



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK (DHP2023-00195)
701 WEST HOLLY STREET

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment such as designation of historic resources;
2. Find that the single-family residence at 701 West Holly Street meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City. It is a locally significant example of a French Norman style single-family residence designed by locally significant architectural firm Postle & Postle; and,
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the property at 701 West Holly Street as a landmark.

BACKGROUND:

On June 5, 2023, property owners Steven Davison & John Palmero, submitted an application for Landmark designation of the building at 701 West Holly Street. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building qualifies for designation as a landmark.

DESCRIPTION:

Property Data

- Address: 701 West Holly Street, Pasadena
- Location: Northeast side of west Holly Street, between Arroyo Drive and North Arroyo Boulevard.
- Date of Construction Completion: 1926 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Postle & Postle (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Wright & Robert (Source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: Susanna B. Holmes
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: approx. 11,323 square-feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 2,416 square-feet (source: County Assessor)

Architectural Description:

The Site:

The subject property is an irregularly shaped lot on the north side of West Holly Street, between Arroyo Drive and North Arroyo Boulevard, east of the Holly Street Bridge over the Arroyo Seco. There are no immediately neighboring houses on either side of the property. Across the street, there are houses and apartments that sit lower than the street and are not fully visible from the subject property. To the right of the house is a landscaped area that transitions into the naturally growing hill into which the house is partially built. The landscaped section includes remnants of stone steps leading up the hill and small wooden bridges. The steps historically connected the subject property to the adjacent uphill property at 141 N. Grand Avenue, but have since been removed in part due to deterioration or disconnection from the uphill property. There is a circular stone fountain with several statues within the front yard. The surrounding neighborhood contains other single-family homes as well as multi-family residences.

Exterior Features of the Building:

The residence is irregular in plan and has an asymmetrical façade that remains largely untouched as it was originally designed, based on a review of historical plans and a photograph provided with the application. It is three stories high and has a tower feature at the center of the façade reflecting its French Norman style. Half of the building is recessed behind the central tower and the other projects in front of it. The house has a hipped roof with a steep pitch that is finished with dimensional fiberglass shingles, and has shed inset dormers. The conical roof of the tower is topped with a spire. The south side of the building includes a two-story volume with a flat roof that is topped with a covered patio. The north side of the site also includes a two-story flat roofed volume that sits behind the street elevation. At the north side of the property there is an exterior side stair that provides access from the rear patio to the ground level. The site formerly contained various walkways and stairs that connected to the property at 141 N. Grand Avenue. Remnants of the stairs and walkways exist at the south side of the site, which include partial concrete decorative stair walls and steps. The rear of the building provides access to an open-air narrow patio that rests against a retaining wall holding up the hillside beyond.

The house has smooth stucco exterior cladding that is ornamented with half-timbering, dentils, and a wooden balcony supported by corbels. Around the shallowly arched opening for the entry alcove, which is at the base of the tower element, there is plaster applied ornamentation as well as a plaster cartouche above the portal. The front door is a rectangular opening and has iron detailing in the middle of the wooden frame. Most of the windows and doors appear to be original to the house. The punched wood windows are both casement and six-over-six double-hung operation with simple sills, shallow recesses and no trim, with the exception of a second-floor window above the entry portal which has an articulated plaster surround. One pair of six lite casement windows on the first floor has wooden shutters. Two pairs of multi-paned French doors provide access to the balcony. There is an attached one car garage on the front façade of the house with original arched wood carriage style doors. On the right side is an uncovered outdoor patio with a low wall. Along the front of the property, a stucco and stone retaining wall separates the hill from the sidewalk. On the rear wall is a stucco chimney.

Documented Changes to the Property:

The property has not undergone any major exterior changes since it was originally built in 1926. Various repairs and in-kind replacements have occurred, though minor in nature. The building underwent a re-roof in 2004, which changed the roofing materials to a dimensional fiberglass shingle. Based on the Building Description Blank, the original roofing was wood shingles. Historically, the subject property was an extension of the adjacent El Roble Estate (141 North Grand Avenue, a designated landmark), with walkways and stairways connecting the two properties, which have subsequently been removed or otherwise modified.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans:

The exterior of the building is experiencing various levels of deterioration due to deferred maintenance over the years, though it still is used as a single-family residence. The new current owners are in the process of applying for the Mills Act Program, with extensive rehabilitation projects planned for the property.

Historical Overview:

French Norman Style:

The French Norman style is not extensively discussed in the City of Pasadena's "Residential Period Revival Architecture and Development in Pasadena from 1915-1942" Historic Context Report (the similar Chateausque and French Provincial styles are noted in the report), but it is outlined in detail in the SurveyLA Citywide Historic Context Statement "Sub-Theme: French Norman, 1919-1940" thematic section, as follows:

French Norman was used primarily as a style in single-family residential neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The least decorative of the styles within the Period Revival theme, French Norman buildings were related to vernacular examples in Europe seen overseas by veterans of the First World War and reimagined in early films. The French Norman style usually involved one or two design elements on a

relatively minimalist building. With only a few distinguishing features, such as a conical tower shaped entrance or steeply pitched roof, a simple, single-story L-shaped house with stucco cladding became French Norman in style... Combinations of materials, including stucco, half-timbering, stone, and wood shingles were meant to suggest development over time. More complex French Norman designs often feature a prominent round tower with a high, conical roof serving as an entry portal. The tower generally houses the principal doorway. Decorative half-timbering, a design element shared by medieval French and English vernacular building styles, often accents smooth stucco elevations. French Norman style buildings have tall and steeply pitched gabled or hipped roofs that appear disproportionate to the height of the wall below...Like all Period Revival styles, French Norman buildings were intended to be picturesque and emotionally evocative of a time and place most people were not familiar with firsthand.

A Field Guide to American Houses by Virginia Savage McAlester refers to the style represented by the subject property as “Towered French Eclectic” with a period of significance between 1915 and 1945 and notes that this subtype “is loosely patterned after similar farmhouses from the province of Normandy in northwestern France; Eclectic buildings often called these Norman Cottages.” McAlester also confirms the statements above that the appearance of French architectural styles in America in the early 20th Century can be attributed to soldiers, including architects and builders, that served in France in World War I.

The character-defining features of early 20th Century French Norman architectural style are:

- Conical tower housing principal entry
- Balconies and second-story overhangs
- Dormers and through-the-cornice windows
- Half-timbering
- Irregular massing and fenestration
- May be associated with important architects and/or landscape designers
- Roofs with long pitches, may be steeply pitched, hipped, clipped
- Varied roofline height
- Roof materials of flat tile, slate, stone or thatch
- Stucco, brick and stone exteriors
- Village feel
- White or lightly colored walls

Character-defining features are those visual aspects and physical features or elements constructed during the property’s period of significance that give the building its character. In general, a property that retains its character defining features continues to convey its significance and therefore retains integrity as an historic resource. Removal or alteration of just one character-defining feature does not necessarily alter the integrity of an historic resource. Impacts to historic integrity can result from a single major change or from many incremental changes over time.

Although not discussed extensively in the Period Revival Historic Context Report, there are many examples of French Eclectic, including French Norman, style houses in Pasadena and many have been designated as historic resources, most of which are within historic and landmark districts. Individually designated French Eclectic houses include 430 Madeline Drive and 855 Rosalind Drive (Cravens Estate and Everett Phipps Babcock House, respectively, both Individual Landmarks).

Postle & Postle:

Postle & Postle (nee the Postle Co.), the architect of the house, was a father and son architectural firm formed in the 1920s. David Postle, Sr. began his architecture career in Chicago in the 1860s and moved to the Los Angeles area in the 1920s before partnering with his son, David Postle, Jr. Together, they were a successful design and contracting firm that worked to meet the demand for luxury housing by the region's elite and wealthy. The company specialized in interpreting and applying popular styles of the time, including but not limited to Chateausque, Beaux Arts, Spanish Colonial, Tudor Revival, Mission Revival, and Regency. Together, the firm designed numerous commissions throughout Pasadena and the larger Los Angeles area, many of which have been designated as historic resources. Pasadena commissions from the firm include: 529 S. El Molino Ave.; 545 S. Euclid Ave. (National Register Individual Property); 141 N. Grand Ave. (Individual Landmark); and 1133 N. Marengo Ave. (Landmark District).

Susanna B. Holmes, the "Silver Queen":

Susanna Bransford Holmes, the original owner of the house, was known as the "Silver Queen." The daughter of a Confederate Army Captain, she gained a name for herself after marrying a Utah mining engineer, who discovered the famed "Silver King Mine" that would later bring him and his wife a plethora of wealth. Born in 1859, Susanna grew up in Missouri prior to the Civil War and spent her early adulthood traveling throughout California until she settled in Park City, Utah in the 1880s. She married her first husband, Albion Emery, a postmaster turned mining engineer, in 1884. After his discovery of the "Silver King Mine" in the early 1890s, their fortunes became prosperous and allowed them a lavish lifestyle. Albion died in 1894, after which Susanna entered into a pattern of becoming a widower and then re-marrying, moving around frequently. Susanna eventually settled in Pasadena in the 1920s, overseeing the El Roble estate at 141 N. Grand Avenue as her own. She hired the Postle Co. (Postle & Postle) to drastically change the style and appearance of the home from a Shingle style residence to a Tudor Revival estate. After her relocation to Pasadena, she had the subject property at 701 West Holly Street constructed as an extension of the estate for family members.

ANALYSIS:

The single-family residence at 701 West Holly Street is 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.

Generally, in order to qualify under Criterion C, a property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. It must retain high integrity of design, materials and workmanship that convey its period of construction. While most buildings undergo alteration over time, these alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance of the building.

Under Criterion C, the building at 701 West Holly Street is significant because it is an intact example of a French Norman style single-family residence, designed by Postle & Postle. The building has a high level of 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 other site features are in their original locations.
- Design: The building retains the majority of its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its complex massing, exterior stucco cladding, original fenestration and exterior materials, roof form, and entryway.
- Setting: The single-family neighborhood, including the El Roble estate built 24 years prior to the subject property but converted into a Tudor Revival style three years prior, are intact, though the construction dates in the vicinity range from 1902 to 1986.
- Materials: The building retains a majority of its original exterior materials. The roofing material has been replaced with fiberglass shingles, which are dimensional and therefore a compatible replacement for the original wood shingles. This change in materials alone does not diminish the building's ability to convey its significance because the residence retains a majority of its original exterior materials and the replacement roof materials are similar to the original materials.
- Workmanship: The building retains the majority of its exterior materials and features that reflect the craftsmanship of early-20th century single-family design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the French Norman architectural style and evokes the feeling of period revival single-family residential development Pasadena.
- Association: The property at 701 West Holly Street retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to convey its association with early-20th century single-family residential development in Pasadena.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The building retains all of its original character-defining features, including three-story configuration with attached garage, asymmetrical stepped back massing, central conical tower with recessed entry, stucco cladding, half-timbering, single and double punched window openings with wood multi-light windows, front-facing second story projecting balcony with French doors, original arched wood garage doors, and steeply pitched hipped roof form.

As a work of the firm Postle & Postle, the subject property represents a full expression of the French Norman architectural style. The firm oversaw commissions both locally in Pasadena and

in the greater Los Angeles area, a number of which have been designated either individually or within historic districts. The firm specialized in various revival styles carried out in both commercial and residential commissions and the subject property is a significant example of their designs applied to a residential property on a unique hillside site.

Although the property was developed as an extension to the El Roble Estate (141 N. Grand Avenue) by Susanna B. Holmes, it is not directly associated with her personal or professional life such that it would be significant under Criterion B (association with the productive lives of significant people).

Contributing features to this designation include the main building with attached garage, front retaining walls (both stucco and Arroyo stone) along the front of the house and adjacent vacant attached lot, and extant remnants of pathways, bridges and stairways that previously connected the property to El Roble.

CONCLUSION:

The building at 701 West Holly Street qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of a French Norman single-family residence, designed by local architectural firm Postle & Postle.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Development Department

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Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application & Historical Documentation (Building Description Blank; Sanborn Map)
- C. Current Photographs, Original Blueprints and Historical Photograph
- D. Effects of Historic Designation