

Agenda Report

July 11, 2016

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AND EAST GARDEN AT 380 WEST GREEN STREET AS A LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines Section 15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the primary structure and associated landscape at 380 West Green Street meet landmark designation criterion B in the Pasadena Municipal Code (P.M.C) Section 17.62.040(C)(2)(b) because it is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the City, region, or State. The original property owner and resident was Hulett C. Merritt, a locally significant entrepreneur and industrialist.
3. Find that the primary structure and associated landscape at 380 West Green Street meet landmark designation criterion C in Pasadena Municipal Code (P.M.C) Section 17.62.040(C)(2)(c) because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period as well as the work of a locally significant architect. The building is a locally significant, intact example of a large scale, single-family property type built in the Beaux Arts style, designed by architect William F. Thompson and the garden is a locally significant, intact example of the Period Revival Estate Garden property type.
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 380 West Green Street, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 380 West Green Street, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting of May 3, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house and east garden at 380 West Green Street as a Landmark under Criterion B & C of PMC Section 17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The house and the east garden at 380 West Green Street qualify for designation as a Landmark under Criterion B & C because of their association with original property owner and resident Hulett C. Merritt, a locally significant entrepreneur and industrialist and as an intact example of a large scale, single-family property type built in the Beaux Arts style, designed by architect William F. Thompson with a garden that is also a locally significant, intact example of the Period Revival Estate Garden property type.

BACKGROUND:

On February 2, 2016 property owners City Ventures Construction, Inc. submitted an application for designation of the primary structure and the terraced lawn immediately to the east of the structure, known as the "East Garden", as a landmark. The staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building and the landscape qualify for designation as a landmark.

DESCRIPTION:

Property Data

- Address: 380 West Green Street, Pasadena, California, 91105
- Location: South side of West Green Street, between South Orange Grove Boulevard and South Saint John Avenue.
- Date of Construction Completion: 1912 (source: Historic Resources Group)
- Original Owner: Hulett C. Merritt (source: Historic Resources Group)
- Architect: William F. Thompson (source: Historic Resources Group)
- Original/Present Use: Single Family Residence/Commercial Office
- Property Size: 78,843 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building Size: 17,329 square feet (source: County Assessor)

The Site (Existing Conditions)

The 1.81-acre parcel contains a two-story house and a terraced lawn with associated decorative site features, including a low, perimeter cast concrete screen wall punctuated by piers topped with urns or metal lanterns. The house is set deeply within the interior of the parcel, with significant setbacks from both South Orange Grove Boulevard and West Green Street. The house is situated on the western edge of the existing parcel, with the East Garden descending in a gentle slope that connects with the remaining elements of

the former Ambassador College campus through a series of shallow concrete steps, framed by shaped hedges and Italian Cypress. At their lowest point, the stairs are flanked by large concrete parastedes, (a pedestal like wall, as the abutment of the end of a staircase). The parcel to the west of the house is currently being developed with multi-family housing. This new development to the west will retain the features of the historic sunken Italian Garden originally created as part of the Merritt Mansion along with the East Garden. This garden adjoins the western façade of the house, in the same way the terraced east garden and reflecting pool complement the east-facing elevation of the house. However, the Italian Garden is on a separate parcel and not part of this application.

Exterior Building Features

This two-story with basement single-family residence, now housing the commercial operations of City Ventures Construction, Inc., is designed in the Beaux Arts style. As described in the analysis prepared by Historic Resources Group (Attachment A):

“It is two stories in height over a raised basement and has an irregular plan consisting of the original symmetrical double cruciform plan with an asymmetrical addition at the south and southwest (of the building). The hipped roof has wide, bracketed eaves and is clad in clay barrel tiles. Below the eaves is a continuous case stone entablature with dentil cornice and a decorative frieze with festoon garlands and fretwork grills. There are multiple interior plastered chimneys. The exterior walls are finished in cement plaster. The central portions of the primary (east) and secondary (west) facades are symmetrically composed, with the main block flanked by projecting full height bays. There is an original one-story wing to the north and a two-story, Mid-century Modern addition to the south. The primary entrance is symmetrically located on the east façade and consists of a wood and glass door flanked by sidelight with decorative metal grilles. The door and sidelights are framed by engaged Ionic columns and rectangular piers supporting a balcony with rinceaux panels, scrolled brackets, and a balustrade. The entrance is accessed by a terrace with balustrade, and marble steps with plastered parastedes and scrolls. Fenestration consists primarily of single light, wood sash, fixed, casement and double hung windows, some with transom lights. Some windows are grouped in tripartite compositions. First story windows have molded plaster architraves and cornices, and projecting subsills. Second story windows have flat plaster surrounds and bracketed plant shelves. The west face has a two-story, semicircular

Doric portico with a divided flight staircase leading to a second story balcony.”

East Garden

The terraced lawn to the east of the Merritt Mansion, herein referred to as the East Garden, is an example of a Period Revival Estate Garden, as identified in the City's draft Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic Designed Gardens in Pasadena." It was created the same year construction began on the primary residence in 1905 and has a series of central staircases with low walls and landings, lined with a formal allee of Cypress trees descending to a sunken pool.

The analysis from Historic Resources Group (Attachment A) describes modifications to the East Garden:

“In 1967, Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams (EDAW) replaced the turf with a river pebble pavement. Flanking the steps located to the west of the sunken pool area pair of concrete, over-scaled pedestals with urns. Just inside the property's north gates is a small, circular motor court. That same year (1967) EDAW added an Oriental-style hardwood bridge over the sunken pool, some bronze sculptures, and replaced the cypress trees along the allee.”

Documented Changes to the Property

The Merritt Mansion has undergone a series of alterations and additions. In 1962 a one-story loggia at the south façade was demolished and replaced with a modernistic two-story addition that wraps a portion of the west façade. In 1964 the most significant alteration occurred when the original one-story, semi-circular Ionic portico and flanking pergolas on the west-facing elevation were replaced with a continuous second-story balcony. This second-story balcony was then replaced in 1967 by a two-story, semicircular Ionic portico and divided staircase. In 1967, both the East Garden and the Italian Garden were modified by the landscape architectural firm of Eckbo, Dean, Austin, & Williams (EDAW). A wooden bridge and bronze sculptures were added to the existing sunken pool in the East Garden. A new reflecting pool and sculpture were added to the Italian Garden. Finally, at an unknown date, a flat-roofed pavilion was added to the roof terrace; by the mid 1970's, this pavilion and the terrace balustrade had been removed and a clay tile roof had been constructed over the terrace.

In 1997, during the property's evaluation as part of the Historic Resources Survey for the West Gateway Specific Plan, evaluators determined that the alterations to the building made it ineligible for designation under local criterion C, and ascribed the building the equivalent of an NHRP Status Code of 6L (Determined ineligible for local listing or designation through local government review process; may warrant special consideration in local planning). In their analysis, the evaluator's stated, "Alterations to

the Hulett Merritt house have diminished its architectural significance, however its eastern façade, and landscape setting convey the estate character of the original property.”

During the re-evaluation of the property that occurred as part of the Ambassador West Project Final Environmental Impact Report (December, 2006), it was found that the Hulett C. Merritt Mansion did meet:

“California Register criterion 2 for its association with Hulett C. Merritt, and met criterion 3 for the high artistic value of its interior features and space; because of the quality of its Italian Renaissance Revival design by architect William F. Thomson; and because the east and north faces, the east yard, and much of the interior spaces have retained integrity.”

Recent visual evaluation by City Staff confirms the findings in the Final Environmental Impact Report and supports the designation of the primary residence and the East Garden.

Current Condition, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property is intact and in good condition on the exterior, although showing some localized signs of deterioration and wear. It is functioning as a leasing office for new multi-family development occurring adjacent to the property. The owner has been informed about the Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) program, and has expressed interest in submitting an application by the May 2, 2016 deadline.

Historical Overview

History of the Neighborhood & Site

The historic context statement for the Ambassador College Site, prepared as part of the “Historic Resources Survey for the West Gateway Specific Plan Area” describes the neighborhood in detail, stating:

“Since the late nineteenth century, South Orange Grove Boulevard and the neighboring streets, has been the location of one of Pasadena’s most affluent residential enclaves. The city’s best-known architects and landscape architects designed houses and gardens for individuals who spent their winters in Pasadena away from the hard climates of their permanent residences in the Midwest and East Coast. For many of these seasonal visitors, Pasadena eventually became their year-round domicile. This demographic pattern

continued as the basis for development along South Orange Grove Boulevard into the 1920's."

This established pattern would change with the introduction of two distinct multi-family developments in the 1920's (Villa Francesca and Grove Manor), and the post-war world would elaborate on the multi-family housing trend. In 1946, the purchase of the Fowler Estate (363 Grove Street) by Herbert Armstrong, the leader of the "Radio Church of God" initiated the consolidation of the parcels that would eventually become Ambassador College and from the years 1957-1966 the Church consolidated parcels that would eventually make up the entire Ambassador College site.

In 1990, Ambassador College closed as an academic institution, but the Worldwide Church of God continued to utilize campus facilities for church operations and the Ambassador Auditorium for worship services. In May of 2005, the Planning and Community Development Department received a Pre-Development Application submitted by the Ambassador Acquisitions Coalition Partners II, LLC (AACP2), to be referred to as Ambassador West. In the following months the City received applications from Ambassador West's representative Dorn Platz, for a tentative and final tract map, an Adjustment Permit, a CUP for Senior Housing, and Transfer of Development Rights. These entitlements were considered collectively and approved by City Council on April 2, 2007 along with certification of a Final Environmental Impact Report. Current development under construction on the former campus is a result of this entitlement process and the construction of new multi-family project on the former Ambassador site was analyzed and approved by this and subsequent entitlement applications.

Beaux Arts Architecture

According to the analysis prepared by Historic Resources Group:

"Beaux Arts (or Beaux Arts Classicism) appeared in Los Angeles beginning in the late 1890's. This style is one of many based on the principals of the Parisian architecture school L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, established in late 18th century France as the successor to the royal academies of painting, sculpture, and architecture. L'Ecole des Beaux Arts dominated all discussion of architecture during the 19th century, guiding the design and placement of major public buildings throughout Paris. The Beaux Arts style became popular in the United States as a result of its prominence at several expositions, including the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), and later the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco (1915). The popularity of the Beaux Arts approach to architecture in the United States at this time was also characteristic of the fact that architecture was becoming increasingly professional and specialized. American architectural schools modeled themselves after

the traditional education methods of their European counterparts, just as Americans used their wealth to construct European style buildings.”

Period Revival Estate Gardens

In the early 1900s, Pasadena had an extraordinary collection of fine residential architecture and designed gardens. Gardening was a popular pursuit among city residents of all economic strata, with features on gardening and gardens appearing in the Pasadena Star-News regularly during this period.

The local interest in garden design among Pasadenans reflected the ongoing discourse among Southern California designers, including architects and landscape architects, regarding the creation of a regional design identity unique to Southern California. With its similarities in climate, designers naturally looked toward the Mediterranean region as well as to historical European and English gardens for precedent examples. As a result, several distinct architectural styles with broadly European or historical origins emerged during this period.

The influence of the 1915 Exposition in San Diego and the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco (also in 1915), which showcased lavish interpretations of Italian, Spanish, and Mexican architecture, helped to solidify the development of a distinctive architectural identity, one that is also exemplified in the architecture of residence.

Fine Pasadena gardens in period revival styles often included specific garden rooms, central water elements, and terraces that introduced grade changes into the experience of the garden and afforded the opportunity for scenic vistas and views. Often used to define interior spaces, common vegetation included thickly planted beds, shrubs, lawns, or allées of native Californian species or other plants from the Mediterranean region. Constructed hardscape elements included walled enclosures, stairways, pergolas, or a balustrade to define garden boundaries.

Hulett C. Merritt (1872-1956)

Hulett C. Merritt was born in Duluth, Minnesota, the son of Lewis J. and Eunice Merritt. After graduating from business college at 16, he was taken into full partnership in the real estate and investment banking business created by his father under the name L.J. Merritt & Son. Within three years, the firm became the largest investment house in the upper Midwest. With his father and others he developed Lake Superior Consolidated Mines and built the Duluth, Missabe, and Northern Railway. At the age of 21, he became director of the railway. In 1901, he sold his interests in the mines and railroads to U.S. Steel, becoming a multi-millionaire at the age of 29. Hulett Merritt's parents had moved to Pasadena in 1897, and Merritt's business interests became focused on the west coast, where he acquired 70% of the stock of the United States Gas and Power Company, and became responsible for installing the gas and electric systems in 17 beach cities from Santa Barbara to San Diego. He also began the Spring Street

Construction Company in Los Angeles, through which he built the marble Merritt Building, on the corner of Eighth and Broadway in Los Angeles. These ventures likely led to Merritt's relocation to Pasadena.

In 1903, Hulett Merritt purchased 2.5 acres of property on South Orange Grove Boulevard, what would become "Millionaire's Row", when the area was being developed with large mansions as some of America's wealthiest industrialists relocated to the west. With considerable fortunes made in industries such as oil, lumber, and steel, the residents of Millionaires' Row constructed grand estates typically inspired by European precedents. Millionaires' Row property owners included brewer Adolphus Busch of Anheuser-Busch brewery; U.S. Steel's Hulett Merritt; Standard Oil's Edward Harkness; and William Wrigley, the chewing gum magnate from Chicago. Hulett C. Merritt and his family counted themselves among this esteemed group. Following construction of the house at 380 West Green Street (formerly 100 South Orange Grove Boulevard), he lived there for over 45 years, during which time his family's activities were followed in the local newspapers. He was well known for his extensive art collection, as one of the founders of the Pasadena Automobile Club, as well as the owner of the Tagus Ranch in Tulare County, California, one of the state's largest ranches. Merritt served as president, vice president, or a member of the board for over one hundred businesses or associations after moving to California and maintained offices in Pasadena, Duluth, and New York. According to the publication *Pasadena Community Book*, Merritt was the first man in the world to lay a 110-pound steel railroad rail, the first to seat a record for miles of railroad track laid in a day, installed the first air brakes on freight cars, and was the first to dispatch trains by telephone. Merritt, like many of his contemporaries was the subject of several lawsuits. The most infamous incident was at the end of World War I, when he was living in Pasadena. He was accused of hoarding 500 pounds of sugar in violation of the Lever Act. He was convicted by two federal courts, but appealed to the Supreme Court, which reversed his conviction. Hulett C. Merritt died in January, 1956 at the age of 83.

William F. Thompson (1859-1948)

According to the analysis performed by Historic Resources Group:

"William Fullerton Thompson was born in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. He and his family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota by 1870. In 1881, he married Jessie Edith Murray. Thompson and his wife and children moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1905 where he practiced architecture until 1922. Thompson many have moved to the area 'specifically to serve as the Merritt family architect,' as he designed four mansions for the Merritt family on or around South Orange Grove Boulevard. Other prominent Pasadena commissions include houses at 969 South Madison Avenue and 989 South El Molino Avenue. Thompson died in Los Angeles in 1948, at the age of 88."

ANALYSIS:

The Merritt Mansion and East Garden at 380 West Green Street are eligible for designation under Criterion B, (PMC 17.62.040(C)(2)(b)), which states:

[The property] is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the region, State, or nation.

Under criterion B, the house and East Garden at 380 West Green Street are significant because of their association with Hulett C. Merritt, a significant figure in the early 20th century steel and railroad industry, and an active Pasadena citizen. The Merritt Mansion is intricately tied to Merritt's productive life and career as he had the mansion built for himself and his family and owned it until his death. Many of the distinguishing events which defined Hulett C. Merritt as locally significant including his maintenance of an office in Pasadena and his leadership in a variety of local businesses including Spring Street Construction in Los Angeles all occurred between the years 1903 when he purchased his parcel in Pasadena until 1956, the time of his death. His significance takes on a national aspect when taken in context with the caliber of industrialists that developed property along South Orange Grove Boulevard, including nationally significant figures like Adolphus Busch and William Wrigley.

The Merritt Mansion and East Garden at 380 West Green Street are also eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC 17.62.040(C)(2)(c)), which states:

[The property] is exceptional in the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style, or method of construction, or that is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the region, State, or nation, or that possesses high artistic values that are of regional, State-wide or national significance.

The Merritt Mansion is an exceptional embodiment of large-scale, single-family construction in the Beaux Arts style, demonstrating many of the character-defining features of the style including symmetrical facade presentation, a flat or low pitched roof, wall surfaces with decorative garlands, floral patterns or cartouches, and facades with quoins, pilasters or columns. The East Garden is an exceptional example of landscape design from this period and the modifications designed by the firm of Eckbo, Dean, Austin, and Williams are of the highest quality and have acquired their own significance.

It has architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building and garden are in their original location.
- Design: The building retains a large extent of its exterior character-defining features. Although the additions to the south and west façade have impacted original material, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance. The garden is also largely intact, and those modifications designed by EDAW have acquired their own significance.
- Setting: The original setting has been altered by the property's incorporation into the Ambassador College Campus, and subsequent, ongoing development. Although the property retains some important features including the East Garden, it no longer retains integrity of setting.
- Materials: The Merritt Mansion retains a majority of its exterior materials including its clay tile roofing, cement plaster wall finish, cast stone entablature, classical detailing and wood sash windows. The retention of the central, shallow staircase, the wide landings, the low-scale decorative garden walls and urns demonstrates the integrity of the garden. Both the house and the garden retain their integrity of materials.
- Workmanship: The building demonstrates the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the craft of the architect, William F. Thompson.
- Feeling: The property very clearly expresses the characteristics of large-scale estate style development that distinguished South Orange Grove Boulevard at the turn of the century. The integration of crafted landscapes and high quality architecture in an almost pastoral environment can still be perceived and as such it retains integrity of feeling.
- Association: The property is clearly documented as being associated with the productive periods of Hulett C. Merritt's life as an industrialist and leading Pasadena citizen. That association remains intact.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under both criteria B and C.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan Land Use Element – Guiding Principle 2: "Pasadena's historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena's unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource;" and Goal 8: "Preservation and enhancement of Pasadena's cultural and historic buildings, landscapes, streets and districts as valued assets and important representations of its past and a source of community identity, and social, ecological, and economic vitality."

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Class 8 exemptions consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or

protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

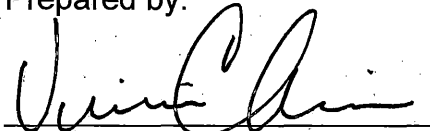
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted the local Mills Act ordinance and acknowledged that a result of this program, the reduced property tax amount which comes out of the City's local share amount from the State, is a small fraction of the City's overall property tax revenue.

Respectfully submitted,




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Attachments (5):

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application
- C. Historic Resources Group Analysis (including Sanborn Maps and Historic Building Diagram)
- D. Current Photographs
- E. Effects of Historic Designation