

MHH Presents the 17th Annual Home Tour: “Master Builders” of Mission Hills



Nathan Rigdon home to be featured at the 17th Annual Home Tour. Photo by Sharon Lieder.

Join MHH on Saturday, September 28, 2024, for our 17th Annual Historic Home Tour. This year’s theme is “Master Builders of Mission Hills,” and the home tour will feature up to six homes in various architectural styles built by early twentieth century Master Builders.

Many of the homes you see today in Mission Hills and other older neighborhoods of San Diego were designed and built, not by trained architects, but by builders who started their careers as carpenters and tradespeople. They learned how to read and draw plans and honed their craft, constructing some of the most beloved bungalows, foursquares, and other types of homes that make up our neighborhood today. These are the unsung heroes of early Mission Hills!

Our tour will feature homes built by some of the most notable builders of the time, including Martin Melhorn, Nathan Rigdon, Morris Irvin, and Alexander Schreiber. These builders often purchased groups of undeveloped lots in new

tracts and built homes on speculation, as well as building custom homes for new residents. Builders such as Martin Melhorn even platted their own small tracts and built entire blocks of new homes. Some used stock plans and added endless variations or came up with entirely new designs based on the popular styles of the day. The lasting beauty and quality of their work has shaped our community and has led the City of San Diego’s Historical Resources Board to designate these builders as “Master Builders.”

Guests on the tour will explore both the exterior and interior of the homes. Docents will provide historical information regarding the homes and answer questions. Attendees will also receive a tour booklet with write-ups on the featured homes and information about the Master Builders.

Advance tickets to the home tour are highly recommended and may be purchased online at <https://www.missionhillsheritage.org/upcoming-events>. Homes may be viewed in any order and will be open from 10 AM until 4 PM. Will Call and ticket sales will be conveniently located, opening at 9:30 AM and closing at 2:30 PM. Only cash and checks will be accepted on tour day.

President’s Post

By Kirk Burgamy, President

Hello Members, Friends and Neighbors,

2024 has proven to be very busy and MHH has responded to many challenges to our mission of preserving our neighborhood that threaten our community as a whole. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our members and gratitude to the Board of Directors for their personal commitment and exceptional support in time and talent in promoting our mission and in combating actions that threaten the historic resources and character of our community and its neighborhoods. My heartfelt “thank you” to all.

The support from your memberships and donations has made it possible to respond to these challenges. Let me summarize a few of these:

Highlights

17th Annual Home Tour	1
President’s Post	1
National Register	3
Melhorn Donation	4
Presidio Park Renovation	6
Annual Membership Meeting	6
Historic Designations	7
Calendar	8
Membership Info	8

President's Post Continued . . .

Arnold & Choates / N Florence Heights Historic District

MHH, as the applicant, is pleased to announce that on July 9, 2024, the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places listed the Arnold & Choates-North Florence Heights Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. The district contains 352 properties, of which 270 are contributing resources.

Historic Designation of the Former Mission Hills Branch Library

I am happy to report some good news with respect to the former library. The following was recently reported in the Sentinel:

A representative of Councilman Whitburn's office stated that according to the Library Department staff, the necessary abatement work has been completed. They are now awaiting the delivery of materials to finalize the remaining work. Once the remaining work is completed, the Library Foundation will commence with the tenant improvements. The Foundation will move forward to reuse the site as a bookstore similar to Warwick's in La Jolla that will include book showings and lectures. New books and gift items will be offered for sale. They also plan to sell artwork by local artists. They are hoping to have everything ready for a grand opening by the holiday season. According to City Librarian/Director Misty Jones, "I am very excited that we have a plan to once again activate this asset in a meaningful way for the community. The Library Shop will add to the literary and cultural offerings in San Diego, and I am thankful for the partnership with Library Foundation SD in making this idea a reality. I look forward to the opening later this year."

Also, I would like to report that this year's historic theme is "Master Builders of Mission Hills". Our May lecture event was well attended, and we had three speakers that highlighted the accomplishment of these Master Builders.

Members and Friends Coffee: We are looking for a resident to host a coffee to show our appreciation to members and to introduce our organization to



Kirk Burgamy, President.

potential new members. If interested, please respond to info@MissionHillsHeritage.org or call us at (619) 497-1193.

Fall Home Tour: We will continue our focus for the 2024 Home Tour Events on the Master Builders of Mission Hills. Our Fall Home Tour will feature several inside-the-home tours associated with these unique builders. We are planning this event for Saturday, September 28th. Stay tuned to our website and email notification regarding event details and registration information. As with all our events, this will be a fundraiser supporting our preservation mission.

Preserving our neighborhood character, charm, and historic resources:

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the various state and local laws, ordinances, and codes that impact our neighborhoods. These include Transportation Priority Areas, Sustainable Development Areas, Complete Communities, lot splitting, 1700 square foot ADUs and junior ADUs, density bonuses, large apartment buildings with little or no parking, and the list goes on.

Most of these programs are out of our control as state and local agendas are being prioritized without

Continued on page 5

Our Mission

To preserve and protect the character, charm, and historic resources of Mission Hills for the education and benefit of the public.

New Mission Hills Historic District Listed on National Register

By Barry E. Hager, Advisory Director

On May 3, 2024, the California State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC) voted unanimously to recommend the Arnold & Choates Addition—North Florence Heights historic district for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Since then, the Keeper of the National Register formally accepted the recommendation and on July 9, 2024, placed the district on the National Register. This action will help protect this remarkably intact enclave of early twentieth century architecture and San Diego history.

The vote was the culmination of a two-year effort led by MHH and community members to create an official historic district for this neighborhood. The district's boundaries generally correspond with the historical boundaries of two contiguous subdivisions—the 1872 Arnold and Choate's Addition and the 1890 North Florence Heights—and encompasses approximately 350 homes and buildings. (See map that accompanies this article.) MHH engaged the consulting firm of Architectural Resources Group (ARG) to assist with drafting the very detailed nomination report while MHH performed outreach to property owners and launched a publicity campaign to apprise the local community of the effort.

The beauty and elegance of early twentieth century architecture is on full display in the district. There is a wide range of architectural styles executed by numerous recognized master builders, including Martin Melhorn, Morris Irvin, Nathan Ridgon and others, yet the district is remarkably cohesive in aesthetic and visual character. And this area has remained remarkably intact, even as many of the surrounding areas have witnessed significant alterations due to redevelopment over the years. Landmarks buildings, such as the Rigdon Block, the Montclair on West Lewis Street, neighborhood churches, and Francis Parker School, have changed little since their construction.

In addition to the fabulous architecture, this neighborhood is also a truly excellent representation of an early streetcar suburb and is one of the best

examples of how the expansion of the electric streetcar service in the early twentieth century shaped development patterns in San Diego. The neighborhood catered to middle-income households, with mostly modest homes on smaller, compact lots, with some larger homes on the fringes. Small-scale commercial, mixed use and institutional buildings—including shops, churches and schools—were woven into the community, supporting the development of the neighborhood.

During the May 3rd hearing, SHRC staff confidently recommended that the SHRC approve the nomination as eligible for listing on the National Register. After that, Barry Hager of MHH and Andrew Goodrich of ARG made presentations in support of the nomination, both highlighting the integrity of and range of architectural styles within the district.

Although housing advocates from other areas of the state spoke in opposition to the nomination, the commissioners rejected the notion that housing issues and real estate forces are relevant to their decision under the applicable rules. Comparatively, Commissioners Janet Hansen, Lee Adams III, and Alan Hess readily recognized the significance of the district as a streetcar suburb and Commissioner Luis Hoyos noted that the nomination was “very carefully written, and very carefully researched.”



Bungalows in the Arnold & Choates Addition--North Florence Heights national register historic district. Photo by Barry E. Hager.

It should be noted that historic districts are not incompatible with new housing. ADUs and Junior ADUs can still be built on properties within such a historic district, regardless of whether the properties are contributors or non-contributors. Additions to existing homes and buildings are also allowed within guidelines.

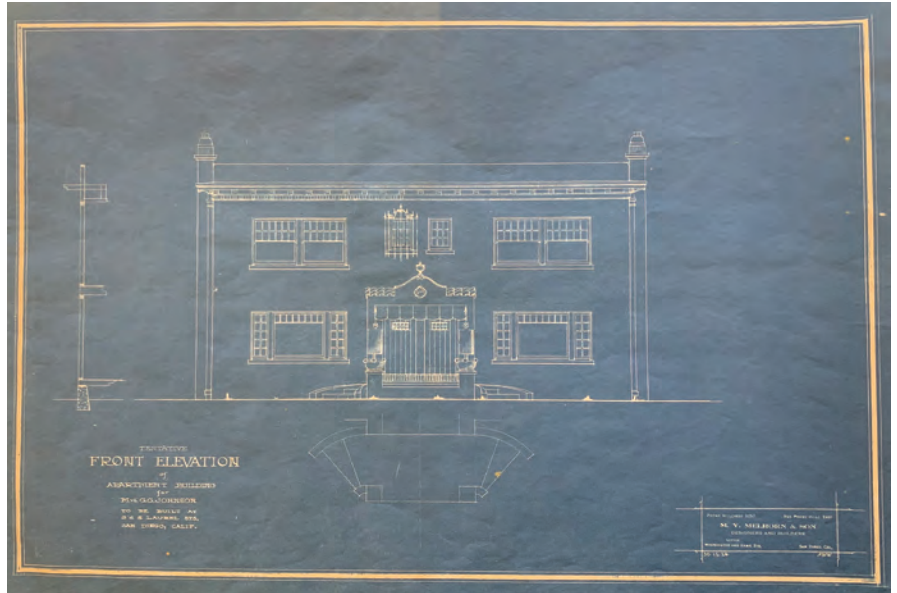
Continued on page 5

Melhorn Blueprint Collection Donated

By Jennifer Machian

March 2024 – MHH recently helped facilitate the donation of multiple historical architectural drawings to the San Diego History Center Research Archives. The drawings, including blueprint floor plans and front elevations, are the works of Martin V. Melhorn, a master builder who built prolifically in Mission Hills and is known for his outstanding Craftsman, Prairie, and Spanish Eclectic style homes.

Until this time, the drawings had been in the possession of Jerry McHenry, Melhorn's great grandson and late principal of Melhorn Construction. McHenry explained that some of the blueprints depict specific homes, but many are "stock homes," meaning the homes were pre-designed. According to McHenry, some of Melhorn's clients would have been shown these pre-designed plans and they may have been modified per the clients' wishes. Otherwise, McHenry says, these stock



Architectural drawing by Martin V. Melhorn.
Photo by Jennifer Machian.

homes could have "ended up anywhere" as spec homes, i.e., Melhorn built them expecting a sale.

Over the years, McHenry has worked to match-up the architectural drawings with their real-world counterparts and has delivered some drawings with addresses to the homeowners—to the homeowners' unexpected delight. The remaining drawings donated to the Archival Collection include a bungalow court, an apartment building, a duplex, and multiple homes.

McHenry also possesses a 1920s conceptual drawing of Alberta Place, a street ending in a culdesac in south Mission Hills that is named in honor of Melhorn's wife, Alberta Melhorn. The drawing reflects the original scope of the tract's intended build-out, with Melhorn's own home at the top of the street flanked by a convex-curved sidewalk that remains so to this day. According to McHenry, despite the numerous tracts that Melhorn developed throughout his career, the Alberta Place tract is the only one for which a concept drawing was commissioned.

Known to the family by his middle-name "Vernon," McHenry says that what Melhorn "loved" was Craftsman homes. "He had a lot of hands-on carpentry work inside, that was kind of his thing," McHenry says.

The donated collection can be viewed by making an appointment at the Research Archives, located on the lower level of the San Diego History Center, 1649 El Prado, Suite 3. Any questions may be emailed to collections@sandiegohistory.org.



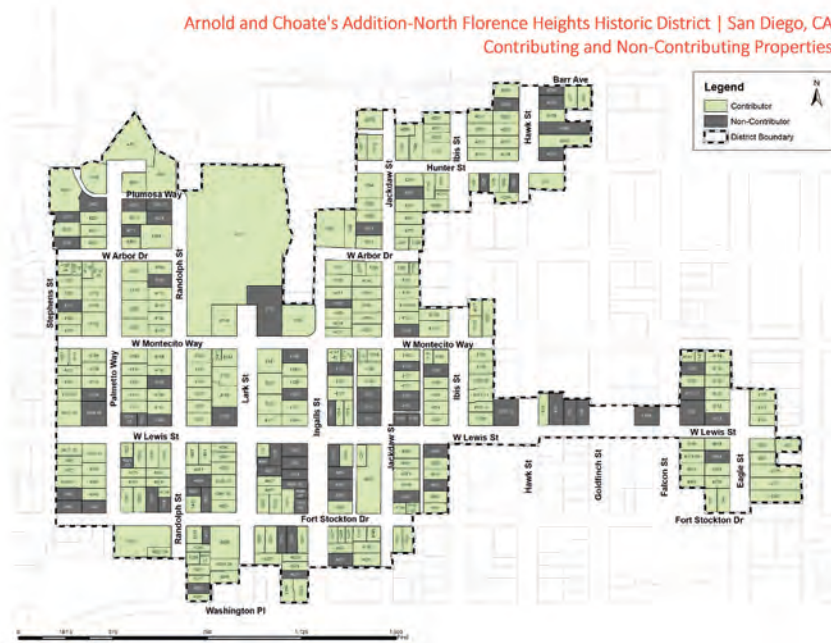
Original concept drawing of Alberta Place. Private collection of Jerry McHenry.
Photo by Jennifer Machian.

National Register Continued . . .

As stated by the State Historic Preservation Officer in a recent letter to district residents announcing the listing, no restrictions are placed upon the property owner regarding “normal use, maintenance, or sale of a property listed in the National Register.” “However, a project that may cause substantial adverse changes in the significance of a registered property may require compliance with local ordinances or the California Environmental Quality Act.” With placement on the National Register secured, in the words of Commissioner Hoyos at the May 3rd hearing, the new

historic district “will continue to delight [future generations.]”

MHH wishes to thank the community for its support of this new historic district—over 50 letters of support were received by the SHRC prior to the hearing. The new district will help preserve the rich architectural history and sense of place that embodies the Mission Hills neighborhood and has drawn generations of residents to the area. We look forward to this newest addition to the historic districts in our community.



President's Post Continued . . .

considering feedback received from residents and voters. Because of these things that are occurring at the state and local level, the Board of Directors believes that our best opportunity to accomplish our preservation mission is by designating historic districts at the National and State level. Currently, there are 12 historic districts and potential historic districts in Mission Hills identified in the 2016 Uptown Community Plan.

So, here's the challenge. The total cost to process these potential historic districts is estimated to be \$300,000 or more which will need to be raised over a four or five year period. Thus, we will be seeking donations at many of our events going forward in support of our efforts to process these historic districts.

In addition, we will continue the advocacy for or against legislation, local codes, and ordinances that are not supportive of our stated mission. The Board of Directors and our many volunteers will be working on the events planned for 2024 and beyond and we request your continued support to protect our special neighborhood for the benefit of future generations of Mission Hills residents and all San Diegans.

Finally, I am grateful for the privilege of representing MHH for the past three years. I am pleased to announce that current Board member Rob Jassoy has offered to take over the reins as your President in October. Rob and his wife Karen have been residents of Mission Hills for over 10 years. I will continue to support Rob and I ask that you support him as you have supported me. Take care and stay safe! See you around the neighborhood!

Kirk Burgamy

Presidio Park Cobblestones Restoration

Mission Hills Heritage is partnering with the San Diego Parks Foundation and San Diego's Department of Parks & Recreation to restore the historic cobblestone curbs and swales of Presidio Park. But we need your donation to make this project a reality!

Constructed in 1929, the historic cobblestone curbs and swales line the winding roads through our beloved Presidio Park. But after 95+ years of use, the cobblestone swales are showing their age. Damage and deferred maintenance have taken a toll.

We now have an opportunity to bring back the cobblestone curbs and swales! Ann Dynes, a founder of the San Diego Parks Foundation, has made a generous matching gift of \$10,000 as seed money for materials and the Department of Parks & Recreation will provide the skilled labor to clean, repair, and restore the curbs and swales. All we need to do is raise a matching amount of at least \$10,000. But the more we raise, the more areas of cobblestone can be restored.



*Presidio Park historic cobblestone curb and swale.
Photo by Barry E. Hager.*

Here is how you can help: PLEASE make an online donation to a dedicated fund set up at the San Diego Parks Foundation for this special project, at www.sandiegoparksfoundation.org. Click on the DONATE button, then under the drop-down menu select "Adopt Presidio Park" and type in comments "Cobblestone Project." Or make a check payable to the San Diego Parks Foundation, 1189 Rosecrans Street, #111, San Diego, CA 92106 and write in the memo "Cobblestone Project." The San Diego Parks Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, and donations are tax deductible.

We hope to continue partnering with the San Diego Parks Foundation and the City for future projects at Presidio Park. Together, we can polish this crown jewel of our community and the City of San Diego.

Annual Membership Meeting

October 19 • 4-6 pm

Location To Be Determined

One of the requirements of our bylaws is to conduct an annual meeting of the members. This is a time to report on activities, to conduct the business of the organization, and to vote on the Board members for the coming year.

This is also a time for an update on what has happened over the last year and to reflect on our achievements and challenges. Our Board and volunteers have been busy

with the processing of a national register district and other advocacy.

One of the special items is to present the Carl & Betty Hauck Heritage Preservation Award. This award is to acknowledge people who have undertaken projects that restore and preserve structures in Mission Hills. You'll want to join us to hear who receives this honor.

For members only. Additional details will be sent as we get closer to the date. Please plan to attend!

Spring 2024 Historic Designations in Mission Hills



Photo courtesy of SOHO.

4227 Jackdaw Street

The John S. Graves Spec House #2, was designated under Historic Resources Board (HRB) Criterion C for architecture in March 2024. Built in 1921, the home embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Craftsman style and retains integrity from its date of construction. The designation excludes the 1985 and 2019-2020 additions and the attached ADU.



Photo courtesy of Apartments.com.

3783 Pioneer Place

The Alwyn and Emily Patterson House (1915), designed in the Craftsman style and designated for its Craftsman style architecture under HRB Criterion C. Located in South Mission Hills, this home was designated in March 2024. Stylistic elements retaining integrity include, among others, a cross-gabled roof, original front door, and wood shingle siding. The designation excludes the detached two-story 1928 apartment building, the detached 2021 garage, and the 2021 two-story addition.

4343 Trias Street

The Pear and Helen Pearson Spec House #1, built in 1928. The home meets HRB Criteria C for its architecture, and D, as a notable work of Master Builder Pear Pearson. The home embodies and retains distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival style as well as integrity. Original elements retaining integrity include, among others, an arched focal window, wood-paneled entry door, and decorative iron window grills. The designation includes the original garage with maid's quarters, living room ceiling beams, and living room fireplace. The designation excludes the 1969 addition.



Photo courtesy of SOHO.

MISSION HILLS HERITAGE

Call for Volunteers!

Interested In Joining Us? If you're passionate about historic preservation, we'd love to have you join our team!

For more information, send us an email at info@missionhillsheritage.org

We Need Help With:

- Events Committee
- Graphic Design
- Newsletter Editor
- Public Relations
- Social Media

www.missionhillsheritage.org

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Visit us on the web!
www.MissionHillsHeritage.org

2024 MHH Upcoming Events

September 28 • 10 am-4 pm • 17th Annual Home Tour

October 19 • 4-6 pm • Annual Membership Meeting
(members only)

To Be Determined • Autumn Members' Coffee

To Join MHH, visit our website to complete an application
www.MissionHillsHeritage.org

Individual..... 1 year \$50

Household (up to 4 people) 1 year \$90

Professional (for business individual).....1 year \$150

Visit us on Facebook & Instagram!



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