



# Agenda Report

December 5, 2022

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Planning and Community Development Department

**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE JAMES L. LEE RESIDENCE LOCATED AT 673 SOUTH LOS ROBLES AVENUE AS A LANDMARK**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15308, Class 8, pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class, and therefore, there are no unusual circumstances;
2. Find that the James L. Lee Residence located at 673 South Los Robles Avenue meets Criterion "C" as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 it is a locally significant, intact example of a hybridized high-style residence consisting of Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, and an increasingly rare example of an extant 19<sup>th</sup> century structure that is original to the city and in its original location;
3. Adopt the resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 673 South Los Robles Avenue, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the Declaration of Landmark Designation for 673 South Los Robles Avenue, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

On October 18, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the James L. Lee Residence at 673 South Los Robles Avenue as a Landmark under Criterion "C" of PMC Section 17.62.040.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### The Site

The property is located on a relatively flat, rectangular-shaped, lot on the west side of South Los Robles Avenue, between East California Boulevard and Fillmore Street; to the immediate west of the property is Langford Alley. The house is located within a single-family zoning district, with an existing surrounding context of single-family residences.

### Exterior Features of the Buildings

This two-story single-family residence is an excellent, intact, example of a Folk Victorian house with Queen Anne style architectural detailing. The house features a full-width front porch with classical tapered Doric columns and simple square peg porch balusters, which can also be found at the Juliette balcony of the front-facing dormer, and the north side gable. A hipped roof caps the first floor, before transitioning into the upper floor which is capped by a steeply-pitched cross gable roof. The asymmetrical front facade also features a bay window, with a full-height bay also found at the south elevation gable, and another bay located at the north-facing gable of the upper floor. The house features multi-textured walls consisting of a Rustic-V siding at the first floor and half-hexagonal wood shake shingles at the upper floor. Double-hung wood windows are located throughout the house, with a divided lite hopper window located at the north end of the front façade within the front porch, as well as a picture window with divided lite transom located at the front of the porch bay window. Arroyo stone clads the piers of the porch steps and the exposed foundation wall which is capped by a simple wood waterboard.

An original 1-1/2 story carriage house is located at the northwest of the rear yard. The carriage house has a side-gabled roof with a single shed-roof dormer with a pair of multi-lite wood windows, is clad in matching Rustic-V siding and features a barn-style sliding door as well as a non-original roll-up door.

### Documented Changes to the Property

The house and carriage house retain integrity, however, there have been some alterations through their respective lifespans. Changes to the house include the replacement of the original wood shake roof with composition shingles, and the construction of a non-original wood pergola attached to the south elevation of the house. In 2021, a two-story addition was constructed at the rear of the house.

Changes to the carriage house include alterations to its doors and door openings, and the demolition of attached appurtenant structures. An original detached building, possibly the original outhouse, located directly to the rear of the house has been removed.

### Victorian-Era Architecture<sup>1,2</sup>

Relative to American architectural history, the Victorian era refers to the architectural styles that grew from the last decades of Britain's Queen Victoria's reign, particularly the period of 1860 to 1900. According to the "Late 19th and Early 20th Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena" context statement, "the Queen Anne style was developed by Scottish architect Richard Norman Shaw, which referenced medieval building forms with dramatic, steeply-pitched gabled roofs, asymmetrical plans, and multi-textured walls, multi-colored walls" (p. 13), with four common subtypes including Spindlework, Free Classic, Half-timbered, and Patterned Masonry (McAlester, pp. 345-346).

The Folk Victorian style was developed as a low-cost housing solution consisting of simplified rectangular or L-shaped forms, modeled after the Folk House style, and facades adorned with decorative, often off-the-shelf detailing reflective of Victorian Era aesthetics and new woodcraft available from burgeoning technologies. Identifying features of this house style include porches with spindlework, patterned trim, and cornice line brackets. There are five subtypes of the Folk Victorian which include the Gabled Front and Wing; Front-Gabled Roof; Side-Gabled Roof, One-Story; Side-Gabled Roof, Two-Story; and Pyramidal (McAlester, pp 397-98).

### The James L. Lee House

The James L. Lee house exhibits a hybridized Victorian-era architecture consisting of the Folk Victorian style in form, superimposed with Queen Anne style detailing. The original volumetric patterning of the house consists of a square ground floor with hipped roof that transitions into the second floor which is capped by a steeply-pitched cross-gable roof, evocative of Folk Victorian massing. Additional identifiers of Folk Victorian style found on the house include the decorative corbels at the front gables, and the full-width front porch. Queen Anne identifiers found on the house include the classical Doric columns at the front porch, the simple square peg balusters found at the porch and balcony railings, the varied wall texture of the Rustic-V siding at the first floor and the half-hexagonal shingles at the upper floor, the protruding bay window volumes, the steep pitch of the upper floor gables, the asymmetrical composition of windows and the upper floor massing, and the front-facing dormer. These stylistic identifiers can all be considered as the character-defining features of the property, including the detached rear yard carriage house. Given that the house has Doric columns, and squared balusters, along with its upper-floor composition, the James L. Lee House evokes the

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<sup>1</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Architecture in Pasadena; pp. 13

<sup>2</sup> A Field Guide to American Houses, McAlester; pp. 345-346; 397-398

stylings of the Queen Anne “Free Classic” subtype, and the Folk Victorian “Gable Front and Wing” subtype.

#### **ANALYSIS:**

The hybrid Folk Victorian and Queen Anne style single-family residence, also known as the James L. Lee house, and its associated carriage house, are eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2, which states:

*[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or possesses artistic values of significance to the City.*

Under Criterion C, the single-family residence is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of a hybridized high-style residence consisting of Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, and an increasingly rare example of a pre-20<sup>th</sup> century structure that is original to the City, and in its original location. The building was previously evaluated as eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as a contributor to the eligible, non-designated Madison Heights Landmark District. The property has a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as follows:

- **Location:** The single-family residence and original detached carriage house are in their original locations. Thus the location remains intact.
- **Design:** The building retains its original form, massing and exterior configuration along its primary front and side facades. Though a two-story addition was constructed in 2021 at the rear of the house, the new construction was designed to be compatible and subservient to the original house, leaving the front portions of the side elevations intact; no alterations were executed to the front of the house, most of its sides or to its original form. Furthermore, the primary structure retains clearly discernable character-defining features of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles. Thus the design remains intact.
- **Setting:** The property was developed during the transitional period of the late 1800s, towards the end of the Victorian era, and the progression towards the Arts and Crafts Period. The house was also one of the first developed properties of the Langford Tract, as evidenced by the earliest Sanborn Map of 1910. Like this property, this particular block of South Los Robles Avenue was developed as a single-family residential neighborhood, and remains single-family residential in nature today. Thus the setting remains intact.
- **Materials:** The residence is composed of Rustic-V wood siding at the base, half-octagonal shake shingles at the upper floor, Arroyo stone foundation walls,

double-hung, fixed and hopper wood windows, wood balustrades and wood Doric columns. These materials are original, and remain extant today. Therefore, the materials are intact.

- Workmanship: The residence retains nearly all of its original exterior finishes, and retains its overall building form visible from the street. Though the architect and builder of this house are unknown, it is an excellent example of high-style residential architecture from the 1800s, and reflects a superior craftsmanship brought on by the local phenomenon of an expanding craftsman construction trade, increasing availability of lumber, and local wood mills during the late 1800s. With the quality of the house's craftsmanship evidenced by the carefully-detailed wood exterior still existing, the workmanship remains intact.
- Feeling: The property retains significant criteria of integrity, and therefore still evokes the feeling of Pasadena's late 1800s transition to a year-round single-family residential community along with the characteristics of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles. Therefore, the feeling is intact.
- Association: The single-family property at 673 South Los Robles Avenue retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and therefore, continues to convey its association with transitional period of the Late 1800s and evoke the characteristics of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles. Therefore, its association remains intact.

Based on the above, the single-family residential property, including the primary residence and original carriage house, retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The residence is a prime example of a high-style hybridized residential design consisting of the Folk Victorian and Queen Anne architectural styles, and it is an increasingly rare extant structure from the 1800s reflective of the City's transitional period during that time. For further, more detailed information on the history and significance of the James L. Lee residence, please refer to the staff report for the Historic Preservation Commission meeting, dated October 18, 2022, in Attachment I.

#### **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:**

The proposed designation qualifies for a categorical exemption pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines. 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. As 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: (9)

- A. Application and Historical Documentation
- B. Vicinity Maps
- C. Tract and Parcel Maps
- D. Sanborn Maps
- E. Building Description Blanks & Archive Building Permit Records
- F. Historical Photographs
- G. Current Photographs
- H. Effects of Historical Designation
- I. Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report (October 18, 2022)