

Peer Review of Historic Resource Evaluation
Veteran's Memorial Senior Center Building at 1455 Madison Avenue



Conducted for:

Community Development Department
City of Redwood City

Prepared by:

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Summary

This is a peer review of the Historic Resource Report (HRE) on the Veterans Memorial Senior Building, hereafter called the Veterans Memorial Building, at 1455 Madison Avenue, conducted by Diane Painter, dated September 2010. That HRE found that the building is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 1 for its association with the event of World War II living memorials, and CRHR Criterion 3, for being a unique and good example of work designed by master architect Birge Clark. The scope of this peer review is to review the HRE's findings of historical significance. This peer review concludes that the building is not eligible under CRHR criterion 1 but is eligible under CRHR criterion 3.

Methods

This review was conducted by Richard Brandi who holds an M.A. in Historic Preservation from Goucher College, Maryland and a B.A. from U.C. Berkeley. He is listed as a qualified historian by the San Francisco Planning Department and the California Historical Resources Information System. With more than 10 years of professional experience in architectural history and historic preservation, Mr. Brandi meets the requirements of a Qualified Professional as set forth by the Secretary of the Interior. He has extensive experience throughout California and has also worked in Arizona, Mississippi, Montana, and New Mexico. He conducts historic resource evaluations; historic context statements; architectural surveys; CEQA, NEPA and Section 106 reviews; HABS/HAER documentation; National Register nominations; and design reviews using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Mr. Brandi has evaluated railroad roundhouses, train stations, airports, golf course clubhouses, log cabins, theaters, courthouses, warehouses, farmsteads, public housing complexes, hospitals, stores, churches, and schools, as well as many types of houses. He previously worked at Atkins/PBS&J, PMC, Page & Turnbull Architecture, and Carey & Co. Architecture. His evaluations have been accepted by the Library of Congress, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Housing and Urban Development, California State Office of Historic Preservation, Mississippi SHPO, San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission, and many cities and counties. He is president and board member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, board member of the Northern California Chapter of docomomo, and vice president and board

member of the Western Neighborhoods Project, which received the State of California Governor's Award for Historic Preservation.

Mr. Brandi has conducted historic impact assessments of several new developments pursuant to the Redwood City Downtown Precise Plan including the Classics@Redwood City, 145 Monroe Street, 605 Middlefield Road, 488 Winslow Street, 2114 Broadway, 103 Wilson, and 30 California Street. He developed the first mitigation measure under the plan for historic resources at 303 and 321 Fuller Streets. He has testified before the Redwood City Historic Resources Advisory Committee and the Redwood City Planning Commission. Mr. Brandi wrote the historic evaluations to preserve or protect several buildings in Redwood City, including the lobby of the Fox Theater, 139 Duane Street, 802 Wedgewood Road, and 823 Bradford Boulevard.

The peer review included a site visit, review of the Historic Resource Report, search of building permits at the Redwood City Community Development Department; archival research at the Redwood City Library History Room; research of the Birge M. Clark collection in the Special Collections at Stanford Library Archives; and consultation with Paul V. Turner, formerly the Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Professor of Art at Stanford University.

Peer Review of Historic Resource Report

The Historic Resource Report (HRE) on the Veterans Memorial Building at 1455 Madison Avenue conducted by Diane Painter, dated September 2010, found that the building is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 1, for its association with World War II living memorials, and Criterion 3, for being designed by master architect Birge Clark "as a unique and yet a good example of his work."

Criterion 1 (Event): Resources associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

Criterion 3 (Design/Construction): Resources that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values.

World War II Living Memorials

The Historic Resource Report (HRE) on the Veterans Memorial Building found that the building is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 1 for its association with the event of World War II living memorials. The *California Register of Historical Resources* (CRHR) evaluates a resource's historic significance based on the following criteria that are similar to the National Register. The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) provide guidance for assessing when a resource has historical significance. Criterion 1 under the CRHR is similar to NRHP criterion A.

According to the National Register:

To be considered for listing under Criterion A (Event), a property must be associated with one or more events important in the defined historic context. Criterion A recognizes properties associated with single events, such as the founding of a town, or with a pattern of events, repeated activities, or historic trends, such as the gradual rise of a port city's prominence in trade and commerce. The event or trends, however, must clearly be important within the associated context: settlement, in the case of the town, or development of a maritime economy, in the case of the port city. Moreover, the property must have an important association with the event or historic trends, and it must retain historic integrity.

A property can be associated with either (or both) of two types of events:

- A specific event marking an important moment in American prehistory or history and
- A pattern of events or a historic trend that made a significant contribution to the development of a community, a State, or the nation.

Mere association with historic events or trends is not enough, in and of itself, to qualify under Criterion A: the property's specific association must be considered important as well. For example, a building historically in commercial use must be shown to have been significant in commercial history.¹

The Redwood City Veterans Building is one of hundreds, if not thousands, of World War II memorials that were built across the United States during the 1940s and 50s. As such, it is associated with an event that took place over many years and in only a general way. There is no evidence that the Veterans Building had an influence on the design of other World War II memorials. Although the building was under consideration and debate for 10 years and residents

felt strongly enough about the need for a memorial to raise taxes, the building did not have had a significant influence or impact on the development of Redwood City.

The building is an example of a particular type of memorial, the so-called living memorial. Instead of statues or monuments to honor and commemorate the service and sacrifice of veterans during World War II, a controversial new school of thought argued that useful civic improvements, such as auditoriums, exhibition spaces and meeting rooms, should be constructed instead. Although Painter concluded that there was not much, if any, controversy or debate in Redwood City (HRE page 16), Andrew Shanken wrote, “living memorials profoundly complicated American expectations of memorialization and practices of commemoration, a confusion evident in the recent controversy over the National Memorial to World War II in Washington, D.C.”²

In any case, the fact that the Veterans Building is one of many “living memorials” does not mean it has significance for this fact. There’s no evidence to suggest the Veterans Building had an impact on the desirability or adoption of living memorials locally or nationally.

For these reasons, this peer review finds that the building is not eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 1 for its association with the event of World War II living memorials.

Birge Clark

The Historic Resource Report (HRE) on the Veteran’s Building found that it is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 3, for being designed by master architect Birge Clark “as a unique and yet a good example of his work.” Criterion 3 under CRHR is similar to NRHP criterion C, and says:

Criterion C (Design/Construction): Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

As the National Register explains:

A master is a figure of generally recognized greatness in a field, a known craftsman of consummate skill, or an anonymous craftsman whose work is

distinguishable from others by its characteristic style and quality. The property must express a particular phase in the development of the master's career, an aspect of his or her work, or a particular idea or theme in his or her craft. A property is not eligible as the work of a master, however, simply because it was designed by a prominent architect. For example, not every building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright is eligible under this portion of Criterion C, although it might meet other portions of the Criterion, for instance as a representative of the Prairie style.³

Painter describes the building as a “modern building with ranch-style motifs and rustic details” (HRE page 18). Although she states that the building is not typical of Clark's work, either during his early period when he designed in the Spanish Colonial revival style or in the later Modern style, she nonetheless concludes it is a good example of his work. She specifically credits him for his space planning that created usable indoor-outdoor space.

There is no question that Clark is a master designer. Many of his designs are local landmarks and have been nominated on historic registers. He is perhaps best known for his work in Palo Alto where he is credited with designing hundreds of buildings. He designed many buildings in the Period Revival styles of the 1920s and 1930s, favoring a version of the Spanish Eclectic Style that he called “California Colonial.” However, Clark later designed modern ranch homes, Streamline Moderne buildings and commercial glass boxes. Clark's projects included industrial and hospital work for Kaiser Permanente, many public schools, and projects for Hewlett Packard. Clark designed few houses after the 1950s.⁴

Clark's most significant modern building, designed in conjunction with his brother David, was the Ruth Lucie Stern Research Building in San Francisco. According to Paul V. Turner, the former Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Professor of Art, Stanford University: “Arguably the most important of these was the Stern Building, which at the time of its construction (1939) received more attention from the architectural profession—nationally and even internationally—than any other of Clark's buildings, before or after.”⁵



This design is in the school of the International Style of Modernism. Turner attributes the design equally to the brothers.

Like many architects, Clark worked with other architects either as business partners or as part of an ad-hoc collaboration. Clark had a number of partners over his long career. For example, he partnered with his brother David (1933–1944), and then was a partner with architect Walter S. Stromquist in the Palo Alto firm of Clark, Stromquist, Potter, and Ehrlich, founded in 1945.

One drawing of the Veterans Building, dated June 27, 1956, was uncovered during a search of the Redwood City building permits bearing the stationery: “Birge M. Clarke, Walter Stromquist Architects, 321 Channing Avenue, Palo Alto.” No other permits of the original building were found, and no drawings of the building were found at the Stanford collection. It is unknown how much of the design of the Veterans Building can be attributed to either man. Clark is repeatedly mentioned in newspaper articles as the architect of the building.⁶ He was older and better known than Stromquist and was the architect of record for the building.

Painter provided examples of Clark's early work in the Spanish Colonial style but provided only one example of his Modern work, the 1966 second phase to the 1951 *Sunset* magazine building designed with Cliff May. May is well known for his ranch-style designs, and it is unclear how much influence Clark had in the design of the *Sunset* magazine building. Painter provided a list of 15 postwar buildings without photos or comparative analysis (HRE page 26).

If the building is unique and does not exhibit the kinds of work Clark is known for, it may not fall under the work of a master criterion. Without conducting a survey of the work during the 1950s of Clark and Stromquist, it is not possible to place the Veterans Building in context with Clark's "particular phase in the development of the master's career, an aspect of his or her work, or a particular idea or theme in his or her craft." A survey and design analysis of the 15 postwar buildings listed by Painter would be useful in determining whether the Veterans Building is a work of a master and hence a historic resource under CEQA or not.

In the meantime, the Veteran Building was clearly a product of Clark's partnership, and he is the architect of record. Thus, it can be considered a work of the master unless further research contradicts this conclusion.

Conclusion

The Historic Resource Report on the Veteran's Memorial Building dated September 2010 found that the building is eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 1 for its association with the event of World War II living memorials and CRHR Criterion 3, for being designed by master architect Birge Clark as a unique and yet a good example of his work. This peer review concludes that the building is not eligible under CRHR Criterion 1 but is eligible under CRHR Criterion 3 for the reasons discussed.

Appendix

Biographies taken from the San Jose Modernism Historic Context Statement:

Clark, Birge M.

Famous Bay Area architect Birge M. Clark (1894–1989) and Joseph Ehrlich designed the John Muir Junior High School (1958) in San Jose to relieve Markham Junior High School from holding double sessions. With Walter S. Stromquist, Clark designed the H. M. Gousha Company building (1946) in San Jose. When Clark opened his San Jose office, he was one of only two architects between San Francisco and San Jose. He eventually designed more than 450 Palo Alto buildings. He designed many buildings in the Period Revival styles of the 1920s and 1930s, favoring a version of the Spanish Eclectic Style that he called “California Colonial.” However, Clark later designed modern ranch homes, Streamline Moderne buildings, and commercial glass boxes. Clark’s projects included industrial and hospital work for Kaiser Permanente, many public schools, and projects for Hewlett Packard Co.. Clark designed few houses after the 1950s. He graduated from Palo Alto High School, Stanford University (1914), and Columbia University (1917). He served in the U.S. Army Balloon Service in World War I (1917–19). He was a partner in the Palo Alto architectural firms of Clark and Clark (with his brother David Clark); Clark and Stromquist; Clark, Stromquist and Sandstrom; and Clark, Stromquist, Potter and Ehrlich. Clark was an instructor in architecture at Stanford University from 1950 to 1972.

Clark, Stromquist, Potter, Ehrlich Partnership

The Palo Alto firm of Clark, Stromquist, Potter, Ehrlich Partnership, which was founded in 1945, included architects Birge M. Clark, Walter S. Stromquist, David Farington Potter, and Joseph Ehrlich. The firm designed the John Muir Junior High School (1958) and the H. M. Gousha Company building (1946) in San Jose.

Ehrlich, Joseph

With famed Bay Area architect Birge Clark, Joseph Ehrlich (AIA) designed John Muir Junior High School in San Jose. The new school was needed to relieve Markham Junior High School from holding double sessions. Groundbreaking occurred in November 1958. Joseph Ehrlich was a partner in the Palo Alto firm of Clark, Stromquist, Potter, Ehrlich Partnership, which was founded in 1945. His partners were Birge M. Clark, Walter S. Stromquist, and David Farington Potter.

Stromquist, Walter S.

Architect Walter S. Stromquist (born 1912) was a partner in the Palo Alto firm of Clark, Stromquist, Potter, Ehrlich Partnership, which was founded in 1945. His partners were architects Birge M. Clark, David Farington Potter, and Joseph Ehrlich. With Birge Clark, Stromquist designed the H. M. Gousha Company building (1946) in San Jose. Stromquist earned his bachelor’s of architecture degree from the University of California, Berkeley in 1937. Stromquist was previously a draftsman for David B. Clark and Birge M. Clark in Palo Alto (1937–42) and a draftsman for Blanchard & Maher in San Francisco (1942–44). He was Secretary-Treasurer of the American Institute of Architects Coast Valleys Chapter in 1951 and President in 1954.

¹ http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_6.htm.

² Andrew M. Shanken, "Planning Memory, Living Memorials in the United States During World War II," *The Art Bulletin*, 84:1, March 2002.

³ http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_6.htm.

⁴ San Jose Modernism Historic Context Statement, 2009, 117–18.

⁵ Stanford Historical Society, *Sandstone & Tile*, Fall 2011, 35:3.

⁶ Redwood City Library History Room, clipping files.