



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: August 10, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-026

HEARING DATE: August 24, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #2 – Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House**

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

APPLICANT: Nancy J Binkin Living Trust 08-08-13; represented by Nancy Binkin

LOCATION: 4609 Norma Drive, Kensington-Talmadge Community, Council District 9
APN 465-550-34-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House located at 4609 Norma Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House located at 4609 Norma Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1977-1986 under HRB Criterion B and 1931 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation includes the original detached garage and interior features including the living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche. The designation excludes the 1985 attached utility room, the pre-1960s slump block wall stuccoed in the early 2000s, and the 2000s detached pergola structure. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is identified with Larry Himmel, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was the primary residence of Larry Himmel, a reporter and TV personality. Himmel hosted the shows "Larry Himmel at Large" and "San Diego at Large," reporting between 1977 to 1988 for KFMB-TV while living at the subject property. Later, he continued to work as KFMB's longest-serving human interest reporter. His work has been recognized by regional Emmy awards and peers in the TV industry. His storytelling, neighborhood profiles, and comedy skits have made a lasting impression on San Diegans. His work in community engagement and dedication to community organizations like Rady Children's Hospital and Ronald McDonald House Charities have positively influenced residents of San Diego.

2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1931 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features Mission half-barrel roof cover; stucco cladding with sand finish; second-story balcony with plank-style wooden railing and decorative bracket supports; wooden arched picture window; deep inset arched entry; cantilevered turret; a *Mashrabiya* faux window; decorative chimney; wrought iron window grilles; divided-lite wood casement and fan-shaped windows; exterior decorative tiles; and interior living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and a sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche.
3. The resource is representative of a notable work of established Master Builder the Dennstedt Company and retains integrity to its original 1931 design, intent, and aesthetic. The Dennstedt Company was an accomplished builder of custom houses and was responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the house is representative of a notable example of the company's residential work in the Spanish Colonial Revival style with custom features.

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 subject property is in the Talmadge Park subdivision and contains a single-family home and a detached garage.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Larry Himmel, a historically significant individual, and the name of the Dennstedt Company, a Master Builder.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Nancy Binkin, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B, C, and D, and staff concurs. 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 subject property located at 4609 Norma Drive was constructed in 1931 and occupied by reporter and TV personality Larry Himmel from 1977 to 1986. Born in Chicago in 1946, he went on to obtain his master's degree at Bradley University in Illinois. Before moving to San Diego in 1974, he worked as a radio broadcaster. After arriving in San Diego, he worked as a bartender, stand-up comic, and radio DJ. While living at the subject property, he was hired by KFMB-TV to host a show called "Larry Himmel at Large," where he provided commentaries. In 1984, he launched a prime-time, daily variety series named "San Diego at Large," which captured the greatest share of the 18-to-

49-year-old market at the 7:30 pm time slot in San Diego, beating the game show "Tic Tac Dough," which previously occupied the same time slot. Neal Matthews, writing for the *San Diego Reader* in 1987, describes "San Diego at Large" as "a compendium of short skits, parodies, and television shows and cartoons. Matthews further notes that the show is "unique in this market and probably unmatched in the nation." The show concluded in 1988, and Himmel went on to become KFMB's longest-serving human-interest feature reporter, working until he died in 2014.

Through his reporting, Himmel documented the rapid transition of San Diego in the 1970s and 1980s in various neighborhoods. He promoted charitable activities and organizations, including March of Dimes, Rady Children's Hospital, Ronald McDonald House, the Alzheimer's Association, and Lions, Tigers & Bears. After the 1999 Columbine shooting, Himmel co-created a violence-prevention education series for schools called "Force 8," which won the 2002 Golden Bell Awards from the California School Boards Association, which recognizes outstanding programs and governance practices of school boards. Himmel also won nearly a dozen regional Emmy awards, which recognize excellence in regional television markets.

He was well-regarded by his neighbors, peers, and coworkers. After Himmel's passing in 2014, various organizations paid tribute to him. Jim Holtzman, news director of KFMB-TV who hired Larry Himmel, paid tribute to him during his memorial service, describing Himmel as the "host, head writer, main ideas person and absolute cornerstone of the 'San Diego at Large' program" who led the program from 1985-1988 daily. Writing for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Karla Peterson declares, "Larry Himmel came to represent the kind of San Diegan we all want to be." In a video, Himmel once proclaimed on video, "I truly believe that my purpose on the news on a daily basis is to make people feel better about the place they call home." This quote is memorialized on a plaque affixed to a newsroom at KFMB-CBS8. After Himmel's death, a foundation was created in his name – the Harry Himmel Neighborhood Foundation. This foundation focuses on local projects such as annual back-to-school haircuts and school supply giveaways; it also provided financial support for local restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other properties associated with Larry Himmel include personal residences at 5075 Niagara Avenue, where he lived prior to working for KFMB, and 17450 Camino Brisa del Mar, where he lived after the conclusion of the "San Diego at Large" show. Larry Himmel is also associated with KFMB Studio at 7677 Engineer Road. Still, the association is not strong because most of his shoots were on the field rather than at the studio. The subject resource at 4609 Norma Drive has the strongest association with Himmel; it is Himmel's personal residence during his most productive years as the host of "Larry Himmel at Large" and "San Diego at Large." The house even served as a backdrop for several of his skits and shorts.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was the primary residence of Larry Himmel, a reporter and TV personality. Himmel hosted the shows "Larry Himmel at Large" and "San Diego at Large," reporting between 1977 to 1988 for KFMB-TV while living at the subject property. Later, he continued to work as KFMB's longest-serving human interest reporter. His work has been recognized by regional Emmy awards and by peers in the TV industry. His storytelling, neighborhood profiles, and comedy skits have made a lasting impression on San Diegans. His work in community engagement and dedication to community organizations like Rady Children's Hospital and Ronald McDonald House Charities have positively influenced residents of San Diego. Therefore, staff recommends the designation of the subject property at 4609 Norma Drive 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 subject property was constructed in 1931 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Situated above street grade, the building is complemented by a front and side yard but not a sizable backyard. The roof is covered in Mission half-barrel tiles, and the building is clad in sand finish stucco. Portions of the roof overhang are decorated with scroll saw-cut rafter tails. A decorative chimney is present atop the building. The two-story dwelling has a one-story gable projecting wing towards the street. A detached garage is also present, as is a stucco-clad wall that partially encloses the side yard. A pergola structure is in this yard.

The west elevation is the primary elevation, featuring a second-story balcony corner with plank-style balustrade, exposed beams, and wooden bracket supports. Next to the balcony is a decorative six-panel *Mashrabiya* faux window. A one-story wing projects from this elevation, containing an inset picture window. Windows on the building are generally divided-lite wood casements unless noted otherwise. The south elevation of the one-story wing consists of a large rectangular window with an original wrought iron door and a raised, inset front entry leading to a wooden door. The entry is decorated along the arched opening with decorative tiles. Along the two-story structure on this elevation is a pair of French doors leading to a raised platform with metal railings. Towards the east corner is a second-story cantilevered turret with a funnel-shaped base and a conical tile roof that extends above the existing gable roofline. The east elevation is the rear elevation, containing a non-original bay kitchen bay window and a utility room addition with a flat roof and aluminum windows. An original pair of fan-shaped windows are present on the second floor. The north elevation contains windows of various sizes. Along the one-story wing, a tapered chimney is present.

The detached garage dates to the period of significance and contains Spanish Colonial Revival features such as an *espadaña* parapet with a bell over the roof. It is recommended to be included in the designation.

Elements of the interior are recommended for designation, including the living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, the pyrographic door, the staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and a sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche.

Modifications to the property include the construction of a pre-1960s slump block wall that was stuccoed in the early 2000s; an attached utility room in 1985; a kitchen bay window addition in the 1990s; a 1990s reroof using the original tiles; a post-1999 replacement of the second-story balcony railing with metal railings; a post-1999 conversion of the south elevation casement windows to a pair of French doors of identical width with a new raised patio; a 2000s detached pergola structure; a 2000s walkway rehabilitation; and a 2000s in-kind replacement of the original casement windows. In 2022, the owner elected to restore the second-story balcony railings to their original design based on historical photos. The owner also modified the non-original stucco walls by lowering portions of the wall and refinishing it with a differentiating texture, and removed a pair of non-original stair pillars adjacent to the sidewalk. Additionally, the owner obtained a building permit to retroactively legalize the post-1999 south elevation window-to-door conversion. Staff approved the building permit as Consistent with the Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Overall, these modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship, or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

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 1920s and early 1930s before rapidly declining in the 1940s. 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 principal windows. Common decorative details are patterned tiles, carved stonework, large focal windows, wooden or iron window grilles, decorative vents, and balconies.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Spanish Colonial Revival style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style, including Mission half-barrel roof cover; stucco cladding with sand finish; second-story balcony with plank-style wooden railing and decorative bracket supports; wooden arched picture window; deep inset arched entry; cantilevered turret; a *Mashrabiya* faux window; decorative chimney; wrought iron window grilles; divided-lite wood casement and fan-shaped windows; exterior decorative tiles; and interior living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and a sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

Brothers A.L., C.A., E.L., and A.E. Dennstedt, originally from Minnesota, sold real estate in the Midwest early in the 20th century until the market collapsed in 1923. In 1926, they moved to San Diego and established the Dennstedt Company. They hired skilled architectural drafter Henry Landt to be the director of drafting. The company built custom houses, mainly in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. By 1929, the Dennstedt Company had built hundreds of houses and was advertising itself as the largest homebuilder in San Diego. They were known for building high-quality custom houses of different sizes, hiring skilled craftsmen, and retaining those employees long-term. Henry Landt also kept the company at the cutting edge of innovations in the field. They adopted the business strategy of buying vacant lots in existing subdivisions, finding buyers who were willing to contract with them to build a house on the lot, and offering clients financing for both the lot purchase and home construction costs. In this way, they became prolific builders of custom houses. They also constructed hotels and other commercial buildings.

In 1933, A.L. sold his interest in the company as a result of a dispute with his brothers, likely over whether to enter the tract housing market and work with low-cost FHA loans. In 1934, A.L. recruited Henry Landt and his brother A.E. to join him in forming the "A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt Building Company." A.L. and A.E. continued to build custom houses, using their method of selling lots to clients who were willing to contract with them to build their houses. They never built tract housing, but they eventually began building speculation houses for clients with FHA loans. One of their projects was the Reynard Hills subdivision, which exhibits a variety of architectural styles, including Spanish Eclectic, Monterey, Cape Cod, and Old English. The company lasted until 1941, during which point residential construction largely stopped as the US entered World War II, and Landt became a construction engineer for Convair.

The Dennstedt Building Company/A.L. and A.E. Dennstedt/The Original Dennstedt Company was established as a Master Builder in 2007 when the Historical Resources Board designated the Hazel Weir/Dennstedt Company House/Mut kula xuy/Mut lah hoy ya Site #4, HRB #818. The subject property was constructed by The Dennstedt Company in 1931 for the original owner George and Mary Peck. The Spanish Colonial Revival style building demonstrates the high quality of design and craftsmanship seen in the company's other known works that are historically designated.

Significance Statement: The subject resource is representative of a notable work of established Master Builder the Dennstedt Company and retains integrity to its original 1931 design, intent, and aesthetic. The Dennstedt Company was an accomplished builder of custom houses and was responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically, the house is representative of a notable example of the company's residential work in the Spanish Colonial Revival style with custom features. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Builder the Dennstedt Company.

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 Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House located at 4609 Norma Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1977-1986 under HRB Criterion B and 1931 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation includes the original detached garage and interior features including the living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche. The designation excludes the 1985 attached utility room, the pre-1960s slump block wall stuccoed in the early 2000s, and the 2000s detached pergola structure.



Alvin Lin
Assistant Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Interior elements proposed for designation
3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 8/24/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 8/24/2023, to consider the historical designation of the **Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House** (owned by Nancy J Binkin Living Trust 08-08-13, 4609 Norma Drive, San Diego, CA 92115) located at **4609 Norma Drive, San Diego, CA 92115**, APN: **465-550-34-00**, further described as LOT 683 (EX DOC80-182355)DOC77-290915 IN LOTS 682& 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 Larry Himmel/Dennstedt Company House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B in connection with Larry Himmel, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was the primary residence of Larry Himmel, a reporter and TV personality. Himmel hosted the shows "Larry Himmel at Large" and "San Diego at Large," reporting between 1977 to 1988 for KFMB-TV while living at the subject property. Later, he continued to work as KFMB's longest-serving human interest reporter. His work has been recognized by regional Emmy awards and peers in the TV industry. His storytelling, neighborhood profiles, and comedy skits have made a lasting impression on San Diegans. His work in community engagement and dedication to community organizations like Rady Children's Hospital and Ronald McDonald House Charities have positively influenced residents of San Diego.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1931 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features Mission half-barrel roof cover; stucco cladding with sand finish; second-story balcony with plank-style wooden railing and decorative bracket supports; wooden arched picture window; deep inset arched entry; cantilevered turret; a Mashrabiya faux window; decorative chimney; wrought iron window grilles; divided-lite wood casement and fan-shaped windows; exterior decorative tiles; and interior living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and a sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of established Master Builder the Dennstedt Company and retains integrity to its original 1931 design, intent, and aesthetic. The Dennstedt Company was an accomplished builder of custom houses and was responsible for the construction of many quality houses in the City, some of which have been historically designated. Specifically,

the house is representative of a notable example of the company's residential work in the Spanish Colonial Revival style with custom features. 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 include the original detached garage and interior features including the living room stenciled open beam ceiling with decorative corbel supports, pyrographic door, staircase with wrought iron railing and decorative tiles, and sculpted plaster fireplace with quarry tile and radio niche.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 1985 attached utility room, the pre-1960s slump block wall stuccoed in the early 2000s, and the 2000s detached pergola structure.

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: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

4609 Norma Drive, San Diego, CA 92115

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **465-550-34-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**

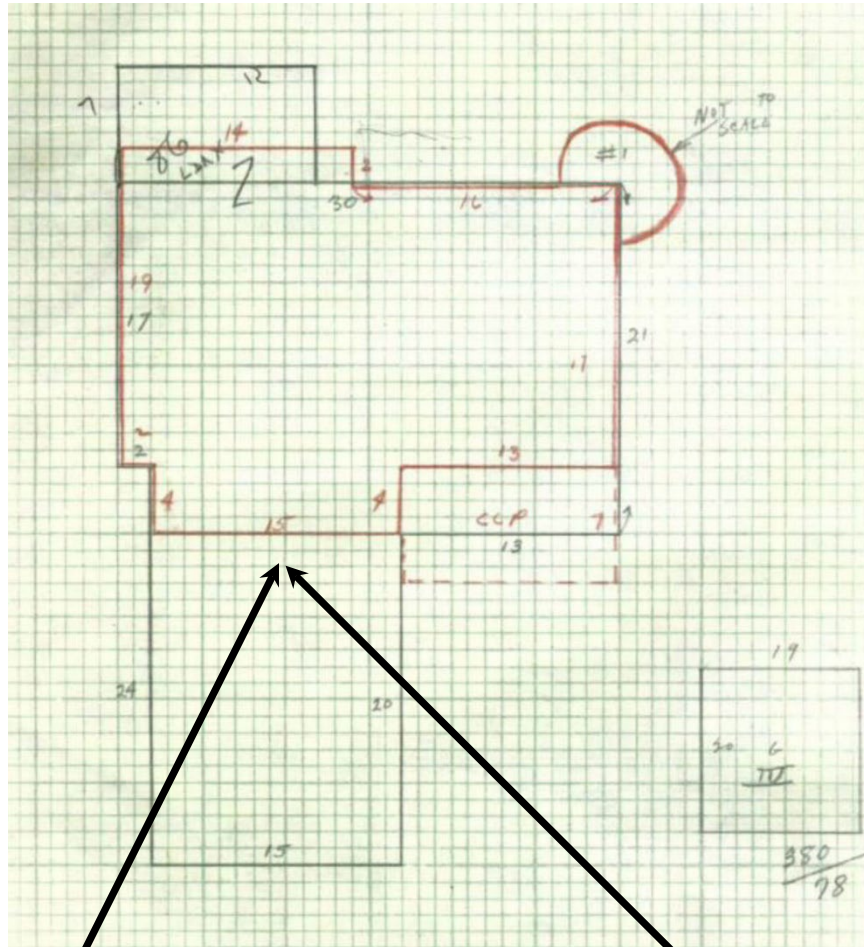
Attachment 2

Interior elements proposed for designation

Site Plan with Footprint

For interior features included in the proposed designation

Page 1 of 3



Location of stairs with decorative tiles



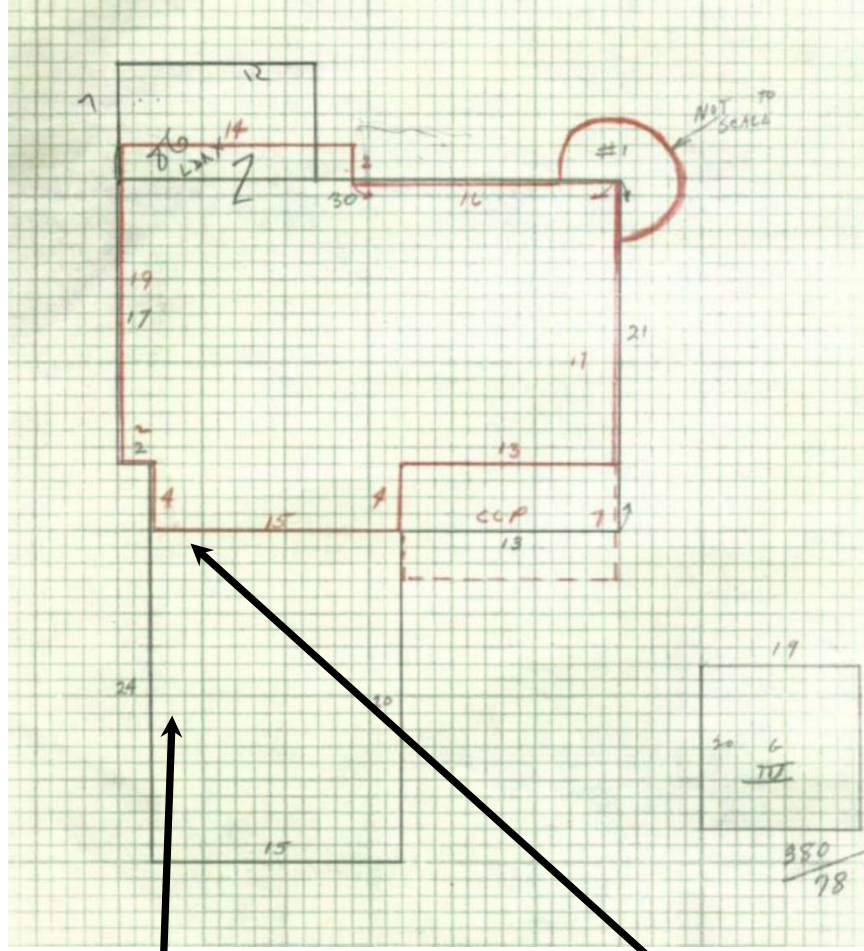
Profile of the railings



Site Plan with Footprint

For interior features included in the proposed designation

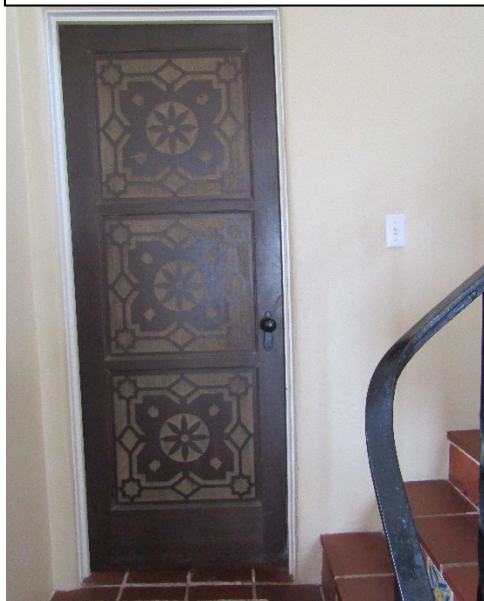
Page 2 of 3



Living room fireplace



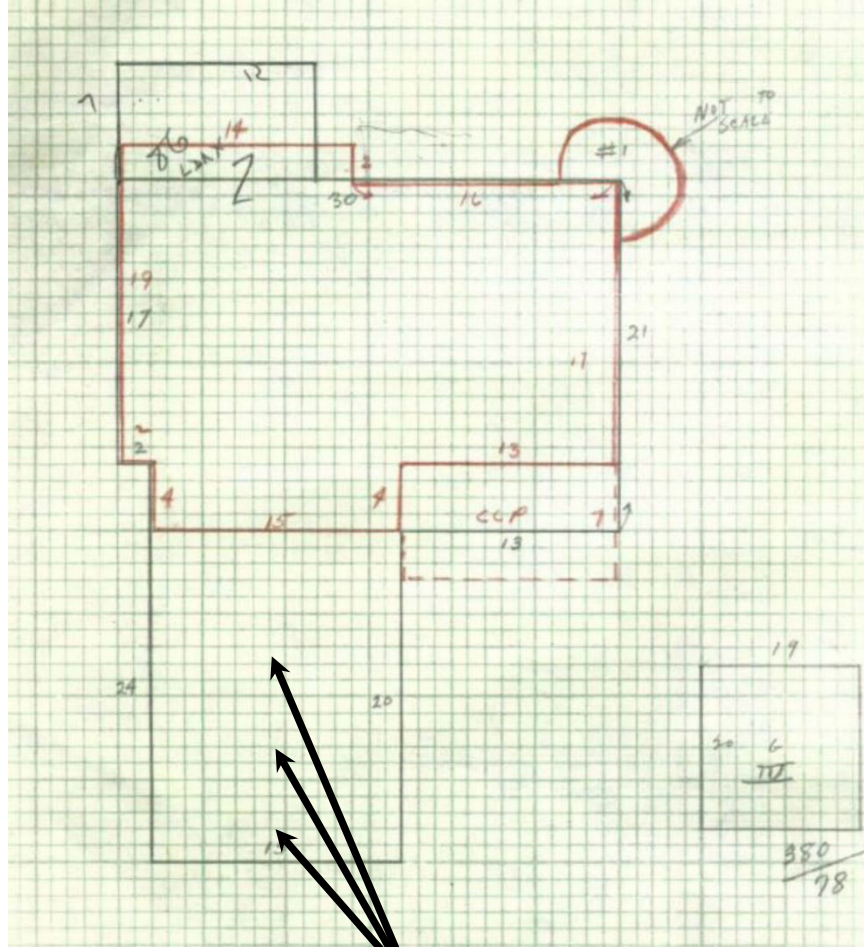
Pyrographic door



Site Plan with Footprint

For interior features included in the proposed designation

Page 3 of 3



Living room stenciled ceiling beams and brackets, three in total

