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Old Pasadena Historic District Amendment
Los Angeles County, California

Summary

The Old Pasadena Historic District is significant in local history under National Register Criteria A and C. As the historic commercial center of Pasadena, the district documents the economic development of the city and its various phases of growth between 1886 and 1936. The period of significance begins in 1886, when several key events occurred that stimulated the development of Pasadena, and ends in 1936 when the commercial activity began to dissipate. The district also contains an important record of the evolution of architectural design in southern California as well as the work of many prominent regional architects. The district imparts a strong sense of past time and place and retains its design integrity from the period of significance.

Statement of Significance

Pasadena's beginning dates to 1873 when a group of settlers from Indiana formed the San Gabriel Orange Grove Association, and purchased land in the area of the old Rancho San Pasqual from Benjamin Wilson. As surveyed in 1874, the Association lands were bounded by the Arroyo Seco to the west, Wilson Avenue to the east, Villa Street to the north, and Mission Street to the south. The original center of Pasadena was the intersection of Orange Grove Avenue and California Boulevard where several churches of different denominations were located, as well as a small number of stores. The intersection was in the midst of agricultural tracts, which were cultivated by gentleman farmers and their families. Between Fair Oaks Avenue and the edge of the Arroyo Seco to the west, the land was divided from north to south by Orange Grove Avenue with land held in east-to-west rectangular tracts by approximately two-dozen owners. These long, rectangular properties were all bisected by Orange Grove Avenue.

The relocation of the school and the subdivision of a large tract of land by Benjamin Wilson shifted the geographic focus of the growing town to the intersection of Fair Oaks Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. In 1876, a general store and post office were established at this new location, along with the town school. The approximate boundaries of this generally rectangular subdivision were Villa Street on the north, Raymond Hill on the south, and Wilson Avenue on the east, and Fair Oaks Avenue on the west. The size of the tract was between two and one-half miles from north to south, and less than one and one-half miles from east to west. One third of the tract lay to the north of Colorado Boulevard (originally Street), and two-thirds lay to the south. The Lake Vineyard tract became the subdivision that would lead to the creation of an urban environment that became the commercial center of Pasadena.

While Pasadena prospered as a local marketplace, the development of the town as a tourist mecca elevated Pasadena to national attention. The first of the city's hotels were established in

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1883, the Pasadena House and the Los Angeles House, respectively. These inns were located at the center of town, but larger resort hotels such as the Huntington, the Vista del Arroyo, and the Raymond, still exerted a force upon the downtown. Carriages routinely carried guests to Colorado Boulevard for shopping and business and the street began to cater to the tourist class with fine shops and professional offices.

The coming of the railroad to Pasadena, as in many communities, was the catalyst for a different scale and type of development. The Southern Pacific connected Los Angeles to the rest of the country by way of San Francisco in 1876. The Atchinson, Topeka, and Santa Fe route through the southwest was extended to Los Angeles and then through Pasadena in 1885. A vicious rate war between the two railroads ensued and eventually sent people west from Kansas City for one dollar. Throngs of emigrants took advantage of the special offer and moved to southern California. The population of Pasadena grew from 2,000 to 12,000 during the 1886-88 period, which accounts for the tremendous amount of new commercial construction.

Edward C. Webster, a particularly shrewd hotel operator purchased land on the east side of Raymond Avenue between Green Street and Del Mar Avenue in 1886 and constructed the Santa Fe Train Station at his own expense. The train tracks that run mid-block between South Raymond Avenue and Arroyo Parkway generally form the eastern boundary of the district. The Richardsonian Romanesque train station operated for nearly fifty years, until 1935, when the plans for the new station were announced and the old station was demolished. The 1935 station was completely restored in 2005 and incorporated into a transit-oriented mixed-used development.

In 1887, Webster began the construction of the hotel north of the station, which he named after himself. However, financial troubles forced him to sell the hotel to an associate, Colonel George G. Green. The hotel was officially renamed the Hotel Green after New Year's Day, 1891. Green carried out Webster's plan to expand the hotel further north to Green Street. In 1898, the hotel was expanded again, this time across the street. The new building (then called the Central Building and now referred to as the Castle Green) was connected to the original building (sometimes referred to as the East Building) by a pedestrian bridge over Raymond Avenue. The Wooster Block at the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Green Street was purchased and incorporated into the hotel, and was referred to as the West Building.

The original portion of the hotel (the East Building) was demolished in 1935. All that remains of the four-story building is a one-story fragment at 80-82 South Raymond Avenue, which is now used as part of a floral supply store. The Castle Green and the Wooster Block at (99 South Raymond Avenue) serve as visual reminders of the heyday of resort hotels in Pasadena.

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Occupying the entire block between Raymond and Fair Oaks Avenues and Green and Dayton Streets, they are individually listed in the National Register. Also, many of the industrial buildings along South Fair Oaks and Raymond Avenues began as laundries, stables, and worker housing for the Hotel Green. Of particular note is the building at 196-70 South Raymond Avenue, which was constructed as the heat plant and laundry for the Hotel Green. Several smaller hotels with separate ground floor retail businesses on East Holly Street and North Fair Oaks Avenue represent the type of lodgings that were designed to accommodate tourists of more modest means. They include the Holly Hotel (1914), the Piece Hotel (1924), and the Marine Hotel (1884, 1904).

The auction of the schoolhouse property in 1886 (the block bounded by Colorado, Raymond, Green, and Fair Oaks) also prompted large-scale development and speculation. Substantial brick buildings replaced early wood-framed structures and almost every prominent family participated in some aspect of the “boom” development. Several remnants of that early heyday remain: the former City Hall building at 45 North Fair Oaks Boulevard; the Old Firehouse at 37 West Dayton Street; the Plant Block at 11-17 North Fair Oaks Avenue; and the Doty Block at 103-115 South Fair Oaks Boulevard. In addition, the alley facades and configurations offer a different view of this era. The alley network of the block bounded by West Colorado Boulevard, North Fair Oaks Avenue, West Union Street, and North Delacey Avenue is the best remaining example within the district, but within every block some vestiges of an alley network remain.

Colorado Boulevard has always been accorded special attention due to its importance as a main thoroughfare, the Rose Parade route, and its historic role as the western gateway to Pasadena. As early as 1900, traffic congestion prompted local citizens to consider widening Colorado Boulevard. In 1919, the City Council approved the expenditure of \$2,000,000 to widen Colorado Boulevard between Orange Grove Boulevard and Delacey Avenue. The project took ten years to complete and was soon followed by the widening of another three blocks from Delacey to Broadway (now Arroyo Parkway). When the project was completed in 1930, the City’s main thoroughfare was 100 feet wide and most of the adjoining buildings were given new facades.

Colorado Boulevard also played a role in the national transportation network, which further enhanced its status as the primer commercial street in the city. In 1914, the Automobile Club of Southern California posted a sign at the corner of Colorado Boulevard and Fair Oaks Avenue marking the National Old Trails Route. The route was conceived and implemented by the organization and involved the posting of signs along 3,000 miles of roadway directing travelers from New York to Los Angeles. In 1926, the National Old Trails Route became part of Route 66, the first interstate highway. The original Route 66 entered Pasadena on the east on Foothill Boulevard, traveled west to Hill Street, turned south on Hill to Colorado Boulevard, west on

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Colorado Boulevard to Fair Oaks Avenue, and then proceeded south on Fair Oaks Avenue to South Pasadena and beyond.

Most construction in Pasadena during the 1920s, whether residential, commercial, or civic bore some relationship to Spanish Colonial Revival images. The construction of Pasadena's Civic Center (listed in the National Register) in the 1920s, promoted Spanish Colonial Revival design and other styles from the Mediterranean region. The association of this style with the upper class, due to its prolific use for houses of the period, symbolized Pasadena's image of itself as a wealthy locale. The 1920s remain the "Golden Age" of Pasadena's economic and cultural history and the fine design along Colorado Boulevard attests to the commitment of local enterprises to portray their city in its best light. While the buildings along Colorado Boulevard do not bear the exuberance of large-scaled Spanish Colonial Revival design, they do offer some of the finest example of the style in a restrained urban setting. Some of the buildings are individually important for their balance of detail and massing but the chief significance is due to the collection as a whole. Relatively unaltered, the almost four-blocks of Colorado Boulevard still provide a glimpse of the unity of purpose and enthusiasm, which guided the residents to go beyond a problematic street widening and attempt a cohesive urban design.

The stylistic images of Old Pasadena can be attributed to the talents of over thirty-five architects and numerous builders. Many of these architects achieved regional and statewide recognition through extensive coverage in such trade journals as *Architect and Engineer* and *Architectural Record*. Many other regionally acknowledged architects, who are not represented on the roster of Old Pasadena architects, lived in Pasadena which created an environment that demanded design excellence.

Harry Ridgeway, the first major architect to practice in Pasadena, designed many of the "boom" commercial buildings of which only 11-17 North Fair Oaks Avenue remains. He is recognized as the premiere Pasadena Victorian-era architect. The two phases of the Hotel Green demonstrate the talent of two major turn of the century architects, C.L. Strange (82 South Raymond Avenue, the remains of the first hotel) and Frederick Roehrig (99 South Raymond Avenue, the Central Building). Strange also design the Doty Block (103-15 South Fair Oaks Avenue) and is best known for his Old Orange County Courthouse in Santa Ana. The Castle Green is Roehrig's best large-scale work as his is predominantly known for his residential designs. The Vandervort Block (26-38 South Raymond Avenue) may be the first southern California work of Frank Hudson who achieved notoriety as a partner in the Los Angeles firm of Hudson and Munsell. His most notable Los Angeles buildings include the County Hall of Records (demolished) and the Museum of Natural History in Exposition Park. Frederick Kennedy Jr., recognized primarily for his ecclesiastical designs (First Baptist Church and Trinity Lutheran Church, both in

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Pasadena) has one commercial design within the district, 24-28 East Colorado Boulevard. In addition to designing seventeen buildings or facades within Old Pasadena, the firm of Bennett and Haskell also designed the Pasadena Civic Auditorium (a local landmark and a contributing building in the Civic Center National Register District) with Edwin Bergstrom. While Bennett trained in the offices of Greene and Greene, Haskell had a classical architect's education at Harvard, MIT, and the Ecole de Beaux Arts. Haskell also worked with McKim, Mead & White in New York before coming to Pasadena in the early 1920s. Although the firm of Marston and Van Pelt has only one representative in Old Pasadena (106 West Colorado Boulevard) they enjoyed popular acclaim due to their other Pasadena buildings including the Grace Nicholson Building, the Pasadena Athletic Club, and the Civic Center YMCA.

The business and cultural focus of the community shifted east along Colorado in the 1920s and 1930. The 1929-30 street widening and resultant façade program was seen by many as a last ditch attempt to revive commerce at this end of Colorado. The construction of the Civic Center and the Maryland Hotel (just three blocks east of the district in the 1920s began this shift which was cemented with the development of South Lake Avenue as a shopping avenue in the 1940s. Despite this shift, merchants continued their business, accommodating a different clientele. The lack of investment in the district saved it from the "modernization" which hit most other downtowns after World War II.

In conclusion, the Old Pasadena Historic District is historically significant as the commercial center of Pasadena. The district represents the major phases of development in the local community from the 1880s through the 1930s. The district is architecturally significant as the largest intact assemblage of commercial buildings in Pasadena, containing numerous individually distinguished buildings and the works of many notable architects. Collectively, the assemblage documents the evolution of commercial architecture in Pasadena.