



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 10, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-016

HEARING DATE: April 24, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – Fred Rohr House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Matthew and Melissa DeLira; represented by BFS Environmental Services

LOCATION: 3603 Amaryllis Drive, Peninsula Community, Council District 2
APN 449-712-0600

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of Fred Rohr House located at 3603 Amaryllis Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Fred Rohr House located at 3603 Amaryllis Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1940 under HRB Criterion B. The designation excludes the front balcony enclosure, the 1968 rear second story addition and the detached garage modified outside of the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is identified with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home at the time of the Rohr Aircraft Corporation's founding in 1940 and was the location at which Rohr and his partners planned for the company's future. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and his company achieved explosive growth, employing thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource.

The property was identified by the Quieter Homes Program and was determined to be individually eligible for designation on the National Register for its association with Fred Rohr and also eligible as a contributor to the National Register eligible Plumosa Park Historic District.

The historic name of the resource, the Fred Rohr House has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Fred Rohr, a historically significant individual.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 3603 Amaryllis Drive is a two-story, Spanish Colonial Revival style single-family residence constructed in 1930 in the Peninsula Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on site include a detached garage which is accessed via a rear alley. The property is located on an interior lot in a single-family residential neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1930 the property has been modified as follows: the southern portion of the garage was converted to office/living space between 1961 and 1967. During the garage conversion, jalousie windows were also installed on the exterior of the structure. Sometime after 1968 the residence and garage were restuccoed with a historically appropriate texture. A second floor rear addition was constructed in 1968 and between 1969 and 1970 the balcony on the front façade was enclosed and windows were added in the former openings. The detached front pergola in the front yard was constructed sometime between 1970 and 2007. The garage was further modified between 1972 and 1981 with the addition of a Cadillac extension and a vinyl window was added to the structure at an unknown date. In 2019 the Quieter Homes Program replaced most of the windows with wood frame windows. The 2019 window replacement project was reviewed by Heritage Preservation staff and determined to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Additionally, three original windows on the east façade were replaced with aluminum windows at an unknown date.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by BFS Environmental Services, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B and C. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion B but not HRB Criterion C. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

The resource is associated with Fred Rohr, a founder of the Rohr Aircraft Company, who rented the 3603 Amaryllis property with his wife Shirley from 1940. Rohr was born in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1896 to European immigrants. At the age of two, his family moved to San Francisco where his father opened a

sheet metal shop. Rohr would later work as an apprentice sheet metal worker in his father's shop. During World War I, Rohr served in the Navy aboard a tanker. After the war, he returned to work in the sheet metal shop and took classes in engineering and mathematics. Rohr and several friends would buy, repair, and fly surplus military airplanes.

In 1920 Rohr married Shirley Blade and the couple moved to San Diego in 1924 where he established the Standard Sheet Metal Works. Rohr quickly became acquainted with several of San Diego's aviation pioneers such as T. Claude Ryan who asked him to join the Ryan Aeronautical Company as the sheet metal foreman. Rohr was able to work on the construction of Charles Lindbergh's plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, which he famously flew from Long Island, New York to Paris in 1927. Rohr continued to work steadily in San Diego's aeronautics industry up until 1940.

Rohr and four partners, two engineers from Ryan and two attorneys, created the Rohr Aircraft Corporation in 1940. During that time, Rohr and his wife were living at the 3603 Amaryllis Drive property. By late 1940, Rohr had 64 employees and the company had received its first major contract. In January of 1941, Rohr Aircraft moved into a 37,500 square foot factory in Chula Vista and within three years the factory was expanded to 600,000 square feet. The company continued to receive contracts and quickly expanded from 70 to over 400 employees. By the end of 1941, Rohr Aircraft employed 865 people and reported sales of just under \$1.5 million.

After the close of World War II, Rohr Aircraft experienced a sharp decline and the company merged with the International Detrola Company to stay afloat. Rohr continued to head the company that he founded until his death in 1965. The Rohr Chula Vista factory continued to expand and by the end of 1966 the corporate headquarters employed over 9,000 people. The company entered marine technology in 1970 and began to build boats for use by the U.S. Navy and Army during the Vietnam War. In 1997 Rohr Aircraft was sold in its entirety to the B.F. Goodrich Company and demolition of the Rohr complex of buildings in Chula Vista began in 2005. Since its initial construction in 1941, Rohr Aircraft factory had a massive impact on the City of Chula Vista, stimulating the population growth of the city. Additionally, the Rohr factory had a massive economic impact on the San Diego region due to the high numbers of employees it attracted to the area.

Fred and Shirley Rohr resided at 3603 Amaryllis Drive in 1940, the year the Rohr Aircraft Corporation was founded. According to Edward T. Austin's *Rohr: The Story of a Corporation*, the company's founding members spent hours around the dining table at the Rohr's house on Amaryllis planning and discussing the future. In 1941 the Rohrs moved to 3130 Curtis Street and moved again in 1942 to 555 San Fernando Street, the Fred Rohr/ Ralph L. Frank House, HRB #1492, where Rohr lived until his death in 1965. The *City of San Diego Historical Resources Board Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria* does not specify that only one property can be associated with a significant person under Criterion B; therefore, there can be two designated properties linked to Rohr if both properties are associated with his most significant achievements. Furthermore, the Rohr factory in Chula Vista is likely the property best associated with Fred Rohr and his most significant achievements; however, the factory has been greatly modified with the demolition of the complex beginning in 2005 and no longer retains integrity for its association with Rohr.

A 2017 *San Diego Union-Tribune* article claimed that the Rohr Aircraft Corporation was started out of Rohr's garage in August of 1940. This article is the only source that asserts the company was founded in the garage and is not backed up by primary resources. Furthermore, the garage has been significantly modified by the conversion of the southern portion of the structure to office/living space, the installation of jalousie and vinyl windows, and the construction of a Cadillac extension. As discussed above, these modifications all occurred after Rohr occupied the residence in 1940. Therefore, the garage no longer

retains integrity as it relates to the property's historic significance and staff is recommending that it be excluded from the designation.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, location, setting, feeling, and association are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion B for its association with Fred Rohr and the founding of the Rohr Aircraft Company in 1940. The residence, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, has not been significantly modified to the point where Rohr or a contemporary would not be able to recognize it as Rohr's 1940 residence and associate it with that time period. The rear second story rear addition, freestanding pergola, balcony enclosure and aluminum replacement windows do not detract from the resource's ability to convey its historic significance for its association with Fred Rohr. Therefore, the residence does retain integrity to its 1940 period of significance under HRB Criterion B.

Significance Statement: The resource is identified with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home at the time of the Rohr Aircraft Corporation's founding in 1940 and was the location at which Rohr and his partners planned for the company's future. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and his company achieved explosive growth, employing thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion B.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The residence and garage located at 3603 Amaryllis Drive was constructed in 1930 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The main massing of the residence is two stories and exhibits a hipped tile roof with little eave overhang and exposed rafter tails. The second story slightly projects over the first story on the primary façade. A one-story wing with a shed tile roof is located on the west side of the residence and is set back from the façade of the main portion of the house creating a small, pergola covered courtyard. The primary entrance is located in the corner of the courtyard and is accessed via a concrete porch. The one-story wing features an arched focal window on the primary façade and a stucco clad chimney on the west elevation. The exterior of the house is covered in a stucco cladding and fenestration includes wood windows in a variety of styles. The detached garage is located at the rear of the parcel and features a stucco exterior and a combination flat and shed tile roof.

The Spanish Colonial Revival style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. Its vocabulary is influenced by Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic or Renaissance precedents. The style became popular after the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 and reached its height in the 1920's and early 1930's before rapidly declining in the 1940's. Identifying features include a low-pitched roof with little or no eave overhang, red tile roof covering, stucco exterior wall finishes, an asymmetrical façade and arches above doors and principle windows. Common decorative details are patterned tiles, carved stonework, large focal windows, wooden or iron window grilles, decorative vents and balconies.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, does not retain enough integrity to convey its historic significance as a 1930 Spanish Colonial Revival style residence. Specifically, the porch enclosure, pergola and aluminum replacement windows impair integrity of design, materials and workmanship. The

enclosure of the second floor balcony on the primary façade is a significant modification that alters one of the resource's original design features by converting an exterior space to an interior space. Additionally, the freestanding pergola in the courtyard visually obscures the arched focal window, a character defining feature of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The aluminum window replacements on the east façade also contribute to the loss of integrity. Therefore, the property does not retain integrity to its 1930 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Fred Rohr House located at 3603 Amaryllis Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1940 under HRB B for its association with Fred Rohr. The designation excludes the front balcony enclosure, the 1968 rear second story addition and the detached garage modified outside of the period of significance.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on , to consider the historical designation of the **Fred Rohr House** (owned by Matthew and Melissa DeLira, 3603 Amaryllis Drive, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **3603 Amaryllis Drive, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **449-712-0600**, further described as BLK E LOT 16 in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Fred Rohr House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B for its association with Fred Rohr, a historically significant person and retains integrity to its 1940 period of significance for that association. Specifically, the resource was Rohr's home at the time of the Rohr Aircraft Corporation's founding in 1940 and was the location at which Rohr and his partners planned for the company's future. Rohr was a leader in the aeronautics field and his company achieved explosive growth, employing thousands of people manufacturing vital equipment for the U.S. and British military during World War II. Rohr Aircraft's Chula Vista factory was a major regional employer until it was sold in 1970 and contributed to the growth of the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the front balcony enclosure, the 1968 rear second story addition and the detached garage modified outside of the period of significance.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: HEATHER FERBERT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney