Santa Monica Pier Sign
Santa Monica, California
City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report
Parcel Map
Sanborn Maps
Photographs

Prepared for:
City of Santa Monica
Planning Division

Prepared by:
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Santa Monica, California

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Environmental Setting

The subject property, the Santa Monica Pier Sign (Sign), is a free-standing arched neon sign installed at the entrance to the Santa Monica Pier in 1941. The Sign is situated at the Ocean Avenue and Colorado Boulevard intersection, north of the Santa Monica Pier, and set-back from Ocean Avenue on the Colorado Avenue Viaduct. The Sign spans the width of the two-lane vehicular Viaduct.

Regulatory Setting

The Santa Monica Pier was named a Los Angeles County Landmark in 1975 and designated a City of Santa Monica Landmark in August, 1976. The Landmarks Commission found that the Pier “exemplifies, symbolizes and manifests elements of the cultural and social history of the city in that it has been utilized as a social and recreational center for Santa Monica from its conception in 1890; has architectural interest and value notably in the merry-go-round structure and the Sinbad building; identifies with important events in local history in that it was the site of the first musical variety program in July, 1948; identified with famous persons in that William Saroyan lived in one of the apartments above the merry-go-round; and symbolizes elements of the city’s economic history in that on the site was a structure that predates the founding of the city, namely the Shoo Fly pier which was utilized as a shipping point.”¹ The Santa Monica Looff Hippodrome (Carousel) Building was designated a National Historic Landmark in March, 1987 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.² However, the Sign was not designated as a contributing feature of the Santa Monica Pier.

The Sign was previously assessed in a Draft CEQA/NEPA environmental review in 1996 that noted the Sign is eligible for listing in the National Register (3S) under criteria A

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² City of Santa Monica, Historic Preservation Element, Prepared by PCR Services Corporation and Historic Resources Group, September 2002; Environmental Planning Associates. Santa Monica Pier development project: final environmental impact report; draft environmental impact report and responses to comments on the draft EIR, 1991, p. IV-P-1.
“for its strong association with the Santa Monica Pier” and C as “one of the finest existing samples of signage from the neon era, dating from approximately 1930-1960.”

**Architectural Description**

The neon Santa Monica Pier Sign was constructed circa 1941 in the Streamline Moderne style (Plate 1). The character-defining features of the style include stepped massing, restrained detailing, horizontality, curvature, classical column motif, and sans-serif font. The Sign spans the entrance of the Colorado Avenue Viaduct at the intersection of Ocean Avenue and Colorado Boulevard. The sign consists of a stylized metal arch, approximately thirty-five feet wide, attached to a utilitarian steel lattice frame and posts (Plate 2). The Primary (East) elevation facing Ocean Avenue is painted blue, outlined with a thin white line at the top and bottom, flanked by yellow columns, and topped with a recessed metal stylized crown. The Sign reads “SANTA MONICA * YACHT HARBOR * SPORT FISHING * BOATING * cafes.” The words are arranged in four lines, with “SANTA MONICA” on top of the arch, followed by “* YACHT HARBOR *,” “SPORT FISHING * BOATING,” and “cafes” at the bottom. All of the letters are uppercase with the exception of “cafes” in lowercase. The words “SPORT FISHING * BOATING” are the largest and most dominant text. The letters are painted in white and defined with colored neon tubing in white, sea green, and gold. The words “Santa Monica” are not outlined in neon and are located at the top of the Sign, freestanding and backlit.

**Alterations**

The Santa Monica Pier Sign is in good condition and does not appear to have had any substantial alterations since its 1941 installation. The Sign appears to have been moved once during the 1950s. It was moved from the center of the bridge towards Ocean Avenue. The

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3 McAvoy, Christy J, “Santa Monica Pier Sign: Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record,” Section 106 Review, Historic Resources Group, January 14, 1996.
relocation of the Sign does not appear to have caused any significant alterations to its integrity. The permits and other associated construction documents were unavailable. The Sign retains integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association.

**Statement of Historical Importance**

**Santa Monica.** In 1875, the original town site of Santa Monica was surveyed, including all of the land extending from Colorado Avenue on the south to Montana Avenue on the north, and from 26th Street on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. Between 1893 and the 1920s, the community operated as a tourist attraction, visited by mostly wealthy patrons. Those areas just outside of the incorporated City limits were semi-rural in setting and were populated with scattered residences. After the advent of the automobile in the 1920s, Santa Monica experienced a significant building boom, which included the development of the area known as Ocean Park, south of the downtown commercial district.

The close proximity to the ocean was no doubt a strong attraction to prospective year-round residents, as well. As early as 1896, a reliable interurban rail line had made it possible to commute to Los Angeles, but it was the advent of the automobile which gave significant momentum to the building boom which Santa Monica experienced in the 1920s. Whereas a significant portion of the first homes built in the older sections of the City, such as the Palisades Tract were originally used as retirement homes or vacation retreats, the tracts north of Montana Avenue and east of 7th Street were developed for year-round residents.

The commercial area, located along 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Streets between Wilshire Boulevard and Colorado Avenue, reflected the development of the City as well. Closely integrated with residences in the nineteenth-century community, the commercial district expanded with the burgeoning population. A few surviving residences changed use; some were moved to other sites.

While tourism had always been the primary industry of the city, other companies contributed to the community’s economic base, as well. A brick, terra cotta, and pottery facility was located in the southern portion of the City in the early years of the twentieth century. The Merle Norman Cosmetics Company, founded in the 1920s, had its headquarters on Main Street. Perhaps the best-known industry was Douglas Aircraft located in the southeastern portion of the city. Opening in 1923, the company became well-known for its

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*Portions of this section were adapted from the “Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory 1985-1986, Final Report, pp. 28-59 and State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation, Historic Resources Inventory Form Update, Central Business District and Third Street Promenade. Prepared by Tearnen, Bricker, and Field, 1998.*

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innovations in the field of global flight and became a primary contractor for manufacturing aircraft during World War II. The Rand Corporation, a nationally known “think tank,” maintains a highly visible presence on Main Street. A small industrial section, which includes studio and entertainment-related uses, has grown up around Olympic Boulevard, and an office park has developed off Ocean Park Boulevard near the southeast corner of the City.

A postwar building boom began in 1946, with the construction of whole residential tracts of single-family residences. Multi-family housing became a major factor in planning and zoning issues as the City’s population continued to grow. While single-family neighborhoods occupy the greater percentage of residential zoned acreage, the population of multi-family areas is in fact greater. Within the past decades, Santa Monica has been transformed bit by bit. Many of the modest single-family houses have been replaced by larger homes or modern condominium units in the areas north of the Santa Monica Freeway. Neighborhoods south of the freeway have also experienced a construction growth of multiple housing types, ranging from high-rise towers to the two- and three-story townhouses, which continue to be developed today.

**Santa Monica Municipal Pier and Pleasure Pier.** On September 9, 1909, after sixteen months of construction, the Santa Monica Municipal Pier opened to the public. This was California Admission Day, and the thousands of people who swarmed onto the 1,600-foot-long wooden pier were in a holiday mood as they enjoyed a festive day of band concerts, swimming races, and the novelty of walking above the waters of the Pacific Ocean (Plate 3). Constructed at the base of Colorado Avenue, the pier was not purely for tourism, but also functioned to pump the city's sewage out to sea.

The Municipal Pier’s continuing ability to attract large crowds impressed Charles Looff, a pioneer amusement entrepreneur who had built Coney Island’s first carousel in Brooklyn, New York and then opened a carousel factory nearby. Sensing vast potential for amusement attractions on the Southern California coast, he moved his operations to Long Beach in 1910, when he began to consider building a pleasure pier of his own.
In 1916, after lengthy negotiations with the City of Santa Monica, he started construction alongside the Municipal Pier. Looff’s Santa Monica Pleasure Pier featured the landmark Hippodrome building, a California-Byzantine-Moorish-style fantasy that has housed a succession of vintage merry-go-rounds and Wurlitzer organs. In the beginning it also boasted the Blue Streak Racer wooden roller coaster and the Whip and Aerospace thrill rides. More attractions followed and soon the Looff Pier was enlarged to its current size of 270 feet by 1,080 feet.

As arts and entertainment flourished in Santa Monica, so did the Pier. In 1924 the vast and ornate La Monica Ballroom opened to become the site of some of the earliest national radio and television broadcasts (Plate 4). It also played host to throngs of dancers who came nightly to enjoy the big band sound, including “Western Swing.”

The Pier’s popularity continued to be high throughout the 1930, but severe storms, heavy use and changing tastes began to take their toll. The Blue Streak roller coaster was torn down in 1930, and the La Monica Ballroom closed down some 33 years later.

While the Municipal Pier continued to be owned and operated by the City of Santa Monica, the Looff Pleasure Pier had a succession of owners. In 1953, it was taken over by the City, which leased it to a private operator who, among other things, offered rooms for rent overlooking the merry-go-round. Painters, musicians, and writers, including novelist William Saroyan, occupied these rooms.

Approximately twenty years later, the Santa Monica City Council ordered the demolition of both deteriorating piers. Outraged by this move, residents fought back with a “Save Our Pier Forever” initiative, with one of its objectives being to establish the Pier as a Los Angeles County Historical Landmark. In 1981, the City appointed the Pier Task Force (later named the Pier Restoration Corporation or PRC) to provide management and oversee restoration, including stripping the famed Hippodrome building back to its original

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framework and reconstructing it piece by piece. Although two fierce storms halted work in 1983, washing away 100,000 square feet of the ocean end of the Pier, good news would soon follow as the Hippodrome and its carousel were designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service.

In 1988, the Santa Monica Pier Development Program was adopted by Santa Monica’s City Council. As part of the Development Program, a new concrete substructure was built, adding strength and stability to a pier that could now withstand violent storms. A variety of retail, food and entertainment outlets, as well as a police substation and a world class amusement park were constructed on the Pier to enhance the overall experience for a crowd that has grown to 3 million visitors a year.

Today, the Santa Monica Pier is once again on the upswing as a recreational and entertainment venue. Each Thursday night throughout the summer, its “Twilight Dance Series” attracts over 10,000 people to concerts that feature popular performers in every musical genre. Many companies and non-profit organizations choose the Pier as a unique location for special events, and it continues to be a location favored by still photographers and film crews, who choose to use the Pier extensively as a backdrop for magazine layouts, movies, television shows, commercials and videos.

**Construction of the Santa Monica Yacht Harbor.** The Santa Monica Breakwater Association was formed in 1926 to fulfill the long awaited dream of bringing a yacht harbor to the Santa Monica bay. Five years later the Santa Monica City Council voted to build a breakwater and small harbor. The breakwater was constructed from 1933 to 1934 with various engineering and funding difficulties. The City Council announced the completion of the yacht harbor on July 30, 1934 and hosted the first annual Santa Monica Regatta on August 4. The popularity of the new harbor was immense and attracted new restaurants on the pier, fisherman, swimmers, and boaters (Plate 5). By the end of August 1934, the harbor already had ninety-nine yacht moorings.

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5 James Harris, p. 39.
6 James Harris, p. 40.
7 Ibid.
8 James Harris, p. 41.
9 James Harris, p. 55.
Walter D. Newcomb, Jr., the pier manager and later the owner of the Pier between 1943 and 1954, realized the ballroom, restaurants, and shops prospered during the war, as a result of the high-volume fishing operations on the Pier.\footnote{James Harris, p. 44.} To capitalize on the fishing industry, he added a new hoist to the end of the pier, to increase the high-volume production.\footnote{James Harris, p. 45.} Also, during World War II, the United States navy displaced entire fleets of fishing boats in large harbors such as Los Angeles, Newport, and San Diego to smaller harbors including Santa Monica.\footnote{James Harris, p. 56.} Thus, by 1941 the Santa Monica harbor welcomed forty-six small fishermen who embarked on successful businesses of catching small mackerel.\footnote{Ibid.}

However, during the fishing boom the yachting community was overlooked and the City of Santa Monica neglected the breakwater. Without the proper repairs, the waters were rough, making it increasingly difficult for mooring.\footnote{Ibid.} Without considerable repairs to the breakwater there was little left of the Santa Monica Harbor by the early 1980s.\footnote{James Harris, p. 57.}

**Sport-Fishing on the Santa Monica Pier.** A week before the Santa Monica Municipal Pier opened in 1909, a local Santa Monica fisherman, John McCreery, caught the first Yellowtail, and later word spread quickly that the Santa Monica Pier was one of the finest fishing spots on the West Coast.\footnote{James Harris, p. 87.} Subsequently, the Santa Monica Pier became crowded with anglers trying to catch their fair share of fish (Plate 6). The first businesses on the pier were related to the burgeoning fishing industry and included pole rental and bait shops, and cafes. In 1917, the construction of the Loof Pleasure Pier next to the Municipal
Pier generated some annoyance among the anglers, as a result of a new deck constructed over the old Municipal Pier that obstructed some of the holes for fishing poles.

During the 1920s, sport fishing emerged on west end of the Santa Monica Pier. Fisherman who wanted more adventure and larger fish than what simple pier fishing provided, were able to buy tickets on sport fishing boats who offered daily deep sea excursions from the west end of the Pier. In 1921, Captain Thornton J. Morris was the first enterprising individual to offer private charters on the sixty-foot *Ursula* and the speedboat *Josie M*, and a few years later he added additional boats to his sport fishing fleet, including the sixty-foot *Ameco*, the *Palisades*, and *W.K.* By the mid-1920s additional sport fishing companies operated on the Pier, including Dick Hernage’s *Scandia II* and *Bright*; Olaf Olsen’s *Harold O.* and *Viking*; and Scotty Lacade’s *Kitty A.* For less adventurous fisherman afraid of high seas, water taxis departing from the west end would transport fisherman to fishing barges anchored in the bay. The popularity of sport fishing subsided during the 1960s and the tumultuous storm of 1983 effectively put an end to all boating operations.

**Transportation Improvements in Santa Monica.** As recreation and business boomed in Santa Monica, transportation infrastructure quickly improved and developed. A deep arroyo, occupied today by the Santa Monica Freeway, once separated Santa Monica’s commercial district and the Ocean Park neighborhood. In the late 19th century, the arroyo functioned as a track bed for the Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) and the Pacific Electric Railway. While the immediate vicinity of the arroyo was sparsely populated, it was in proximity to the city’s earliest resorts. The Arcadia Hotel, circa 1887, was located nearby on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean to the south of present day Colorado Avenue until it was demolished in 1908.

The rapid growth of Santa Monica during the 1920s generated an increased need for transportation connectivity and the Main Street Bridge, circa 1926, created a link, via Main Street, between the city’s growing commercial core and Ocean Park. Upon completion, the Main Street Bridge extended Main Street across the arroyo. Traveling south, Main Street bisected the mostly vacant area owned by the SPRR until it reached the former Santa Fe Railroad’s right of way and a small residential pocket that occupied the southeast corner of the quadrant. From there, Main Street turned diagonally southwest to connect with the existing segment of Main Street in Ocean Park. The Bridge still occupies its original location despite numerous changes to its setting over the past eight decades.

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17 *James Harris*, p. 88.
The challenging topography from the Pacific Ocean inland to the vicinity of the Fourth Street Bridge created the need for a variety of permanent crossings since at least the 1890s. An 1891 Sanborn map depicts a thin north-south bridge over the natural arroyo, occupied today by the Santa Monica Freeway. An elevated boardwalk that extended from the bridge provided access from the bluff to the beach and Arcadia Bath House below. By 1895, a more substantial wooden bridge in the same vicinity was built. This bridge, known as the Ocean Avenue Bridge, had three separate lanes for the passage of wagons, automobiles, and pedestrians. The wooden bridge was replaced by a concrete structure in 1902 (demolished 1934). By the late 1930s, with the former rail passage widened and converted to automobile use, the road below was known as Olympic Boulevard. Olympic Boulevard ran through the tunnel until it was rerouted in the 1960s. In 1966, the Santa Monica Freeway reached the Pacific Coast Highway via the tunnel (known today as the McClure Tunnel). Throughout its history, the Main Street Bridge has spanned rail lines, Olympic Boulevard, and the Santa Monica Freeway.

The Colorado Avenue Viaduct and Colorado Grade Separation Project. The Colorado Avenue Viaduct is associated with early 20th century recreation and transportation improvements in the City of Santa Monica. The 600-foot Colorado Avenue Viaduct, constructed in 1939 (Plate 7), was one facet of the complex transportation project, the Colorado Grade Separation Project, designed to improve access between the coast and city streets.20 Reported by state highway engineers as one of the most “dangerous traffic snarls,” the Colorado Grade Separation Project untangled the three routes that carried traffic from the Ocean Avenue to the coast.

Construction of the Colorado Avenue Viaduct began on September 19, 1939, closing the entrance to the Municipal Pier and routing traffic down Moss Avenue.21 Tourism declined as a result of the entrance closure, so the City reduced rents for businesses by five


21 *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, “Overpass Will Be Opened Monday: Direct Route to Pier to be Provided Again,” June 12, 1940, p. 7.
percent. The Colorado Avenue Viaduct formally opened on June 12, 1940. The City of Santa Monica Commissioners commended the engineering milestone and boasted “a new and far-better-than-before roadway to the Municipal Pier.”

The Santa Monica Pier Sign. After the Colorado Avenue Viaduct opened in 1940, business owners on the Santa Monica Pier determined the Viaduct entrance needed a grand welcoming sign. The entrance to the Pier did not have prominent signage indicating the entrance to the Pier from the intersection at Colorado Boulevard and Ocean Avenue. From savings on rent reduction during the viaduct construction, the Santa Monica Business Men’s Association commissioned the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company to design, construct, and install a neon sign for two thousand dollars (Plate 8). The Santa Monica Business Men’s Association wanted the sign to advertise the outstanding amenities and activities located on the pier, thus the pier sign reads “Santa Monica Yacht Harbor * Sport Fishing * Boating * Cafes.” At the time the Sign was erected, the major attractions on the Pier were the yacht harbor, sport fishing, and boating. The Sign was officially installed and presented to the City on June 19, 1941 (Plate 9). At a small ceremony, Dick Hernage, President of the Santa Monica Pier Business Men’s Association, gave the Sign to the City, represented by three City Commissioners. It is interesting to note that the Santa Monica Pier Sign was installed just over a year after the completion of Santa Monica City Hall in 1939; the duo are among Santa Monica’s several iconic Streamline Moderne monuments representing the City’s identity during the 1940s.

Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company. The Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company was identified as the designer and manufacturer of the Sign. The Santa Monica City Directories indicate the company was established in Santa Monica in 1936 at 2300 Lincoln Boulevard,

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22 Santa Monica Evening Outlook, “Santa Monica Pier in Gala Celebration Tomorrow,” June 12, 1940, p. 13.

23 James Harris, Santa Monica Pier: a century on the last great pleasure pier (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2009), p. 42.

24 Santa Monica Evening Outlook, “Sign Presented to City,” June 20, 1941, p. 20.
lists the manager as Fred Leyman, and describes the company as “Neon Signs and Borders, Sales and Service.” The 1940 Santa Monica City Directory lists the company at 800 Colorado Avenue. It appears the company also designed other neon signs in Southern California, including the Pan Pacific Auditorium, Los Angeles (Plate 10); Henshey’s Department Store, Santa Monica; and the Sea Lion, Malibu.

**Arched Signs.** Small towns in the United States have a tradition of arched welcome signs beginning at the turn of the century, but the height of their popularity was from 1915 to 1940. Increased reliance on the automobile during the 1920s made prominent signage an essential feature of advertisement along major vehicular arteries. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, President Roosevelt inaugurated the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and started the greatest road building boom in the country’s history. Town officials saw this as an opportunity to advertise their towns to motorists and erected free-standing arches constructed of masonry, steel or wood, later with the advancement of technology neon was incorporated, and suspended the arches across highways. The signs carried the name of the town along with a word of welcome or slogan. They were “an outward expression of people’s pride in their community and a symbol of the friendly rivalry that exists between

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25 Santa Monica City Directories are unavailable between 1941 and 1946. The next available Santa Monica City Directory is from 1947-48 and the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company is not listed in the directory.

26 The Pan Pacific Auditorium, 7600 Beverly Boulevard (1935; burned 1989) was created by the architectural firm of Plummer, Wurdenman & Becket, who teamed up on the design of this temporary structure for the National Housing Exposition; in the 1940s it became a permanent full-service auditorium, before being shuttered in 1972. One of Los Angeles’s most iconic landmarks in the Depression years, the outstanding feature of the Pan was its Streamline Moderne façade, with soaring flag poles and neon sign integrated into the architecture of the entrance marquee. The Southern California Chapter of the AIA gave the Pan-Pacific an Honor Award in January 1947. The County purchased the property in 1979, and a year after it was declared a city landmark and listed on the National Register. In 1989, the dilapidated building was destroyed by fire. (http://bigorangelandmarks.blogspot.com/2008/09/no-183-site-of-west-facade-of-pan.html, accessed October 17, 2011).

Examples of arched welcome signs were located in Modesto, California, circa 1920s (Plate 11); Reno, California, circa 1926 (Plate 12); and Rock Springs, Wyoming, circa 1930 (Plate 13).

The earliest illuminated signs used large numbers of low-wattage light bulbs. During the 1930s and 1940s, neon lighting became popular and was used in the majority of welcome signs constructed during this period. Examples of neon arched welcome signs constructed during the 1930s and 1940s are located in Linton, Indiana, circa mid-1930s (Plate 14); Columbus, Nebraska, 1940 (Plate 15); Fresno, California, 1925 (Plate 16); and Huntington Beach, circa 1930s (Plate 17).

Pier Signs in Southern California. Historically the entrances to piers in Southern California have been demarcated with an arch or a sign to promote and identify the pier. At The entrances to the Crystal Pier (Plate 18), Pacific Beach, San Diego, constructed circa 1928.
1925, and the Hermosa Beach Pier (Plate 19), Hermosa Beach, constructed circa 1914, were buildings that had an arch spanning the pier entrance.29 The Manhattan Beach Pier had an electric sign (Plate 20), circa 1923, supported by two iron poles that stretched across the width of the pier. The sign was designed and manufactured by the Metlox Company, a local ceramic manufacturer.30 The sign had large ceramic letters illuminated with electric lights. The Streamline Moderne Malibu Pier sign (Plate 21), circa the late 1930s, is stylistically similar to the Santa Monica Pier sign, but was pole mounted.31 The Malibu Pier sign also advertises sport fishing.

![Left to Right: Plate 18. Crystal Pier, Pacific Beach, San Diego, California, 1925 (George Ross Jezek, p. 70); Plate 19. Hermosa Beach Pier, Hermosa Beach, California, circa 1940 (Chris Miller and Jerry Roberts, p. 41)](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24409)

**History of Neon.** The word Neo originates from the Greek word for “new,” at the time Neon was discovered it was a “new gas.” Neon gas was first discovered by Sir William Ramsey in 1898 and was found to have the unique property of glowing when an electric charge passes through it.32 Neon is technically called “luminous tube lighting,” a vacuum glass tube filled with a small amount of rare gas, neon, and fitted at each end with an

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electrode. When the two electrodes are connected to a source of high-voltage electrical power, the neon glows. In 1910, George Claude, a Frenchman, displayed the first commercial luminous tube sign at the Grande Palais in Paris. The new technology, long-lasting, economical and noncorrosive, was an alternative to typical low-wattage incandescent lighting. Before neon, electric signs consisted of a box with lights inside or outside with little artistic value. Neon tubing was easily molded into shapes and could be colored dependent upon the glass color. George Claude’s partner, Jacques Fonesque, realized the potential neon had for advertising and sold the first neon sign to a barber shop, Palais Coiffeur, on Boulevard Montmarte in 1912. By 1914, there were over 160 neon signs in Paris that were all focused on lettering. George Claude was granted a patent on January 19, 1915 for the electrode attachment process.

In 1923, the first documented neon commercial sign in the United States was at the Packard Motor dealership in Los Angeles (Plate 22). Earle C. Anthony imported two signs from Paris made of Claude Neon for his Packard Dealership. The simple signs were comprised of orange letters spelling “Packard” surrounded by a blue border. George Claude began franchising his method of the electrode attachment process to businesses all over America for $100,000 plus royalties, until Americans learned the technology and ignored the patent rights. A list of early neon customers who erected standardized signs included, “Remington typewriters, Loft candies, American Radiator Company, Eveready batteries, Packard, Willys-Knight, Scientific American, Standard Oil, Burroughs adding machines, and Lucky Strike cigarettes.”

Increased reliance on the automobile during the 1930s and 1940s made prominent signage, generally constructed of neon and metal, an essential feature of businesses along major vehicular arteries. Large signs, clearly visible from automobiles at rapid speeds,

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33 Michael F Crowe, p. 31.
34 Ibid, p. 2.
35 Michael F Crowe, p. 31.
became commonplace on all types of businesses of the period. At the local level, other commercial corridors emulated the advertising strategy of distinctive roadside signage to attract the automobile traveler. At the outbreak of World War II, there were 2,000 neon sign companies in the United States.

**Streamline Modern Style and Neon Signage.** Following the height of the Art Deco style in the early 1930s, the Streamline Moderne style was an economic and stylistic response to the ravaging effects of the Great Depression. A new style was needed to express optimism and a bright look toward the future. Streamline Moderne style structures continued to suggest modern values of movement and rejection of historic precedents, but with far less opulence and more restraint than the Art Deco style of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Yet the Streamline Moderne style differed from the “High Art Modern Architecture” of the early 1930s in that it,

...continued to regard design as ‘styling’ and that architecture should represent or perform as an image rather than be a used as a space to radically change ones everyday life. The boosters of Streamline Moderne argued that their purpose was not to create an architecture that functioned in the same way as the ocean liner, airplane, or locomotive; rather, the buildings would symbolize those things and therefore remind one of the ‘modern’ future.

Streamline Moderne architecture took its cue from the emerging field of industrial design and borrowed imagery from things swift and free – in particular, the ocean liner, the automobile, and the airplane.

The Streamline Moderne styling of the Santa Monica Pier Sign reflects the national trends of the style which reached its height during the early 1940s and continued in use into the early 1950s. The Streamline Moderne style was applied to signage, specifically neon signs, with the design focus on the font and shape. Often architects, designers, draftsmen, and sign manufacturers were commissioned to design signage. *A Handbook on Neon Advertising Design*, originally published in 1935, compiled various Streamline Moderne templates for designing and manufacturing signs (Plate 23). The Handbook advocated the modern neon trend and described its applicability to modern design:

> As a point of illustration, the sign and automobile industries may be said to be similar in many ways. One could not hope to sell model 1910 automobiles in this day; neither could the best salesman sell model 1910 sign advertising today. By the same

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36 Ibid.

37 Michael Webb, p. viii.

token one would not install a late model motor in an old style automobile, nor attempt to install modern neon equipment in out-of-date signs which obviously do not lend themselves to the adaptation of modernistic design or modern color schemes.

Electric sign designing today is a specialized field. It requires a new technique that is recognized and respected by all progressive sign manufacturers. The art of sign designing has advanced such an extent that architects and builders of modern structures now specify and secure signs of artistic sign conformity.

Owners of new buildings and merchandising-minded store owners are now sign-wise and they demand modern signs that harmonize with their buildings, and their store fonts and interiors. As a result, sign designers are compelled to keep pace with the trend of the time.39

After the first neon signs were erected in Los Angeles in 1923, neon became immediately popular during the late 1920s, and reached its height of popularity in the 1940s. In the beginning neon was added to existing buildings as accents and by the 1930s neon signage and tubing were being used as an integral part of the architecture for a unified design. There are several different types of signs, including swing or projecting, vertical fascia, outline skeleton, rooftop, pole, and marquee.40 Additionally, there are different kinds of letters, including flat, raised, channel cut out, recessed, back-lit, and overlay.41 Due to the ease of shaping the glass tubes, they were easily applied to the Streamline Modern style. The Santa Monica Pier Sign exhibits the basic design features of the Streamline Modern style and includes stepped massing, restrained detailing, horizontality, curvature, and sans-serif font (flat letters with neon detailing).

Plate 23. Sketches for neon tube lettering, circa 1935

40 Michael F Crowe, p. 32.
41 Michael F Crowe, p. 33.
Other neon signs in Santa Monica exhibiting some Streamline Moderne character are Cora’s Coffee Shop, pole-mounted sign (Plate 23); Zucky’s, wall mounted, restored (Plate 24); Father’s Office, pole-mounted (Plate 25); and Penguin Coffee Shop, pole-mounted, altered and Googie example (Plate 26).

During the 1940s neon was produced in forty colors, many that are unavailable today.42 The neon colors are made by adding different levels of neon gas combined with argon and mercury, as well as using tinted glass tubes.

Because neon lights and signs use light and color combinations, the additive primary colors—red, green and blue—are the three main neon colors. Red neon light colors include ruby red, argon ruby, tangerine, orange and deep red. Many neon "open" signs are a shade of red. Green neon shades include sea green, standard green, rich green, clear emerald and apple green. Neon blue shades include clear blue, standard blue, sky blue, rich blue and cobalt blue. Additive secondary colors are those that are created using equal parts of two additive primary colors. Red and blue create purple, an additive secondary color. Other additive secondary colors are yellow (red and green) and cyan (green and blue). Neon yellow shades include clear yellow, clear gold, noviol gold, bright noviol and deep noviol. Purple neon shades include violet, purple, deep lavender, deep purple and ultra violet. Cyan neon colors include clean aqua, coated aqua and blue-green. The neon used on the Santa Monica Pier Sign is white, sea green, and gold, which were typical colors for the time period. One cannot help but surmise that this color palette may also allude to the tile work of Santa Monica City Hall and the City logo.

42 Ibid.
**Person(s) of Historical Importance**

Fred Leyman was identified as the manager of the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company. However, no additional information was uncovered about his education, ability, or other notable achievements. No other persons of historical importance were associated with the Sign.

**Statement of other significance**

No other evidence was discovered in current research of the property to indicate other significance.

**Is the structure representative of a style in the City that is no longer prevalent?**

Within Santa Monica, the Sign is a representative example of an arched neon Streamline Moderne style sign, which is no longer prevalent in the City and is one of the only surviving arched neon signs of its era in Santa Monica. The Sign has not been substantially altered since its installation in 1941 and retains its integrity.

**Does the structure contribute to a potential historic district?**

The Sign contributes to the Santa Monica Pier as a whole, as part of a potential Santa Monica Pier historic district or grouping. The Sign is the iconic symbol representing the Santa Monica Pier. The Sign, Colorado Avenue Viaduct, Looff Carousel, and adjacent buildings are a related group of structures that contribute to the history of the Santa Monica Pier.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, based on current research and the above assessment, the Santa Monica Pier Sign appears to meet the City of Santa Monica Landmark criteria. It is recommended the City reviews and follows the preservation recommendations outlined in the National Park Service Preservation Brief No. 25: The Preservation of Historic Signs (http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief25.htm).
Landmark Criteria

9.36.100(a)(1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.

The property appears to satisfy this criterion. The Sign is an iconic symbol of the Santa Monica Pier and integral to the history of cultural, social, and economic history of the City and the Santa Monica Pier. At the time the Sign was erected, the yacht harbor, sports fishing, and other amenities including the Looff carousel and cafes were pivotal to the local culture and economy of the Santa Monica Pier and associated commercial, entertainment and recreational areas in the City. In applying the City’s significance criteria for individual recognition as a potential City of Santa Monica Landmark, the Sign appears to possess sufficient historical importance and architectural merit to warrant such designation.

9.36.100(a)(2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.

The Sign is an excellent example of its type, an arched neon Streamline Moderne sign, and it embodies sufficient aesthetic or artistic interest or value necessary for designation.

9.36.100(a)(3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.

Historical background research did not reveal any information on the Sign’s association with important individuals that indicates historical significance or notability. Therefore, the Sign does not appear to satisfy this criterion.

9.36.100(a)(4) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.

The property appears to satisfy this criterion. The Sign is an excellent example of the type and style of neon signs constructed during the early 1940s. The Sign is unique in and of itself, and there are no other extant examples of its type and style, an arched neon Streamline Moderne sign, within the City of Santa Monica, the broader Los Angeles metropolitan area or other Southern California beach cities. The Santa
Monica Pier Sign appears to satisfy this criterion as a rare, extant example of a unique neon sign constructed during the 1940s.

9.36.100(a)(5) It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.

The Sign appears eligible for local landmark designation under this criterion. The Sign was designed and constructed by the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company. The company operated their business in Santa Monica. It appears the company also designed other notable neon signs in Southern California, including the Pan Pacific Auditorium, Los Angeles; Henshey’s Department Store, Santa Monica; and the Sea Lion, Malibu. Among these signs the Santa Monica Pier Sign is the only extant sign designed by the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company, and the Santa Monica Pier Sign has become the most iconic and the primary image associated with the Pier. Through physical examination of the Sign, it can be inferred the Pan Pacific Neon Sign Company was an experienced and talented company. The Sign itself stands as evidence of the competence of its designer.

9.36.100(a)(6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.

The Sign appears to satisfy this criterion. The Santa Monica Pier Sign is an iconic and recognizable feature associated with the Santa Monica Pier. The scale and proportions of the Sign at the intersection of Colorado and Ocean Avenues, the arch shape, the Streamline Moderne styling and neon lettering of the Sign is a notable visual feature. As a result, the Santa Monica Pier Sign is an established and familiar visual feature of the community.
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ATTACHMENTS

Santa Monica Evening Outlook Article, June 20, 1941

Current Tax Assessor Map

1918 Sanborn Map

1950 Sanborn Map
SIGN PRESENTED TO CITY

When Dick Hernage, president of the Santa Monica Pier Business Men's association, handed the new pier sign over to the city yesterday, all three city commissioners were on hand to accept the big neon marker in the name of the municipality. Left to right, behind the pier rail, are Hernage, Commissioner D. C. Freeman, Commissioner W. W. Milliken and Mayor Claude C. Crawford. In front are Martha O'Driscoll and Susan Hayward, young film players who happened along through the intensive efforts of Bob Bears of the city lifeguard service.

Santa Monica Pier Sign Presented to the City, June 20, 1941
(Santa Monica Evening Outlook, “Sign Presented to City,” June 20, 1941, p. 20.)
Assessor’s Map
1918 Sanborn Map
1950 Sanborn Map