street and date from the house's initial construction.

At the request of the property owners, some of the house's interior features are also included as part of the nomination. Specifically, these include the open-beam wood ceilings in the living and dining rooms and the sculpted "beehive-style" living room fireplace. The owners do not wish to nominate other interior features – including flooring, dining room shutters and doors, tile work, cabinetry, doors and lighting fixtures – specified in the consultant report.

Modifications to the subject house are minor in scope and do not detract from its architectural integrity. The consultant report notes that the front wall has been reconstructed to its same height and a rear yard on the north elevation has been modernized. Over time, some interior spaces – including the kitchen, mud room and portions of the bathrooms – have also been renovated. On a

recent site visit, the owner indicated that the house had been re-roofed, but staff concurs that the current roof material is appropriate for a Spanish Eclectic style residence.

Staff concludes that the Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House retains integrity and embodies distinctive characteristics of Spanish Eclectic style architecture. These include an asymmetrical massing, low-pitched red clay tile roof, minimal eave overhang, smooth stucco exterior walls and ornamental window grilles. 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.

Brothers Albert L. (A.L.), Chester A. (C.A.), Aaron E. (A.E.) and Edward L. (E.L.) Dennstedt initially sold real estate in Iowa, but moved to San Diego in 1924 when the market soured. In previous years, the brothers had also been trained in residential design and construction, and shortly after their arrival the Dennstedts – under the direction of A.L. – jointly established a construction firm in their name. Between 1926 and 1933, The Dennstedt Company produced a number of homes throughout the city and became well known for its high-end, custom designs.

In 1933, a dispute among the four brothers prompted A.L. and A.E. to sell their interests in the company and establish their own construction firm. Between 1933 and 1941, their practice – named the A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt Company – also constructed custom homes and gained notoriety in its own right. At the same time, brothers C.A. and E.L. continued to operate The Dennstedt Company and were later joined by family members Moreau, Arthur, Kenneth and Keith. To avoid confusion between the two Dennstedt companies, C.A. and E.L. elected to rename their practice The Original Dennstedt Company in 1938.

Despite the brothers' early collaboration, only the A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt Company has been established as a Master Builder by the HRB. To date, five structures attributed to the company have been designated by the Board as historical sites, including:

- HRB # 627 – Antoine and Jeanne Frey – Rear Admiral Francis Benson House
- HRB # 664 – A.L. and Cleveland Dennstedt House
- HRB # 806 – Anne and Edward Lindley House
- HRB # 818 – Hazel Wier/Dennstedt Company House
- HRB # 892 – Jean P. Hampton/A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt Company Spec House # 1

It is important to note that the subject house was not constructed by the Master Builder, but is rather attributed to E.L. and Arthur Dennstedt of The Original Dennstedt Company. The consultant report suggests that The Original Dennstedt Company and its associates – C.A., E.L., Moreau, Arthur, Kenneth and Keith – also be established as Master Builders, but staff does not believe there is sufficient evidence to support the proposal at this time.

While the report provides several examples of company-designed structures, to date no buildings constructed by The Original Dennstedt Company have been designated by the HRB. Moreover, only one designated resource – the Carlos B. and Blanche W. Livers House (HRB # 535) – is attributed to the first Dennstedt Company that includes the names of all four brothers. Thus, staff

acknowledges The Original Dennstedt Company, its associates and its contributions to the city, but lacks the evidence needed to support nomination of the company as a Master Builder.

In conclusion, 4615 Norma Drive is not attributed to Master Builder the A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt Company, and at this time there is insufficient evidence to suggest that its builder, The Original Dennstedt Company, merits recognition as an established master. For these reasons, staff does not support designation 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 Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House be designated under HRB Criterion C for embodying distinctive characteristics of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and retaining integrity from its 1936 period of significance. 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.



Andrew Goodrich
Planning Intern



Cathy Winterrowd
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

AG/ks/cw

- Attachments: 1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under Separate Cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 8/27/2009

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 8/27/2009, to consider the historical designation of the **Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House** (owned by Howard & Joanna Smith Family Trust, 4615 Norma Drive, San Diego, CA 92115) located at **4615 Norma Drive, San Diego, CA 92115**, APN: **465-492-13-00**, further described as Lot 722 in Talmadge Park, Unit No. 3, Map 1900 recorded on May 23, 1926 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 Edward and Gertrude Dennstedt House on the following finding:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as it embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and retains architectural integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1936. Specifically, the house retains an asymmetrical massing; a low-pitched, gabled red clay tile roof; slightly overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails; smooth stucco exterior walls; and ornamental window grilles. 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 well as the interior living room ceiling, dining room ceiling and living room fireplace, 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