



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 14, 2016 REPORT NO. HRB-16-044

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of July 28, 2016

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – Robert and Climena O’Brien Spec House #1**

APPLICANT: Richard Seghers, Jr. and William Godsey represented by Legacy 106, Inc.

LOCATION: 3920 Adams Avenue, Normal Heights Community, Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Robert and Climena O’Brien Spec House #1 located at 3920 Adams Avenue as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Robert and Climena O’Brien Spec House #1 as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criterion C. The designation includes the interior cobble fireplace. 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 and retains integrity. Specifically, the resource exhibits a flat parapet with raised capped corners, clay tile roof and arched focal window. A Spanish Eclectic influence can be detected in the decorative tile attic vents. The house’s featured cobblestone façade is also a valuable example of the use of natural materials and craftsmanship.

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 one story, single-family residence constructed in 1926 in the Mission Revival Style with some Spanish Eclectic influence using native cobblestones. The building's front elevation is oriented toward Adams Avenue and is located on APN 440-520-1200 in the Normal Heights Community.

The historic name of the resource, Robert and Climena O’Brien Spec House #1, has been identified consistent with the Board’s adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the owners who constructed the house as a speculation house. The owners would like to propose a different name, the Rock House, which reflects the colloquial name by which the house is commonly referred,

according to the owner. The Board's adopted policy on the Naming of Historic Sites states, "Sites may be named after the HISTORICAL NAME as it may have been established by the original owner, subsequent owners, or community. Such name shall be substantiated by a Historical Report, as the site's known name since its period of significance or for the past 50 years." There is no information in the report which discusses the use of the name "The Rock House" by the community. Therefore, staff cannot recommend this name as consistent with the Naming Policy. However, should the Board wish to consider the owner's request, the Board may vote to waive the requirements of the Naming Policy for this property.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Legacy 106, Inc., which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C and staff concurs. 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.

Research into the history of the property at 3920 Adams Avenue did not reveal any information to indicate that the property exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion A.

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

Research into the owners and tenants of the property at 3920 Adams Avenue 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. Therefore, the property is not eligible 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 story, single-family residence constructed in 1926 in the Mission Revival Style with a slight Spanish Eclectic influence using native cobblestones. The building is located on an interior lot with its primary façade facing Adams Avenue. The house is balanced in appearance with a U shaped plan. The projecting wings form a central courtyard and a garage is attached to the east façade. The building features a flat parapet accented with red tiles and raised capped corners. Cobblestones laid in a decorative pattern cover the exterior walls and chimney.

The primary entrance is accessed from the courtyard and is located beneath a low pitched red tile shed roof. A divided light French door with matching sidelights serves as the primary entrance. The windows are all double hung, one-over-one with wood frames except for an arched three-part focal window. The center window of the trio is a single fixed pane and is flanked by two 14-light fixed

pane windows. Above, an arched row of cobblestones further articulates the shape of the feature. The house is also accented by round clay tile attic vents grouped together in sets of three.

The cobblestones used to cover the house are native to the region and were most likely found in a nearby canyon. Homes constructed of cobblestone are rare in California and required a skilled craftsman to construct. The stones are loosely laid in courses and give the appearance of quoins at the building's corners. An interior fireplace is also constructed of cobblestones and is included in this designation.

Few modifications have been made to the home including the replacement of the garage door. A window on the east façade was also altered when the lower glass panel was replaced with solid wood and a flowerbox. There is also evidence that some of the concrete caps at the parapet corners have been replaced as they are all of varying color and size.

California was the birthplace of the Mission Revival Style and a high concentration of landmark examples are located within the state. The style mimics the appearance of Spanish Colonial mission buildings and is considered the California counterpart to Georgian inspired Colonial Revival in the northeast. Architects began to advocate the style in the late 1880's and 1890's. By 1900 houses in this style were spreading eastward from California under the influence of fashionable architects and national builders' magazines. Commonly found features of the Mission Revival style include: Mission-shaped dormer or roof parapet, red tile roof covering; widely overhanging eaves, porch roofs supported by large square piers and smooth stucco wall finishes. Decorative detailing is generally absent although arches, quatrefoil windows, carved stonework and patterned tiles are occasionally used. Trends began to shift away from the Mission style to the Spanish Eclectic with its debut at the Panama California Exposition of 1915.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Mission Revival Style and retains integrity. Specifically, the resource exhibits a flat parapet with raised capped corners, clay tile roof and arched focal window. A Spanish Eclectic influence can be detected in the decorative tile attic vents. The house's featured cobblestone façade is also a valuable example of the use of natural materials and craftsmanship. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property 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.

Research into the construction of the property at 3920 Adams Avenue failed to conclusively identify a builder, designer or architect. 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 3920 Adams Avenue 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.

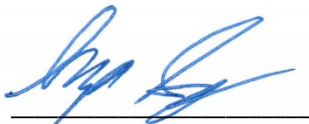
The property at 3920 Adams Avenue is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

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 Robert and Climena O'Brien Spec House #1 located at 3920 Adams Avenue be designated with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that exhibits the distinctive characteristics of the Mission Revival Style. The designation shall include the interior cobble fireplace. 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.



Suzanne Segur
Assistant Planner



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison

SS/ks

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution
2. Interior fireplace proposed for designation
3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 7/28/2016

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 7/28/2016, to consider the historical designation of the **Robert and Climena O'Brien Spec House #1** (owned by Richard E. Seghers, Jr. and William J. Godsey, 3920 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116) located at **3920 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116**, APN: **440-520-12-00**, further described as VL 194 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 Robert and Climena O'Brien Spec House #1 on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Mission Revival Style and retains integrity to its 1926 date of construction and period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits a flat parapet with raised capped corners, clay tile roof and arched focal window. A Spanish Eclectic influence can be detected in the decorative tile attic vents. The house's featured cobblestone façade is also a valuable example of the use of natural materials and craftsmanship. 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 include the interior cobble fireplace.

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

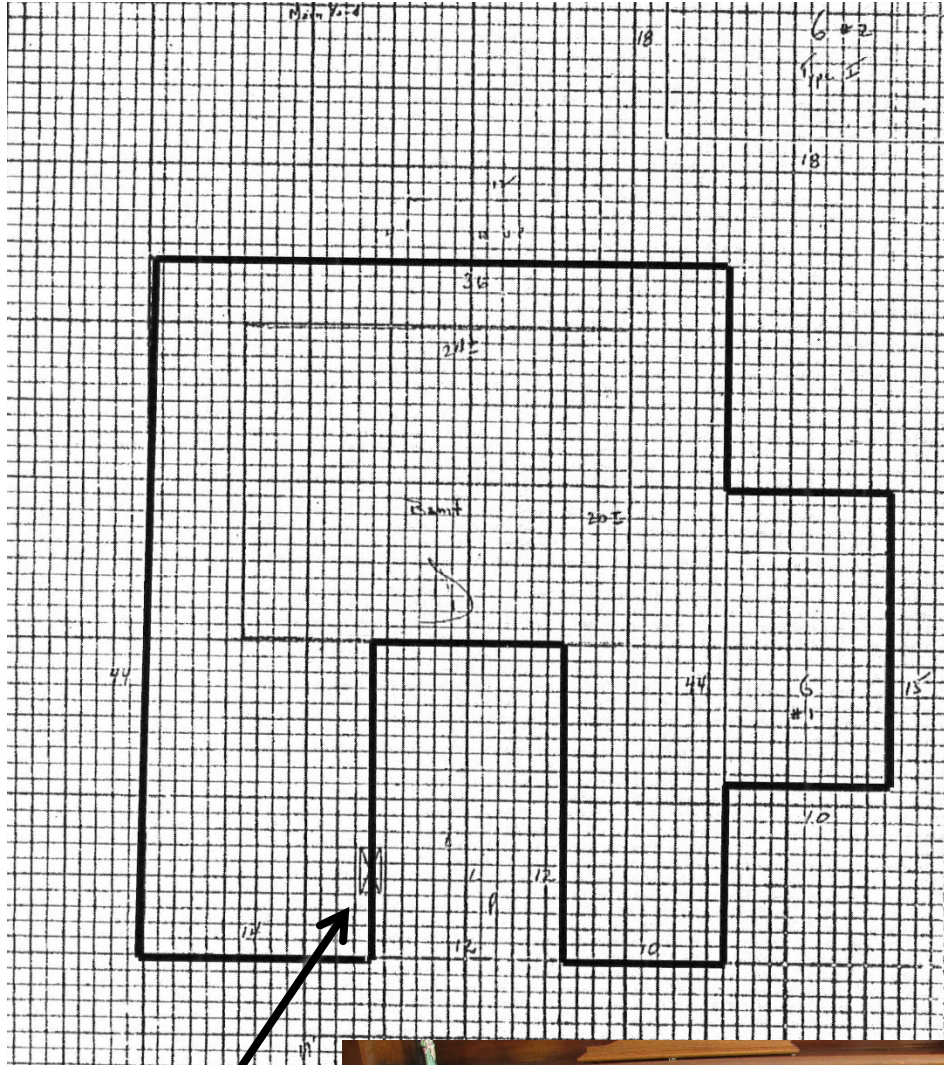
BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney

Site Plan with Footprint

Fireplace Included In Proposed Designation



Location of cobble fireplace
included in designation

