

Historical Context Statement

The Mission Hills– Sunset Boulevard/St. James/Lyndon/Sheridan Traditional Historic District

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mission Hills Traditional Historic District – Sunset Boulevard/St. James Place Lyndon Rd. Sheridan Ave. (The District) lies within the original Mission Hills Subdivision Map #1115 that was created by George Marston, Tom and C.S. Hamilton, E.S. Babcock, John and James Forward and John and Charles Kelly in 1908. The District is an excellent example of a (1909-1941) suburban residential development prior to the U.S. involvement in World War II. Eligible for designation under the Historic Resources Board **CRITERION F**, it is notable for its eclectic mix of architectural styles California Bungalow, Craftsman Bungalow, Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Prairie School Style, Dutch Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Italianate Revival and pre-war and post-war Minimal Traditional homes. The District is comprised of 75 unique and architecturally interesting homes, some of them constructed by master architects and craftsmen for prominent San Diegans. There are already five homes in the district, which have been historically designated as City of San Diego landmarks.

The Historic District boundaries are: Fort Stockton to the east, St. James to the west, the north end of Sunset Boulevard and the south end of Lyndon Road. The tract's design significance is expressed in its curvilinear street plan that follows the area's natural contours, in contrast to the surrounding area's grid development pattern.

THE UPTOWN COMMUNITY PLANNING AREA

The District is located in the Uptown Community Planning Area that lies just north of the Centre City. Comprised of 2,700 acres, or approximately 4.2 square miles, it is bounded on the north by the steep hillsides of Mission Valley, on the east by Park Boulevard and on the west and south by Old San Diego and Interstate 5. The Uptown Community is located on a level mesa that is broken by numerous canyons and is bordered by two major parks, Presidio and Balboa. The Uptown community contains some of the oldest neighborhoods in San Diego exhibiting a variety of historic architectural types and a heavily traveled pedestrian mixed-use retail commercial area. The area also features a wide range of residential opportunities and a diverse mixture of people within a distinctly urban setting. Most of the street system and building lot development was well established prior to the need to consider the automobile as a part of subdivision planning.

The area includes the neighborhoods of Mission Hills, Middletown, Hillcrest, the Medical Complex, University Heights, and Park West. Residents represent all economic backgrounds and are diverse in their ethnic composition. The area consists of single-family residential uses, apartments and condominiums, commercial and office uses, and is also dominated by two large hospitals: University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center and Mercy Hospital. The Hillcrest business area south of the medical complex is linked to Centre City by a commercial, office and residential use corridor along fourth and Fifth Avenues.

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DISTRICT HISTORY

Preface

To make what today is called “San Diego” their home, the earliest human explorers viewed an entirely different world. Glacial retreat and melting left behind a path of destruction and cycles of harsh weather climates. East of the Peninsular and Laguna Mountains, lush forests and savannah lands opened to inland lakes the size of the state of Delaware. To the west, those rivers carved deep valleys through 90 million year old uplifted river terraces.

Mission Valley once extended due west and forked south about two miles out into what is now the Pacific Ocean. Rich forested valleys thriving with mammals, birds, amphibians, and marine resources filled what is now San Diego Bay. For in those ancient times, glaciers sucked seawater north and the ocean level lay at least thirty feet lower than it is today. Within the past 8,000 years, melting glaciers have changed the native landscape. People began changing the land.

Archaeologists have a dim understanding of how early people adapted to the rapid changes caused by glacial melt. As the sea level rose, rainfall diminished, and savannahs gave way to deserts. Lakes dried up and mammoths went extinct. No longer able to hunt mammoth or cave bear, people shifted living locations and emphasized harvesting of plants, marine shell fish, and smaller game.

Such was the changing landscape at the time the Kumeyaay, Kwaimi, Cocopah, Pai Pai, and other tribal groups that first learned of Spanish explorers in the Arizona deserts. Word traveled fast, but people were not ready for European philosophical and political conquest. Nor were they prepared for the onslaught of disease and culture shock that would forever change their ancient ways of life.

The arrival of Spanish soldiers and Franciscan priests changed annual seasonal transhumance land use patterns, but native people adapted and simply kept out of their way. Only the fertile river valleys along the coast were essentially denied native people.

Spanish authorities contained their populations to fortified towns. These were primarily limited to the Royal Presidio de Cosoy, about one mile west of Mission Hills, and the Mission San Diego De Alcalá. Spanish cattle wandered the uplifted marine sediment mesas and quite possibly denuded mixed chaparral, vernal pools and coastal sage scrub habitat. Mexican ranchers expanded up into the hills to plant horticulture, orchards, and vines and the feral cattle, goats, pigs and sheep increased. Residential expansion oriented toward San Diego Bay and Mission Valley, where fresh water and food resources were more plentiful.

Following the Mexican War of 1846, the State of California formed the Common Council of the City of San Diego in 1850. Based on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1852, the Common Council hired land surveyor Charles Poole to mark the boundaries of the enormous tract of land set aside for the City of San Diego, known as Pueblo Lands. The Common Council approved a subdivision of those Pueblo Lands into “Pueblo Lots” and began to auction the land to raise funds to operate the City of San Diego. Americans and former Mexican citizens bought property in those

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auctions and cleared native brush for various kinds of farming, horticulture, and plant nurseries. The poorest quality areas, such as the dry mesas, were left alone at the end of the 19th century (1).

Johnston Heights and Early Settlers

Captain Henry James Johnston became the first person to purchase property in the area when he bought about 65 acres of public land centered around what is now Sunset Blvd and Witherby Streets. Johnston was the Captain of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's S.S. Orizaba, a wooden side-wheel steamer that ferried between San Francisco and San Diego (2). The Orizaba was regarded as the "Mayflower of San Diego" as it brought many future San Diegans to town for the first time. The Orizaba began its trips down the Pacific Coast to San Diego in 1865 and was broken up in 1887. For years, as Captain Johnston brought passengers and freight to San Diego, he rounded Point Loma and viewed the high promontory overlooking the great expanse of sea. This high plot of land so impressed the Captain that he resolved to buy it for his home when he retired.

Legend has it that Johnston purchased the property that includes what is now called Mission Hills, after a near disastrous voyage to San Diego. On February 2 1869, he paid \$16.25 for the 65-plus acres, or 25 cents per acre, the price of land prevailing in San Diego. Sixty plus acres being more than he needed, Johnston quickly sold half his barren land to his First Mate, Ormsby Hite for \$7.50. Mission Hills was comprised of weeds, scrub and chaparral, an area that the Native American tribes, such as the Kumeyaay, inhabited before the Spanish settlers. The Captain's retirement was never realized. Johnston died at his home in San Francisco on December 28, 1878. The Captain's widow, Ellen Johnston, willed the property to her daughter, Sarah Johnston Miller, for "...love, affection and \$1". Mrs. Miller named the land Johnston Heights in honor of her father. (2)

During the winter of 1887-1888, Sarah Johnston Miller built a home on the southern edge of the highest point of the hill, and named it the Villa Orizaba. The old ship's saloon sideboard and probably the railing from the salon up into the social hall were built into the grand Victorian home.¹ Until 1907, the Villa Orizaba stood alone among the scrub and cactus amongst a few small dairies and chicken ranches. By 1909, Johnston Heights was still undeveloped, so Captain Johnston's grandson Henry Leverett changed the street grading and the street names as well as the subdivision around the Villa Orizaba. Johnston Road was renamed Sunset Boulevard as the main thoroughfare in the newly subdivided Inspiration Heights. Inspiration Heights lies immediately to the west of the District adjacent to Subdivision map #1115.

The second pivotal figure in Mission Hills's history to arrive was Miss Kate Sessions. After her arrival in 1884 on the S.S. Orizaba, she became a schoolteacher at Russ School (San Diego High School). She became disenchanted with teaching after being locked into a locker by a group of rough schoolboys (3), and took up horticulture, her first love. After a brief stint with her first nursery downtown, she began operations in City Park (Balboa Park), which she almost single-

¹ The Orizaba was remodeled into a Prairie-Style home some thirty years later when the Victorian Period was no longer in vogue.

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handedly planted. In 1903, upon losing her Balboa Park lease, she began buying up land in what would become Mission Hills. Sessions would spend the next 24 years in this area, leaving an indelible mark on its landscape and its appearance and by playing a major role in its development as a streetcar suburb. Sessions would occupy the four blocks north and east of Lewis and Stephens Streets. She chose this area because of its rich soil, moist sea breeze and remote location. Eventually, Sessions owned or leased most of the North Florence Heights section (created in 1890 north of the cemetery² and bounded on the east and west by Randolph and Stephens Streets). The area bloomed under her supervision with an ocean of poinsettias in the fall and sea of lavender in the spring.

In 1870, at the age of twenty, George White Marston arrived in San Diego, taking his first job as a clerk in the Horton House. In 1873, he bought a general store with Charles Nash. They divided their interests in 1878, with Marston keeping the dry goods part of the business. By the 1890's, Marston was a wealthy merchant and civic leader. In 1871, he led a group of citizens to keep City Park out of the hands of land speculators and developers; he served on the City Council; he became an outspoken Progressive who believed in the latest concepts of city planning. In 1902, Marston offered \$10,000 of his own money to develop the plans for the 1,400-acre City Park and was a driving force behind bringing in John Nolan to develop a comprehensive city plan. As a social progressive, he believed in bringing nature into the city to give the urban working class a place to relax. In 1913, Marston ran for Mayor but was defeated by Louis Wilde in the so-called "Geraniums vs. Smokestacks" race. Marston was an advocate of cultural development, moral uplifting and beautification of San Diego. Marston would leave his personal fingerprints on Mission Hills as he attempted to develop a planned community of progressive citizens.

The Progressive Era

Broad historical movements or epic events are really the confluence of other historical movements at a sudden episode in time. After the boom and bust cycle of the 1880s and economic depression of 1893, citizens of San Diego were disillusioned and seeking new identities with purpose. Across America, utopian societies and religious movements swept westward. The British Arts & Crafts Movement came to San Diego about the same time national newspapers and magazines alarmed America with the social ills of waves of European immigrant groups. Seeking refuge and solace and good health, Americans readily joined the emerging American Arts & Crafts Movement into the early 20th Century. Ideals were expressed through popular architecture by open and airy houses with abundant windows, use of earthy wood and stone in construction, decoration with naturalist sculptures, paintings, sculptures, and hand-made artistic furnishings. Popular magazines like the *Land of Sunshine* with energetic editorials by Charles Lummis and George Wharton James developed devoted followings. People retreated from the cities and sought refuge in new subdivisions created by idealists and popular leaders (1).

At about the same time as the rise of the Arts & Crafts Movement, an assassin cut down President McKinley and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumed power as president of the United States. Although a conservative, President Roosevelt formed his administration around the Progressive

² The cemetery is now Pioneer Park.

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Party and extolled the values of progressive ideals among the new generation of American middle and upper class. Coincidentally, some of his former U.S. Army “Rough Riders” from the Battle of San Juan Hill and the Philippine Insurrection invested heavily in Southern California real estate and settled here in San Diego. Many wealthy San Diego businessmen swept into the Progressive Party and the ideals outlasted President Roosevelt, well into the Taft Administration. Progressive Party politics impacted San Diego in 1906 and lasted until World War One (1).

Progressives like George Marston and his relatives, the Hamilton’s and Kelly’s were successfully involved in merchandising and real estate. They shared the vision that magnanimous leadership and civic action was necessary to shape the future of San Diego. Those powerful San Diego figures embraced city planning as a cure to urban problems and believed residential housing communities should surround civic parks, transportation routes and harbor resources (20). Marston and his associates carried out this progressive vision by forming the Kelly Investment Company.

Progressive-minded acts such as buying up Presidio Park, extending the San Diego Electric Railway, under grounding water and sewer, and installing power and communication lines, building YMCA buildings and camps, promoting Boy and Girl Scout organizations, and getting advocates appointed to the Planning Commission, Harbor Commission, and Park Commission were ways for Marston and his supporters to implement progressive ideals. These acts were rewarded by common belief that progressivism coincided with powerful religious expression.

The influence of the British Arts & Crafts Movement and American artists and architects in San Diego at the end of the 19th century pervaded the social circles of the wealthy. In 1909, such powerful forces carried over to the Chamber of Commerce, where the plot hatched to recruit the finest architects, artists, capitalists, and industrialists to participate in the Panama California Exposition.

The Nolan Plan

At about the same time, alarmed that enormous tracts of land were sold for private development, the Common Council had the vision and foresight to set aside some Pueblo Lots for future public use. Lots were reserved for cemetery and park lands. About 1905, the City of San Diego retained John Nolan to develop a general plan, just as had been done for big eastern cities like New York as well as over 450 small and large cities across America. The Nolan Plan concepts found their basis in the City Beautiful Movement of the late 19th century

Nolan produced a small book and maps that outlined planned use of both Pueblo Lands and private property by ordinances to be enforced by the City of San Diego. (1). Nolan wrote in his Comprehensive Plan of 1908 that “Notwithstanding its advantages...San Diego is today neither interesting nor beautiful. Its city plan is not thoughtful, but on the contrary, ignorant and wasteful”. Nolan noticed that there were few contour streets in San Diego and often times the method of building city streets required cutting through hills and filling in of deep valleys and canyons.

“It has meant great and much uncalled-for expense and a destruction of a rare opportunity to secure significant beauty. The streets are not only straight; they are rectangular in

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arrangement, unrelieved by diagonals and of the same width, eighty feet. There is scarcely any recognition of the need for differentiation in the width and character of streets”.

Concerning the manner in which San Diego streets were laid out at the time, Nolan wrote, “The most glaring and serious...is the attempt to implant a rectangular system, almost unrelieved by diagonals, on so irregular a topography”. Among Nolan’s recommendations for San Diego was that there should be wider residential streets for the “...bigger and handsomer homes that are now being built” In his summary, Nolan quotes Robert S. Peabody when describing how streets should be laid out “...main roads may be interesting which curve or wind...not to have the main arteries all straight.”

The Nolan Plan of 1908 met stiff resistance from opposing philosophical power bosses in the Common Council, who prevented adoption of the ordinance. Although the Nolan Plan and was never formally adopted, it clearly influenced laying out the subdivision map of Mission Hills. Progressive Party businessmen, bonded by family and financial ties, countered this failure by private acquisition of Mission Hills and design of their own communities to carry out their vision for the future. George W. Marston and his extended family, The Hamilton’s, The Kelly’s and Gunn’s formed small corporations to purchase land, hire land surveyors, engineers, and title companies, and market land to like-minded people.

Streetcar Suburb

In 1907, Sessions and Alice Rainford began circulating a petition asking property owners to support extending the electric trolley car line from First Avenue and Washington to Lewis Street. While the area proved to be fertile for horticulture it proved too distant for Sessions customers. Since many property owners did not live in the immediate area, the duo traveled all over town by horse and buggy rounding up signatures. In 1908, with property owner’s approval, the city widened the necessary roads and J.D. Spreckels, the owner of the San Diego Electric Railway Company, began extending the trolley line. By 1909, one could travel from Market Street downtown to Lewis and Stephens. In 1913, the track was extended from Lewis to the intersection of Fort Stockton and Trias. Spreckles believed that “transportation determines the flow of population.” Wherever the tracks went, development followed, meaning more rides, fares and profits. He was right! The fuse was lit for the Mission Hills boom.

The expansion of the electric streetcar lines from the inner city out into it new suburbs was critical to the growth of Mission Hills. Throughout the United States at this time, the new technology of the street railway, coupled with the advances in sanitary engineering methods, enabled families to move out from the old inner city boundaries into near vacant and lightly settled land. In this new land, the Jeffersonian rural ideal, with its emphasis on private family life and the security of a small community setting amid aesthetically pleasing natural surroundings, encouraged middle and upper middle Americans to build a wholly new residential environment, the streetcar suburb. The streetcar line would serve as quick, reliable transportation to the heart of the city from these subdivisions. John S. Spreckels, a self-proclaimed ‘Capitalist’, bought out and incorporated failed rail lines into his San Diego Electric Railway Company. Spreckels was convinced that the key to profit lay in the proportional increase in the number of passengers as the streetcar system expanded into the suburbs.

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Spreckels did not wish to control the form and direction of suburban expansion, but rather to leave suburban development to real estate builders and individual homeowners who would buy building materials from his company and obtain building loans from the various banks whose boards he sat on. The success or failure of the streetcar system centered around attempts to provide housing for people, each with a small parcel on which to build a house, achieving what previously had been available only to a few rich families with large houses and ample land. (6).

In response, real estate speculators purchased and subdivided parcels of land along the streetcar routes. Initially, these streetcar lines served to attract prospective property owners to the newly laid-out subdivisions where lots would be auctioned off. . Similar to subdivision development today, these developers installed the subdivision's infrastructure – water and sewer hook-ups, street lighting, curbs, sidewalks, paving, street trees, etc. While several local real estate developers built speculative houses on their tracts to boost sales, most of these developers were interested in selling lots, not homes. It was up to the individual lot buyer to contact an architect or a craftsman/builder to design and construct the home. (6).

Subdivision Map #1115

Marston was a principle, with his brother-in-law Tom Hamilton, his nephew C.S. Hamilton and Coronado Hotel developer E.S. Babcock of the Kelly Investment Company. They knew that the trolley was going to be expanded and believed Speckle's theory of development following the infrastructure improvement of the trolley tracks. The Kelly Investment Company co-invested with John F. Forward and James D. Forward of Union Title and Trust Company and purchased 22 acres of property from Kate Sessions, known as Pueblo Lot A on Pascoe Map 1870. They hired civil engineer F.A. Rhodes of the Southern Construction Company to survey the property and hired New York architect George Cook to lay out the tract and incorporated many of the concepts promoted by Nolan in his 1908 comprehensive plan for San Diego.

This map abuts Johnston Heights, North Florence Heights on the East and Middletown Addition on the South. The street layout in Mission Hills is quite unique when compared to other neighborhoods of San Diego. Streets just outside of the subdivision east of Stephens Street follow the familiar grid pattern. Common ties to Nolan's plan include leaving the deep ravines undisturbed for the purpose of recreation and scenic enjoyment while streets followed the topography of the hilltops; blocks and lots varied in size and shape; and a minimum of intersections with sharp 90-degree corners. It is only in the area mapped as subdivision #1115 that one first sees the break from the grid pattern. The thoroughfare Sunset Blvd is 51 feet wide and a gently curving street. Sheridan Ave and Lyndon, distinctively curvilinear streets, are no more than 36.4 feet wide and St. James is no more than 33 feet wide. (4)

Mission Hills was officially born on January 20, 1908 when Subdivision Map #1115 was filed at the County Recorder's Office. The Mission Hills subdivision is one of the best examples in San Diego of the streetcar suburb made possible by the spread of inter-urban rail lines and the carries out the influence of John Nolan's ideas of City Planning.

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The Kelly Investment Company sold the lots and Union Title and Trust Company filed the deeds with the County Recorder. Real Estate vending companies like the Mission Hills Company and several other companies acquired groupings of undeveloped lots for resale to homebuilders. (15).

Early Development and Promotion

The developers intended to make Mission Hills one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in San Diego and indeed, Mission Hills became San Diego's first restricted subdivision. The deed restrictions stated that only single-family homes costing at least \$3,500 could be built (this during a time when the average worker made about \$10 per week). Garages and barns had to cost at least \$500 each. As San Diego Union columnist Oscar Cotton noted in 1933:

“It took optimism to visualize \$3,500 homes in this inaccessible, wind-swept district, miles from the nearest street car line, through the greasewood and dust, in places a foot deep.”

So advertising helped create some imagery for prospective purchasers. Some advertising stated that Mission Hills was the “Most desirable residence tract in all California” and it was “Just the Right Distance from Business – 12 minutes from U.S. Grant Hotel by Auto and 20 minutes by Cars” (7).

Deed restriction #14 stated that “...no male poultry or farm animal of any kind” could be kept on the property. Like many restrictions of the day, there was also one regarding race. Deed restriction #15 stated that the property could only be sold or leased to members “...belonging to the Caucasian race”. A real estate brochure claimed, “Natural beauty and artistic development unite in producing Mission Hills as ideal district for residence. The ‘cream’ of this favored section is that designated as George W. Marston’s Subdivision...” The subdivision desired to become a “...distinctly high-class neighborhood”. It would also be “Planned and protected for particular people” and “For those who want the best” and “No hotels or apartments” would be built in such an upscale community (8).

Another early Mission Hills real estate promotion pamphlet stated:

“At your feet lies the harbor its mirror of amethyst held safe from the surges of the outer sapphire sea by the gigantic elbow of Point Loma and the long low reaches of Coronado, whose gleaming line is fretted by the picturesque towers of the world-famed hotel and the aboriginal-looking thatched roofs of Tent City. Upon the brow of Point Loma rises the shaft of the Bennington Monument and hid under its sides the great guns of Fort Rosecrans. Far out upon the rim of sapphire looms the surprising triplet of lonely peaks known as the Coronado Rocks, while to the south and east tumble the glorious Mountains, purple and vast and solemn, linked in sublime skyline, from Table Mountain away off in old Mexico, to the glittering icy coronet of San Jacinto towering some four score leagues to the north, above the royal purple masses of Palomar. Then, looking to the west, you see first, the little ‘Old Town’ of San Diego and the hamlet of Pacific Beach, then Mission Bay separated from the ocean by a silvery strand which the breakers are constantly pounding and foaming” (7).

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By 1910, building permits citywide were up 23% since 1900. At the outset, aside from its promoters, Mission Hills had few friends. With a city of only 30,000, the new subdivision was too far from Florence Heights to be taken seriously. First Avenue and Washington Street was the residential border. But the population boom continued and Mission Hills began to grow. The Panama Pacific International Exposition (1915-1916) brought over 3,000,000 people to San Diego³ Many people, who visited the Exposition returned to San Diego to live, work, invest and retire. Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt recognized the potential of San Diego Bay as a naval center. In 1919, The San Diego California Club, a community-advertising club, was established and promoted San Diego as “The Home City”, with ads encouraging retired, or well to do mid-westerners to move to San Diego. In, 1919, Speckle’s San Diego and Eastern Railway expanded and in 1921, the Naval Training Center and the Marine Corp Recruiting Depot were established. The spread of the trolley, and the additions of the military bases, greatly contributed to the growth of San Diego and Mission Hills:

Development took off with the extension of the San Diego Electric Railway Company’s #3 car line into Mission Hills. The building of homes and the planting of trees and shrub, which grew vigorously in the rich virgin soil, soon formed effective windbreaks. The contoured streets with pleasing names and the building restrictions proved good drawing cards.

And so, Mission Hills became known as an area of wealth and affluence. Upper middle class and wealthy families who, during the late 19th century, had originally established prestigious neighborhoods south of Laurel Street in Bankers Hills, and later moved northward to form the up scale neighborhood between Maple and Brant Streets, reestablished once again in Mission Hills during the 1910’s and 1920’s. With their patronage, lot values increased rapidly – 100% to 300% in the first three years. Later, lots were to go much higher— \$5,000 and up for the best view lots (9). In 1907, a single 100 square foot lot cost approximately \$600. By 1933, the same lot may have cost as much as \$50,000 (9).

Development after the 1915 Pan Pacific Exposition

In 1916, by the end of the Panama-California Exposition, many thousands of visitors returned to live permanently in communities like Mission Hills. Newcomers knew little or nothing of the social elite such as British Vice Consul Hutchinson or John Bradshaw, who had returned to England by that time. The drums of war rolled across Europe and armies clashed in newsprint as World War I wore on. The Exposition inspired a new era. Builders like Nathan Rigdon and Morris B. Irvin adapted older Mission style with Beaux Arts designs to create their own versions of Craftsman, Spanish Eclectic bungalows and two-story Prairie style residences for the growing families.

During the 1910’s, Craftsman architectural styles resulted in homes with large rooms, broad shade porches, large bay windows, and ornamental sculpted stucco design elements mixed with Spanish-Roman style windows. North African Moorish design elements and Southwestern territorial style

³ Former Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Taft were both present at the Expo. Roosevelt met with several former Spanish Civil War veterans (the Rough Riders) in San Diego, including Captain Thomas Rynning who built and lived at 1871 Sunset Boulevard.

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with Pueblo-style design elements and exposed roof poles began to fill the empty lots of Mission Hills. The furniture and built-in cabinetry from the earlier Arts & Crafts era continued well into the 1930s. Very swiftly, the neighborhoods grew to be more than the founders envisioned.

The impact of the Great Depression in 1929-1932 led to the divergence of Prohibition and rising role of federal agencies in American lifestyles. Gone were the days when powerful progressives called the shots, magnanimously built public facilities or donated monuments of public art. Marston's Presidio Park landscaping dried up, Mission Cliffs Gardens became a desert, and Kate Sessions attained status as an elder spokesperson. All across the nation, people lost their jobs and banks seized houses for failure to make mortgages or payments on promissory notes. Almost no building is reported for this period and the directories record displaced families, vacancies and rentals all over Mission Hills.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress revolutionized American government during the Great Depression to bootstrap the nation into recovery. Various federal programs spurred real estate development, including the National Recovery Act of 1934. Before the courts struck it down as unconstitutional, federal NRA funds fueled housing for working class families who could hardly afford to make ends meet. Simplified housing with small rooms, stripped of ornamentation, and low-hipped roofing arose as the "Minimal Traditional". Some of those homes were built in the District after the depression. This style would later give rise to post-war ranchette sub-styles of Minimal Traditional.

The intersection of the Great Depression, Prohibition, and the War Preparedness Act formed the catalyst for change. Hard financial times actually spurred people to seek illegal recreation at Agua Caliente in Tijuana. The rise in military facilities meant housing shortages and opened doors for Mission Hills residents to rent rooms or entire houses. The Federal Housing Authority created low interest loans, pattern books with building costs calculated, and triggered a boom in lumber harvesting, plaster mining, planning mills, brick and tile factories, and production of structural steel for potential homeowners. But by 1941 when the United States enter World War II, most lots in Mission Hills had been fully developed (1).

Prominent Citizens

Eastern migration to San Diego burst forth following World War I. The 1920 and 1930, U.S. Census showed an 87% increase in population from 112,250 to 209,660 (22). This meant housing starts boomed in the 1920s. War industries were fueled by Congressional money for U.S. Navy salaries and infrastructure support. Aircraft industries, both civilian and government, and expansion at U.S. Army Fort Rosecrans and Camp Kearny infused the new inhabitants with money for houses, cars and recreation (1).

From the very beginning, Mission Hills has been home to many of San Diego's leading and prominent citizens as well as working class; including business owners, educators, doctors, lawyers,

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mechanics, nurses and artists (22).⁴. Many of Mission Hills' early residents were from the Midwest (22) and many of Mission Hills early citizens were typically members of several of San Diego leading civic groups, a reflection of the progressive politics of the period, including: the Cuyamaca Club, the Elks, the San Diego Cricket Club, Knights Templar, Silver Gate Masonic Lodge, the Junior League, the Fine Arts Society, the Masons, the Thursday Club, the University Women's Club, the Wednesday Club, the San Diego Rotary Club and other civic organizations. Five women living in this small district were listed in the 1934, San Diego Social Register with dozens more from the greater Mission Hills subdivision. (12).

There was more to life in Mission Hills than garden parties and civic duties, however. The sleepy border towns of Tijuana and Siempre Viva blew into existence almost overnight with Prohibition in 1920. Some families hammered by the deepening economic depression shifted and adapted to industries associated with recreation and service of wealthy imbibers of illegal hooch. Wealthy communities like Point Loma, Mission Hills, and Kensington were not immune to the secretive but profitable trafficking of truckloads of liquor from colorful distilleries like Red Top. Great fortunes could be made almost overnight. Mission Hills residents were among the thousands who sought entertainment across the border in Agua Caliente, the Rosarito Hotel, or Jack Dempsey's casino in Ensenada. The underground movement of liquor, neighborhood parties, gatherings of the powerful community leaders, and speak easies affected the people who lived through the Great Depression and approaching new war in Europe (1).

As Mission Hills had a deed restriction from 1908 until 1918 regarding race it was possible for a future member of the Ku Klux Klan to be active in proper society - real estate and church affairs. Klan member Earl S. Barr bought and sold at least three pieces of property along Lyndon Road and Sheridan Ave (15). Barr was a founding member of the First Congregational Church serving as superintendent when the church was founded in January 1911. Barr's wife was also listed a singer at the church's dedication services in July 1911 (16). In about 1922, The KKK organized in San Diego (15) but by this time the "whites only" clause in the deed restriction was expired. However, Mission Hills remained a predominantly white community with few minority residents. Although the Klan

⁴ Some of San Diego's leading citizens who moved to the historic district: including: leading civic leader and freeway builder **R.E "Pappy" Hazard**, Spanish-American War veteran Rough Rider, Contractor **Captain Thomas Harbo Rynning**, **Dr. John Henry Young**, retired lumberman and elder of the First Presbyterian Church **Jerome Ford**, British aristocrat **John Bradshaw**, Egyptian Theater and Bush theaters owner **Kent Bush**, power washing machine inventor **Peter Coffield**, wholesale produce merchant **Fredrick Nason**, singer **Alice Barnett Stevenson**, furniture store owner and brother of San Diego's mayor in the 1930's **Harry Benbough**, architect **Frank P. Allen**, Concrete Company owner **Ralph Whitaker**, San Diego State College professors **Leslie and Elizabeth Brown**, District Attorney **Thomas Whelan**, journalist and newspaper founder **Col. Milton McRae**, tuna industry businessman **Wiley Ambrose**, writer and poet **John Vance Cheney**, San Diego Chicken Pie Shop owners **Joseph and Kleo Henry**, **Rev. John Doane**, rancher and real estate investor **Charles O. Graves**, real estate investor, brick and tile company owner and rose developer **Forrest Heatt**, World War One hero **Col. Samuel Frankenberger**, Daley Corporation VP **William Davis**, the **Gould** family, **Captain William W. Gilmore**, District Attorney **Stephen Connell** and many others who made up the fabric of the community..

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membership was secretive, most Klansmen were ambitious members of the middle class who were also church going people.

Mission Hills was also home to “businesswomen” who engaged in the world’s oldest profession. Women were renting homes “doing an unusual amount of entertaining.” (13). Ironically, In 1912, Sunset Blvd resident and lawman Thomas Rynning moved to San Diego to help clean up the Stingaree, (the notorious downtown red light district) before the opening of the 1915 Expo. Such business activity was also reportedly conducted during World War II (14).

The Historic District was home after the Second World War to many of the town’s leading citizens such as Consolidates Vultee Aircraft VP and post-war real estate developer **David Fleet**, City Parks and Recreation Superintendent **W. Allen Perry**, UCSD Professor of Medicine and physician **John Wanless**, architect **C.J. Paderewski**, Mayor Pete Wilson’s assistant **Robert S. White**, **Juan Carlos**, the future King of Spain and even the retired 1924 Olympic Jai Lai Gold Medalist – **Jose Garate** from Spain.

DISTRICT ARCHITECTURE

The Arts and Crafts Movement

The District began its life at the height of the Arts and Crafts Movement in San Diego. Architecture followed national movements, media hype, and popular trends. The “War to End All Wars” forever changed the cultural landscape. Neighborhoods shifted dramatically from Victorian style and as early as 1880, people looked for a new “American” identity. British bungalows, cottages, and cabins inspired less formal lifestyles. The new generation of San Diego residents desperately sought identification with new cultural landscapes. Mission Hills rose from a confluence of ideals, popular themes, and political views (1).

The Craftsman Movement found architectural expression in the development of the California bungalow. The Craftsman homes were simple well-built homes that often exposed the wood elements and emphasized hand craftsmanship and attention to detail as hallmarks in the construction. The quality of the workmanship is clearly evident in many Mission Hills homes built during this period.

The Eclectic Twenties and Thirties

Craftsman bungalows dominated the styles up to the end of World War I and were occasionally built through the early 1920’s. However, after the 1915 Exposition, the Mediterranean, Mission and Spanish Colonial Revival architectural styles became increasingly popular. The Eclectic Movement stressed relatively pure copies of traditions originally developed in Europe such as: Neoclassical, Chateausque, French, Spanish and Colonial Revival designs. In the 1920’s Mission Hills residents were swept away by the Spanish Colonial Revival building craze, as was much of San Diego. Builders and architects designed Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival and Spanish Eclectic

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homes with whitewashed stucco, low-pitched roofs, decorative ironwork, tiled floors and walls and formal gardens (20).

Architects, Builders and Designers

At the start of the 20th century, San Diego remained somewhat geographically secluded. Compared to Los Angeles and San Francisco, the city was unable to support a large population of artists and architects. While nationally, or even locally, recognized architects and artists could not always be commissioned to design new suburban homes, there was still a need for creative individuals. Designers, craftsmen and builder contractors filled this void. Often times these three talents were found in one person. This was especially significant to middle class residents who sought comfortable, easy to maintain homes that fit their new commuting lives as well as offering a respite from the density of the downtown city center. When funding didn't favor hiring a well-known architect, these property owners hired builders who could design an economical home that would reflect the owner's professional status. Builders such as **Morris B. Irvin** and **Nathan Rigdon** afforded their clients an opportunity for unornamented, stylish homes that fit their lifestyles. In creating such homes, these builders had a significant impact on the visual narrative of the Historic District (16).

There were several women who were early real estate speculators such as the Annie and Jeannie Meyers, Martha Ingersoll Robinson (a very successful real estate agent, who was encouraged by many to run for mayor), Irene Daley, Florence Nelson and others. Over twenty builders such as **Irvin, Rigdon, Marvin V. Melhorn, H.J. Lang, John S. Graves, Emmor Brooke Weaver, David Owen Dryden** and others would come to build in the District alongside architects such as **Richard Requa and Henry Jackson, Henry Lord Gay, Henry Preibisius, Charles H. Tifal and Frank P. Allen**. There were several architects, such as **John W. Gernandt**, who designed homes for both clients and for speculation. Several real estate speculators lived, or would later live, within the District, such as Forrest L. Heatt (F.L. Heatt Brick & Title Co. and President of the Commercial Club) or Sarah and James O'Marr. . Perhaps just as significant, now forgotten carpenters and craftsmen built many of the simple bungalows and craftsman homes in the district. There were also several construction companies engaged in building homes in the district such as **The Pacific Ready Cut Homes (Gernandt), Daley Construction Company (George R. Daley), Ideal Home Builders (Requa and Jackson), Homeland Improvement (H.J. Lang), the Pacific Building Company** (whose draftsmen were trained by Irving Gill) and others.

In some cases, no expense was spared when designing the interior spaces. Details such as wainscoting, extensive crown molding, and built-ins were common features in these homes. Douglas fir or expensive gumwood was often used for moldings and built-ins.

Although no one architect or builder dominates the Historic District several are notable. Builder **Morris B. Irvin** designed seven homes and partnered with Nathan Rigdon on two more homes within the District. According to his July 1933 obituary, Irvin arrived in San Diego in 1913 just in time to ride the building boom and was responsible for building 125 homes in Mission Hills. Building-in the Craftsman, Mission Revival and Spanish Revival styles, he is given credit for having been the first to engage in large-scale speculative home building in San Diego. It is worth

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noting that each of his homes were built for the lot and each home maximizes the use of special details that make it different from each of his other designs. Irvin established himself in the real estate business of Mission Hills upon his arrival and built a large apartment house on Goldfinch. In his obituary, it also stated "...aside from his progressive activities that had much to do with the up-building of Mission Hills, Irvin became known and loved by hundreds of men and women because of his kindness and advice to those who went to him with their troubles and problems" (17). He resided at the southwest corner of St. James Place and Sheridan, just outside the District.

Emmor Brooke Weaver (1876 – 1968), who built three homes in the Historic District, has been called "...one of a handful of architects who was able to elevate the California bungalow to a high art form" (10). Weaver worked at William Hebbard and Irving Gill's firm and contributed to the firm's design and construction of the masterpiece Marston house (1905) on Seventh Avenue. Weaver left the firm and became known as a designer and builder of "artistic bungalows." He soon catered to the growing number of upper-middle-class Easterners and Midwesterners who had moved to live the good life on San Diego's suburban fringes such as Mission Hills (10). Most of Weaver's homes are known for their "...rustic beauty, their folksy simplicity and their unique spatial qualities. They are places of peace and harmony". The Taliesin trained modernist architect Sim Bruce Richards walked into one of the Weaver homes in the district and stated "...see what I mean, everything is at rest here, everything is at peace, the way it should be..." (19). Weaver stated that the historically designated Allen B. Cook/Mary Ward house on Sheridan Avenue worked the best of all the homes he designed for small city lots. Weaver, like many of the Arts and Crafts architects and builders, exhibited meticulous workmanship. He used redwood and red fir wood in his interior spaces and scrutinized every aspect of construction, even forbidding carpenters to touch the wood with bare hands (10).

Nathan Rigdon built two homes in the District and partnered with Irvin on two more. Listed as an architect in 1911, Rigdon appears in Mission Hills in 1912, realizing at once the potential building boom. Rigdon built over forty homes in Mission Hills between 1912 and 1915 (20). Rigdon built simple square homes with front porches and detached garages at the rear of the property. This creates a distinct separation of the house and garage that preserves the square plan of his homes. The garage also expresses Mission Hill's development as a community of residents financially comfortable enough to own private transportation. Features such as rear garages and front porches create a consistency within a neighborhood and are important features of Rigdon's houses (20). Rigdon was responsible for designing the so-called "Mission Hills boxes"-- two-story Prairie-Style craftsman stucco homes that are found throughout Mission Hills. Rigdon also built the mixed-use Montclair Apartment Building (1605-1633 West Lewis) and the Methodist Church (Lark and Fort Stockton) in Mission Hills. The highest concentration of Rigdon built houses appears to be on Arguello, West Montecito, West Lewis and Fort Stockton. Rigdon's work certainly influenced the appearance of all of Mission Hills and may be a reflection of the influence of Nolan's Plan for San Diego. Of the houses that Rigdon built, either alone or with Irvin, almost all punctuate the hierarchy of streets with mostly two-story homes along the main streets (16).

Marvin V. Melhorn built two houses in the district, including the precursor to the international style at 1845 Sunset Boulevard. Melhorn was a master builder and artist who also arrived in San Diego in 1912, just in time to join the building boom. Like many builders of the time, Melhorn built

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in several architectural styles: Spanish Revival, bungalow and Craftsman. Melhorn passed away in the 1930's, but his son and later his grandson carried on the family construction business.

Although Irvin, Weaver, Rigdon and Melhorn were not certified as architects, they all had a significant impact on the design of homes in Mission Hills. Their forethought and attention to detail contributed to the thoughtfully planned community that Mission Hills still richly conveys today.

From this period of intense house building in San Diego, arose an industry of churning out architectural plans of all manner of housing styles. People could order blueprints by mail or have the aspiring 19-year-old neighborhood architect draw up plans for their home. Famed architect Wayne D. McAllister and William F. Wahrenberger both started in Mission Hills this way.

Kit houses from Sears & Roebuck, Montgomery Wards, or Aladdin were readily available and pick up loads of pre-cut and pieced wall sections, roofing, windows, doors, hardware, were easily shipped across the nation for contractors who had simply to know their business and follow the plans. From simple to elaborate, kit houses ranged from Craftsman to English Storybook to Spanish Eclectic houses. Emerging talented architectural designers, like Wayne and Corrine McAllister and Anne Maxwell-Moore, rose from this industry to create true masterpiece homes in Mission Hills. A wide range of English, Spanish, and American colonial revival styles emerged in the mid 1920s and carried over until the 1940s when most all lots were developed.

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