Mendota Block
2663-2671 Main Street
Santa Monica, California
City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report
Tax Assessor Map
Photographs
Sanborn Maps
Building Permit History

Prepared for:
City of Santa Monica
Planning Division

Prepared by:
Jan Ostashay, Principal
Ostashay & Associates Consulting
PO BOX 542
Long Beach, California 90801

October 2014
Mendota Block

2663-2671 Main Street
City of Santa Monica
APN: 4288-002-035

City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

This landmark assessment report documents and evaluates the local significance and landmark eligibility of the Mendota Block building located at 2663-2671 Main Street in the City of Santa Monica, California. This assessment report includes a discussion of the survey elevation methodology used, a summarized description of the property, a brief historical context of the community and property, the identification of character-defining features, the local landmark criteria considered, the evaluation of historic significance, photographs, and applicable supporting material.

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify and evaluate the subject property as a potential local landmark, an intensive-level survey was conducted. The assessment included a review of the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) and its annual updates, the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register), and the California Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) list maintained by the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) in order to determine if any previous evaluations or survey assessments of the property had been performed.

For this current landmark assessment a site inspection and a review of building permits and tax assessor records were conducted to document the property’s existing condition and assist in evaluating the property for historical significance. The City of Santa Monica’s landmark criteria were employed to evaluate the local significance of the site and its eligibility for landmark designation. In addition, the following tasks were performed for the study:

- Searched records of the National Register, California Register, and OHP Historic Resources Inventory.
- Conducted a field inspection of the subject property.
- Conducted site-specific research on the subject property utilizing Sanborn fire insurance maps, city directories, newspaper articles, historical photographs, and building permits.
- Reviewed and analyzed ordinances, statutes, regulations, bulletins, and technical materials relating to federal, state, and local historic preservation, designation assessment procedures, and related programs.
• Evaluated the potential historic resource based upon criteria established by the City of Santa Monica and utilized the OHP survey methodology for conducting survey assessments.

FINDINGS

This report concludes that the property located at 2663-2671 Main Street, the Mendota Block building, meets several of the City’s local landmark program significance criteria and is, therefore, eligible for designation as a City of Santa Monica Landmark. The property satisfies Criterion 1, as reflecting an important historical period in the city from the 1910s; under Criterion 2, for being an area of artistic interest and value; under Criterion 3, for being associated with an important person; under Criterion 4, as being a very good extant example of early vernacular commercial architecture within the Ocean Park business area; and under Criterion 6, for being an established and familiar visual feature. These conclusions are based on extensive research conducted on the property, the development of relevant historic contexts, an analysis of the eligibility criteria, and an assessment of integrity thresholds for consideration as a local City of Santa Monica landmark.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The subject property (the Mendota Block) is situated at the northeast corner of Main Street and Hill Street, and occupies lots 55 and 56 (two tied lots) of Block Q of the Santa Monica Commercial Co’s tract. Each parcel measures approximately 25 feet by 100 feet (the shorter frontage faces Main Street). The two-story commercial building with 8,668 square feet of space is located in the Ocean Park commercial neighborhood of the City. The building has two primary elevations with shops units and entry doors along both Main Street (facing west) and Hill Street (facing south). There are additional secondary entries into the building off the rear (east) elevation.

The property has been previously identified and evaluated under the City’s on-going historic resources survey process. It was first assessed as part of the 1983 Santa Monica Historic Resources and was identified as a contributor to the potential “Main Street (Historic) District.” The property assigned a California Historical Resources Status Code (previously referred to as the National Register Status Codes) of 5/5D, which at that time was defined as “ineligible for the National Register but still of local interest and eligible for local listing as a contributor only.” It was also identified and recorded as part of the 1985-1986 Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory survey as a contributor to the “Main Street District.” The most recent survey, the City’s Citywide Historic Resources Survey Update (December 2007, finalized 2010) reconfirmed the property’s eligibility status as a district contributor to the Main Street Historic District and was assigned a California Historical Resources Status Code of 5D3, which means “appears to be a contributor to a district that appears eligible for local listing or designation through survey elevation.” The 2007 Citywide Historic Resources Survey Update also identified the property as eligible for designation as a City Structure of Merit.
PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Architectural Description. Constructed in 1913, the Mendota Block building is a two-story, masonry constructed classically inspired vernacular style commercial structure that contains retail use on the ground floor and office space on the second floor. Situated at the northeast corner of Main and Hill streets, the building occupies most of the two tied lots associated with the property with no setback from the public sidewalks along the two streets. The front (west) elevation contains three storefront openings while the south side of the building includes two separate shop units (207, 209 Hills Street), a false shop entry (203 Hill Street), and an entry to the office spaces upstairs (205 Hill Street). The building also features a basement area.

Capped with a flat roof with parapet, the brick building features an ornate fretwork patterned brick frieze and an imposing non-original metal cornice that wraps the west and south elevations. The name of the building is incorporated into the running frieze along the front (west) elevation and reads “MENDOTA BLOCK.” A double banded brick stringcourse separates the first floor from the second level along the two primary commercial storefront facades. Set just above the upper stringcourse are the sills of a series of elongated window openings most of which are set in pairs of similar size. The fenestration in these recessed window openings was originally wood-frame sash, but consist now of wood-frame casements. The ground floor level of the west and south elevations feature storefront bays of varying size that are separated by original brick (now stuccoed) engaged columns. The large display windows of the shop units include non-original wood panel bulkheads and transoms, some of which are interrupted by non-original ornate wood and glazed panel entry doors. Canvas awnings have been hung from the lower stringcourse of the building over the storefront openings along both Main and Hill streets at the transom level.

The rear (east) and north (side) elevations are utilitarian in character, design, and general appearance. At the rear of the building is a code compliant exterior staircase of wood and stucco as well as a small back yard area that is paved with brick and enclosed by a brick wall and metal fencing. The first floor of the rear of the building is mostly sheathed in stucco and contains non-original entry doors, utility panel switches, and access to the basement. The upper floor of this elevation retains much of its historical character as it is punctuated by elongated window openings with arched shape brick lintels and recessed casement windows (non-original) as well as a secondary entry door to the office spaces within. The north (side) elevation is basically devoid of any ornamentation and openings but for a single still intact (original) wood-frame sash with brick sill and lintel on the first floor and two recessed open light wells at the second level. The walls within these two open light wells have been stuccoed and the doors and windows replaced.

Construction History and Alterations. There are few older building permits on record with the City of Santa Monica for the subject property. The original permit was not uncovered during the current research and assessment evaluation of the building. The date of construction was determined using tax assessor records, reviewing city directory information, studying historic aerials and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the area, and from information gleamed from previous survey assessments of the property.
The earliest recorded permit dates to 1956 for the installation of awnings along much of the two commercial storefront elevations of the first floor of the building. That same year, a permit was issued for the installation of exterior wall signage that wrapped around the southwest corner of the building and along both street level facades.

A permit from 1959 described the building as having four stores and 12 residential rental units. Work requested under this permit included the installation of new plate glass windows in the storefronts and the relocation of a side door (unspecified as to which elevation for the door relocation work). It wasn’t until the late 1970s that the building underwent significant exterior and interior modifications.

In 1978, both the first and second floors of the interior as well as the basement were substantially remodeled. It was also at this time that the original rear exterior staircase was removed and replaced with its current code-compliant configuration. In addition, the original wood-frame sash windows on the second floor of the building were removed and replaced with casement frames within the original window openings. The storefront entry doors, windows, and bays at ground level were also removed, reconfigured and replaced with an aluminum framing system. As part of the renovation work of the late 1970s, the building was seismically retrofitted using metal ties, a concrete beam frame and stucco in 1979. It was also at this time that the monumental metal cornice was added to the building’s parapet; possibly as part of the retrofit work. In 1980, the building was sandblasted to remove the old light colored paint on the exterior walls and re-painted a red brick color with white trim highlights for the frieze (which is still evident today). As part of this remodel work the upstairs apartment units were reconfigured and partitioned for office space, and a third shop unit space was added along Main Street as well as an additional shop unit along Hill Street.

In the early 1990s, when Starbucks moved in and occupied the southwest corner shop unit, the building experienced additional interior improvements. In later years, the aluminum framing system of the commercial storefronts were removed and the ground floor level was remodeled in a more sympathetic manner that incorporated period-appropriate storefront type bulkheads, display windows, side lites, transoms, and entry doors. And finally, in 2003, the building was re-roofed.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

**Santa Monica.** In 1875, the original townsite of Santa Monica was surveyed, including all the land extending from Colorado Street on the south to Montana 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, with homes being constructed in the tracts north of Montana Avenue and east of Seventh Street for year-round residents. Commercial buildings,

---

\(^1\) Adapted from City of Santa Monica, “Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory,” 1988-1986.
primarily one- or two-story in height, initially concentrated along 2nd and 3rd Streets between Colorado Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard also began to expand north and eastward at this time. The impetus for this change occurred as a result of the continuing resident and tourist population growth of the City overall and their demand for consumer goods.

While tourism has always been the primary industry of the city, other factors also contributed to the community’s economic base. A brick, terra cotta and pottery facility was located in the southern portion of the town. The Merle Norman Cosmetics Company had its initial headquarters on Main Street for many years. The Douglas Aircraft Company, begun in 1923, was also located in Santa Monica near the airport and went on to become a primary contractor for the manufacture of aircraft. In later years, the Rand Corporation, a nationally known “think tank” established its operations along Main Street across from the City Hall.

With the expansion of the Douglas Aircraft Company during World War II, a boom in population and building occurred once again with the construction of whole residential tracts of single-family dwellings. Multi-family housing was also in demand as the City’s population continued to grow. The area north of the Santa Monica Freeway has been transformed as many of the early, modest single-family houses have been replaced with larger homes or modern condominium units. Neighborhoods south of the freeway also experienced a construction growth of multi-family housing types that include high-rise towers, condo conversions, and two- and three-story townhouses.

**Ocean Park.** Ocean Park’s history was somewhat independent from that of the rest of Santa Monica. Separated from the north by a gully, which initially was filled by the Pacific Electric Railway tracks and today by the Santa Monica Freeway, Ocean Park was initially oriented towards the beach where a series of piers and other tourist attractions were constructed in the late nineteenth century. Much of the housing during this early period of development was deliberately temporary in nature. Although residential tracts began to be subdivided, from the large blocks of land that was once owned by families such as the Lucas and the Vawters families in the mid-1880s, construction tended to cluster on streets nearest the ocean with the 4th Street hill as the inland boundary.

In the years following the turn-of-the-twentieth century; however, building activities intensified significantly. Main Street (initially called 2nd Street) became the commercial spine of the community, servicing both permanent residents and visitors who lived in the beach cottages, bungalows, and bungalow courts that sprang up as far east as Lincoln Boulevard and beyond. By the close of the 1910s, a substantial portion of Ocean Park had been improved. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed nearly complete build-out of the area, sometimes at the expense of older improvements. This pattern of development continued in the post-World War II era with the result that Ocean Park is characterized by a multi-layered and diverse historical legacy in terms of the ages, styles, and building types it contains.

---

2 *Adapted from City of Santa Monica, “Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory, Phase 3,” 1993.*
Following World War II, few new amusement piers were constructed. Soon the familiar cycle of
destruction by fire in conjunction with changing economics and new recreational choices led to
the demise of the great amusement piers. A short-lived exception to this trend was Pacific
Ocean Park (POP), which opened in 1958 as a competitor to Anaheim’s Disneyland, but POP
eventually closed in 1967. In the early 1970s, fire destroyed the remaining remnants of the
Pacific Ocean Park Pier erasing the last physical evidence of what had been one of the defining
features of the Ocean Park community and the catalyst for its early growth.

Uses of the beach and the character of the built environment of Ocean Park changed. Whereas
the beachfront was once defined by a multitude of amusement park piers, large commercial
buildings, and residential structures, today it is notable for its open stretches of sand. The
beach itself was enlarged when hundreds of tons of dredged sand were deposited there after
World War II. Soon thereafter, many small hotels, flophouses, apartments, stores and shops,
and other buildings were closed and demolished as part of a redevelopment plan implemented
between 1957 and 1964. At that time the neighborhood was in decline and the construction of
new, larger residential and commercial structures was in favor. Despite this redevelopment
activity, the Ocean Park became the center for bohemian culture, art, and political activism.

In later years, following the transformation of the oceanfront the beach itself became a popular
destination for recreational activities. Swimming, surfing, sunbathing, beach volleyball, jogging,
and bike riding continue to draw visitors from southern California and countries around the
world.

**Main Street.**

Santa Monica’s Main Street extends from Colorado Avenue on the north to the
Los Angeles city limits on the south, continuing into the area defined as Venice in the City of Los
Angeles. The street is divided architecturally into two sections, one north of Ocean Park
Boulevard and other south. The northern portion begins at the Main Street Bridge, with its
vintage street lights and reinforced concrete deck and railing walls, which originally carried the
street over the Pacific Electric Railway tracks and now over the Santa Monica Freeway. South of
the bridge the street passes along the city’s Moderne style City Hall with the Santa Monica Civic
Center just to the south. South of Pico Boulevard the scale, setting, and use of Main Street
changes; in this area it is lined primarily with small-scale commercial improvements such as
restaurants, small shops, offices, and some industrial and residential uses.

Properties along this portion of Main Street range from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-
century dwellings, to 1910s to 1920s vernacular brick commercial buildings, to Streamline
Moderne buildings of the 1930s, to mid-twentieth century structures. The southern portion of
Main Street south of Ocean Park Boulevard is characterized primarily by one- and two-story
brick commercial vernacular buildings of the 1910s and 1920s. Early improvements along this
section of Main Street include the Mendota Block building and the Ocean Park Branch Library
(Carnegie Library), anchored by the five-story Elks Building at the southern end of town.

---

3 Adapted from City of Santa Monica, “Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory,” 1988-1986.
The earliest map of Main Street showing land use is the 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, which includes the portion of this street from Front Street (now Pico Boulevard) to the southern city limits (at Marine Street). Main Street was at the time called 2nd Street, and the present-day 2nd Street was known as Lake Street. The tracks of the California Southern Railroad, a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, ran down the center of 2nd (Main) Street from Front to Hollister Avenue, where they veered to the west, running south along what is now Neilson Way. This change in the alignment of the tracks accounts for the jog in Main Street at Hollister.

In reviewing the 1902 Sanborn, scattered residential development is evident along 2nd (Main) Street, interspersed with some commercial uses such as the Santa Monica Brewery at the northeast corner of Bicknell and Main, the Ocean Park Lumber Company south of Hill Street, and the Kinney and Dudley Water Works Company just south of Ash Street. By 1902, a small commercial district was developing at 2nd (Main) and Hill, comprised of several small stores, a church with school room (originally constructed as a railway freight depot), the California Southern Railroad passenger depot, and a small freight yard for the Los Angeles Pacific Railroad.

In reviewing the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from 1909, 2nd Street had been renamed Main and the Bay Cities Laundry building stood in the Y-shaped parcel between Main Street and the railroad right-of-way. Though the area north of Hollister was still lightly developed, new and larger commercial buildings had been erected farther south, beginning with the Imperial Ice Company at what is now 2435 Main Street. A large wood-frame building with a masonry façade was built for the Ocean Park Steam Laundry at the east side of Main Street just north of Hill Street, and the church had been reconverted back to a freight office. A funeral (undertaker) parlor stood at the northeast corner of Ashland and Main. By this time, most of the commercial development had shifted to Pier Avenue between Main Street and the new ocean piers at the end of that street. There were also several extant residential dwellings lining both sides of Main Street, as well.

This pattern of development continued into the 1910s. In 1913, the two-story Mendota Block building (the subject property) with shops on the first floor and apartment rental upstairs was erected and a year later the “Main Garage” was built at 2407 Main Street. By 1918, the Bay Cities Dye Works stood on the site of what is today the Merle Norman Building, and the Ocean Park Branch Library had been constructed at the corner of Central, which was later widened to become Ocean Park Boulevard. A feed and fuel yard occupied the west side of Main Street north of Hill, and a series of masonry commercial structures including a bakery, bicycle shop, post office, and tire works shop, had been built south of Hill on the west side of Main Street as far as Pier Avenue. The east side of Main Street between Hill and Ashland continued to be primarily residential until the early 1920s, when the residences began to be replaced by brick vernacular commercial buildings. Main Street did not exist north of Pico Boulevard in 1918. This area was occupied by railroad freight facilities and a lumber yard. It was later developed into the Santa Monica Civic Center.
In 1926, Main Street was widened on its west side and several existing buildings were moved back four feet from the previous property line. In addition, from this date until the beginning of the Great Depression several significant buildings were constructed along the street, including the Elks Building (1926) at 3001 Main Street, the Pacific Electric bus depot (1926) at 174 Kinney, and the Parkhurst Building at 185 Pier (1927).

Main Street continues to reflect this diverse development history. Because the street was developed slowly over decades, the section north of Ocean Park Boulevard includes a mix of early and more recent commercial buildings executed in a variety of styles and scales. The intersection of Main Street and Ocean Park Boulevard is marked by the Neo-classical style Ocean Park Branch Library, the Streamline Moderne Merle Norman Building, and two 19th century mansions that were relocated here in the 1970s from their original locations on Ocean Avenue. The southern portion of Main Street retains a significant number of early twentieth century commercial architecture with a fairly uniform consistency of design and scale. Many of the facades have been covered and windows altered, but the renovations of the street have led to certain old facades being revealed again. Some storefronts; however, have been overly historicized beyond their original modest qualities. Nonetheless, because this section of Main Street from Ocean Park Boulevard to the south city limits retains a significant collection of early twentieth century commercial buildings with few intrusions the area has been previously identified as a potential City of Santa Monica historic district.

**Mendota Block Building.** As previously discussed, the initial development of the lots near the intersection of Main Street and Hill Street in Ocean Park began just prior to the turn-of-the-twentieth century. As previously discussed, a portion of the Southern California Railway Company (Santa Fe route) ran down Main Street. To service this rail route a small, one-story, wood-frame depot was erected along the north side of Hill Street just west of Main Street and the railroad tracks in 1892. A supporting freight depot was also built nearby at the northwest corner of Main and Hill streets. Just after 1900, the freight depot was leased for non-railroad use and as such became a church. This transition is evident on the 1902 Sanborn Map.

The lots of the subject property were utilized as a freight depot for the Los Angeles Pacific Railroad at this time as well. By 1909, the two parcels associated with the subject property (illustrated on the 1909 Sanborn as one large lot) had been redeveloped with a large bungalow, a small detached dwelling behind the house (a granny flat), and two separate small commercial structures. At this time, most of the lots along the east side of Main Street north and south of the Hill Street were fully developed with residences, commercial ventures, or both. The west side of Main Street south of Hill Street was also well developed; however, the lots just north of Hill Street still contained only the freight depot, a few small dwellings, and a long swath of vacant land. The Los Angeles Pacific railway depot structure was in its same location west of the tracks and Main Street along the north side of Hill Street.

With plenty of access to the beaches and the pleasure piers of Santa Monica and Ocean Park, visitors arrived daily to take advantage of the beach side community and its offerings. Taking

---

4 Serpico, Phil and Lee Gustafson. Santa Fe Coast Lines Depots: Los Angeles Division, p. 150.
advantage of its location near the beach, piers, and rail depot, the two-story Mendota Block building was constructed in 1913 as a mixed-use commercial building with shop units fronting Main and Hill streets and a long-term hotel/apartment house on the upper floor. The commercial spaces were configured with two large storefronts along Main Street (2663 and 2667 Main Street) and only two smaller shop units off Hill Street (207 and 209 Hill Street). In reviewing city directories from 1913 and later, the apartment house upstairs was called the “Mendota Apartments” and had an address of 205 Hill Street. The “Mendota Apartments” was operated by an on-site manager who lived there and rented out the furnished units when vacancies occurred. The tenants over the years included short-term vacationers and long-term blue and white collar workers as well as retirees and widows. The listings in the city directories show a high turnover of managers and tenants for the apartment house up through the early 1960s.

The corner commercial unit at 2667 Main Street initially contained a local pharmacy called the Seaside Pharmacy. This business had just relocated from 2709 Main Street after the Mendota Block building was completed. By the mid-1920s the pharmacy was under new ownership and the name changed to Silvernale’s Pharmacy (operated by Arthur Silvernale of Santa Monica). Silvernale’s Pharmacy remained at this location until the mid-1950s when the business closed. The adjacent store unit at 2663 Main Street contained a notions shop initially, but this business did not last long as by 1914 it was no longer listed in the local city directory. Use of this storefront varied over the years but included a spring water business, dry goods shop, a canvas shop, and for a short time a reading room called the Townsend Club #2. A large used furniture business occupied the unit during much of the 1950s.

There were also two shop units along Hill Street (207 and 209 Hill Street) originally. Much smaller in size compared to the two shops along Main Street these storefronts contained a real estate office and butcher shop just after the building was constructed. A year later; however, one of the units was vacant and the other contained a water company. Over the years, other occupants of these two units have included a milliner, clothing store, radio store, and watchmaker/jeweler.

Following World War II, the area began to change and the redevelopment of Ocean Park between 1957 and 1964 involved the removal of many small hotels, flophouses, apartment buildings, stores, and other structures. The commercial spaces of the subject property were vacant with some tenants were still residing upstairs in the “Mendota Apartments” by the late 1950s and early 1960s. Run down and for sale, up-and-coming visual artist James Turrell purchased the property in 1966. Turrell lived on the second floor but made his studio and exhibit space throughout the building. He resided there at the Mendota Block building, which he called the “Mendota Hotel,” until 1974 when he relocated his residence and studio to Arizona. It was at the “Mendota Hotel” that he created some of his most impressive and signature early pieces of visual art, some of which are titled after the building.

After Turrell sold the building it underwent a significant remodel in the late 1970s. It was at this time that the ground floor storefronts were altered and reconfigured, the building was
retrofitted, the basement converted for occupancy, and the use upstairs was changed from residential to office. Early tenants following this so-called remodel work of the building included the Ocean Parks Project, Inc., which operated the anti-crime program called Communitas, and the group Santa Monica For Renters Rights (SMRR). The Ocean Parks Project, Inc. initially worked from the basement of the Mendota Block building beginning in 1979. This group later became the Ocean Park Community Organization (OPCO), the predecessor to the Ocean Park Association (OPA) known today. The SMRR, a coalition of local tenant groups who petitioned for rent control initiative in the late 1970s and early 1980s, had their first office upstairs. These grassroots organizations played a vital role in establishing significant reform in the Ocean Park area in terms of rent control, crime, and over development, while bolstering and protecting the neighborhood’s sense of community, character, and scale.

Later occupants of the building included Starbucks in the early 1990s. Located in the larger, southwest corner commercial unit fronting Main Street this business went on to make significant tenant improvements to the building’s interior as well as sympathetic exterior modifications. They remain the key tenant today.

The reasoning behind naming the building the “Mendota Block” was not uncovered during this current research and evaluation process. Inquiries were conducted to identify any individuals or businesses with the name Mendota, but to no avail nothing was found to associate the name with the building. Mendota is a small rural community on the west side of Fresno County that initially prospered as a Southern Pacific Railroad storage and switching facility. The Southern Pacific management borrowed the name from Mendota, Illinois. It is possible the building has some railroad connection as it was within close proximity to the local railway system in its early years.

Vernacular Commercial Style. The Mendota Block building is a very good example of classically influenced brick vernacular commercial architecture from the early twentieth century. This style was designed and constructed to primarily meet the needs of the user. They were often one or two stories high, had no setback from the street line, and were devoid of stylistic embellishments, although they incorporated pared-down stylistic details from the period in which they were built. Typically the buildings were constructed of masonry with a large framed storefront system set within masonry pilasters or columns and had modest decorative treatment. For multi-story properties a distinct horizontal separation between the first and second floors was evident by the use of a beltcourse or stringcourse. This feature helped to differentiate the service, public spaces with the private offices or residential apartment units on the upper floors. Many early twentieth century commercial buildings were similar to earlier building stock in form and setting, with rectangular plans and the narrow end of the building oriented to the street. If situated on a corner then the building had the distinction of having two key facades fronting on the public right-of-way with those exteriors formally embellished.

---

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Person(s) of historical importance

James Turrell. James Turrell (1943-) is recognized for his groundbreaking visual art. Born in Pasadena, California, Turrell received a BA degree from Pomona College in perceptual psychology in 1965 and also studied mathematics, geology, and astronomy there. He enrolled in the graduate Studio Art program at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) in 1966 where he began making work using light projections.\(^6\) He later received a MA degree in art from Claremont Graduate University.\(^7\)

Following his studies at UCI, Turrell had acquired the Mendota Block building (the subject property) in Santa Monica, California in November 1966. It was there that his most important early work was developed. By covering the windows of his studio spaces and only allowing prescribed amounts of light in from outside to come through the openings he created his first light projection art pieces there. During the last part of 1968 and the early part of 1969, Turrell concentrated on studio-specific works and also developed his “Shallow-Space Constructions” pieces at the Mendota Block building.

In 1968, he received a monthly stipend over a one year period to take the next steps in the development of his light projections, which came to be known as the “Mendota Stoppages.” A pivotal environmental art piece developed by Turrell from 1969 to 1974, the “Mendota Stoppages” work utilized several rooms in the Mendota Block building. Turrell used the back part of the building as living quarters and two rooms on the ground floor near the front of the building and upper floor as the studio spaces for this work.

The “Mendota Stoppages” work comprised Turrell’s first efforts to establish relationships between inside and outside spaces. The “Mendota Stoppages” were conceptualized in terms of one space “sensing” the light quality present in another. They were part installation and part performance piece (in a sense they were performed by the light in the environment), and they involved the incorporation of his entire studio into the art.

The “Mendota Stoppages” existed in relation to their particular location on the corner of Main and Hill streets. The projections responded to the light and external activity unique to the site. In this sense, they were among the first “site-specific” works to develop during the 1960s. The “Mendota Stoppages” grew slowly out of a process in which Turrell reopened his studio spaces after having completely sealed them off in order to work with another art work called the “Project Pieces.”

During his time at the Mendota Block building, Turrell worked with and finessed the spatial implications of his various light images and elaborated ways of placing light directly out in the

---


\(^7\) Biographical note to introductory leaflet for the 1993 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, South Bank, London, UK.
middle of the interior spaces of his studio. Other prototypes of light image works by Turrell were developed and constructed at the Mendota studio as well.

Turrell kept the Mendota Block building and associated Mendota studio until 1974, when he relocated to Arizona. His eight years at the Mendota Block building were productive, particularly in terms of his conceptual artistic development. Inside the Mendota studio spaces, he worked out several of his key art pieces besides the “Mendota Stoppages” work. He also produced his first environmentally interactive works at the Mendota, the integral series of light images that comprised the “Mendota Stoppages.”

James Turrell is also known for his light tunnels and light projections that create shapes that seem to have mass and weight. He has had over 120 solo exhibitions worldwide since 1967, including the three-venue museum exhibition presented concurrently at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in 2013. For over three decades he has used light and indeterminate space, not objects or images, to extend and enhance perception. In addition to 22 permanent installations at institutions such as the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; The Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; and P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York, Turrell’s work can be seen in over 70 international collections. Since 1968, when Turrell received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the artist has been the recipient of many prestigious awards ranging from The John D. and Catherine T. McArthur Foundation Fellowship (1984) to being named a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government to being presented the National Medal of Arts by President Barack Obama in 2014.

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

Despite its noted alterations the subject property is a very good example of an early twentieth century vernacular commercial building that was erected within the commercial business area along Main Street within the Ocean Park area of the city. While the property type is found throughout much of the City, including downtown, Ocean Park’s Main Street is the primary location of this particular property type. Many of the extant examples in the City dating from this period have been substantially altered and lack sufficient integrity to visually reflect their period of construction, historic character, or historical significance. As such, this property is an extant representative of a particular property type and style that is no longer prevalent in the community.

Does the structure contribute to a potential historic district?

The Mendota Block building was first identified and recorded as part of the 1983 survey of Main Street. The property was recommended as locally eligible as a contributor to the “Main Street District” and given a National Register status code (now referred to as the California Historical Resource Status Codes) of 5/5D. The commercial building was re-identified as part of the 1985-1986 survey and was recorded as a potential district contributor. The subject property was evaluated again as part of the 2007 “Santa Monica Citywide Historic Resources Inventory Update” and its status as a district contributor was recorded as a California Historical Resources
Status Code of 5D3.

EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

Santa Monica Landmark Designation Criteria. In analyzing the historical significance of the subject property, criteria for designation under the City’s local landmark program was considered. Additionally, consideration of historical integrity and the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) survey methodology was used to survey and assess the relative significance of the property.

The Santa Monica Landmarks and Historic Districts Ordinance includes criteria and procedures for designating City of Santa Monica Landmarks, Structures of Merit, and Historic Districts. Landmarks may include structures, natural features, or any type of improvement to a property that is found to have particular architectural or historical significance to the City.

The Landmarks Commission may approve the landmark designation of a structure, improvement, natural feature or an object if it finds that it meets one or more of the following criteria:

- 9.36.100(a)(1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.
- 9.36.100(a)(2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.
- 9.36.100(a)(3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Historical Integrity Consideration. “Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance.” In addition to satisfying the criteria of local significance, a property must have integrity. Integrity is the authenticity of a property’s physical identity clearly indicated by the retention of characteristics that existed during the property’s period of significance. A property eligible for local landmark designation must meet at least one of the City’s landmark criteria and retain enough of its historic character or appearance to be recognizable as historical...
resource. Both the National Register and the California Register recognize the seven aspects of qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity. To retain historic integrity a property should possess several, and usually most, of these seven aspects. Thus, the retention of the specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. The seven qualities that define integrity are location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

In considering the subject property’s historical integrity, exterior alterations to the building are largely limited to the commercial ground level, except for the replacement of the wood-frame sash windows with casement frames and some other work on secondary elevations. In consideration of the age of the structure, its property type, period and method of construction, and architectural style the evident changes have not significantly compromised the property’s overall stylistic qualities, historical integrity, or key character-defining features. Therefore, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical significance.

**Evaluation Findings.** In summary, based on current research and the above assessment, the property located at 2663-2671 Main Street, the Mendota Block building, appears to meet several of the City of Santa Monica’s Landmark Criteria. The property was evaluated according to statutory criteria as follows:

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

Constructed at a very early time in Ocean Park’s history, this still extant vernacular commercial building predates many of the other commercial structures along Main Street. Anchoring the corner of Main and Hill streets, the Mendota Block building visual and physically connotes a distinctive early economic period and architectural style of the Ocean Park area. Its use of exposed brick, brick inlaid ornamentation, building configuration, dual zone design and function, and location help manifest a particular period of commercial development and architecture that was once ubiquitous but is now considered rather rare in the community. Its presence is also a prominent physical reminder of the commercial growth of Main Street within the Ocean Park area in the early 1910s. The property has also been the locale of important cultural and political activities and as such has intangible historic value to the community. In evaluating this property, it appears to satisfy this criterion.

*Criterion (2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.*

While the building is aesthetically pleasing in its overall form and prominent siting, the building’s relatively restrained expression of the vernacular idiom does not lead to the conclusion that the property possesses sufficient aesthetic or artistic qualities or value necessary for designation under this criterion.

However, the property was once used as an interactive exhibition space and on-site art studio by noted visual artist James Turrell during the late 1960s and early 1970s. His dealing with the art world at this time revealed his idealism when art took precedence over such practical
matters as spatial limitations. The Mendota Block building not only served as Turrell’s studio it also became an equivalent for his work. It was used as his private exhibition facility in which his unique light sending artwork was created, displayed, and experienced. The subject property, therefore, is considered to have artistic interest and value to the community.

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

The Mendota Block is identified with a noted historic person and is the location of important events in local history. The subject property, therefore, appears eligible for local landmark designation under this criterion.

The property is directly associated with James Turrell, a contemporary visual artist who owned and occupied the building for seven years in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though Turrell lived on-site he also used the building as his studio and exhibit space during his seminal years of his professional career. He owned and occupied the Mendota Block building (or as he referred to it the “Mendota Hotel”) from 1966 to 1974. James Turrell is recognized for his groundbreaking visual art, of which many noted works were created at the Mendota Block building.

The property is also associated with the early grassroots activist efforts of two prominent neighborhood organizations, the Ocean Parks Project, Inc. (which evolved into the Ocean Park Community Organization and later became the Ocean Park Association) and the Santa Monicans for Renters’ Rights. These groups, which had their initial start-up offices in the Mendota Block building, are recognized for their stalwart anti-crime, rent control, and community pride campaigns among other efforts in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Criterion(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 Mendota Block building despite the alterations along the ground floor level of the structure is a very good and prominent example of an early vernacular commercial style property with classical influences. The subject property retains the majority of its primary character-defining features on the exterior including its mixed-use form and massing; masonry construction; flat roof with parapet; the distinctive brick fretwork and building name plaque along the frieze; original fenestration openings size, arrangement, and location; pronounced double banded stringcourse along the primary facades; most of the commercial storefront opening bays with decorative engaged columns; arched shaped window openings on the rear (east elevation); and minimal setback of the building footprint, if any, from the street/sidewalk. The building is only one of a handful of extant examples of early commercial architecture in the immediate area and community at-large; thereby making it a rather rare property type. The design, materials, workmanship feeling and association of the Mendota Block together reflect the essence of the
vernacular commercial style once so prevalent in the community, but now considered rare and unique. Therefore, the property appears to satisfy this criterion.

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

The architect and/or designer of the subject property are not known as the original building permit was not uncovered during the current evaluation process. Therefore, this criterion cannot be satisfied at this time.

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.

Despite being somewhat obstructed by a large canopy of street trees planted along Main Street, the two-story brick building is still a significant and unique feature of the Ocean Park neighborhood as it is located at the northeast corner of Main and Hill streets. The property reflects a very early period in the commercial development of Main Street and Ocean Park and as such has become a familiar visual feature of the area. Therefore, the subject property also appears to meet this criterion.

**CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES**

Every historic property is unique, with its own identity and its own distinguishing character. A property’s form and detailing are important in defining its visual historic character and significance. It is a property’s tangible features or elements that embody its significance for association with specific historical events, important personages, or distinctive architecture and it is those tangible elements; therefore, that should be retained and preserved.

Character refers to all those visual aspects and physical features that comprise the appearance of every historic property. According to “National Park Service Brief 17, Architectural Character: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character,” character-defining features include the overall shape of a property (building, structure, etc.), its material, craftsmanship, decorative details, interior spaces and features (as applicable), as well as the various aspects of its site and immediate environment (form, configuration and orientation).

The character-defining features associated with the subject property include its overall setting, immediate environment, materials and design, massing and height, form and shape, and location at the northeast corner of Main Street and Hill Street. Those features on the exterior of the property that are readily visible from the public right-of-way and reflect its overall historic character, architectural style, period of construction, and historical significance are also included as important character-defining features. Those features include, but are not limited to:

- Prominent location at the northeast corner of Main and Hill streets
• Two-story height and dual zone design/function separated by double stringcourse
• Rectangular plan and boxy massing
• Flat roof with parapet (under metal cornice)
• Exterior brick walls with running bond configuration (materials)
• Embellished brick frieze with building name plaque “Mendota Block” on west elevation
• Symmetrical placement of upper story fenestration at west, south and east elevations
• Size, shape, and material of upper story window openings
• Large storefront bays separated by engaged classical columns
• Classical details including column elements, capitals, stringcourses, and brick fretwork
• Secondary original door and window openings with decorative brick sills and lintels

CONCLUSION
The Mendota Block building satisfies the City of Santa Monica’s landmark designation criteria as stipulated in the Ordinance (SMCM Chapter 9.36, Section 9.36.100). It meets the age and integrity requirements, and meets five of the six landmark criteria for local designation. As discussed herein, the property satisfies Criterion 1 (manifests important aspects of the City’s history), Criterion 2 (possesses aesthetic or artistic interest or value), Criterion 3 (association with historic personages or with important events), Criterion 4 (embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics), and Criterion 5 (is an established or familiar feature of the neighborhood). As a result, the Mendota Block is eligible for listing as a City of Santa Monica Landmark.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Basten, Fred E. *Santa Monica Bay: Paradise By the Sea*. Santa Monica: Hennessey + Ingalls, 2001.


City of Santa Monica Planning and Community Development Department. *Historic Resources Inventory Update, September 30, 1995: Final Report*.

City of Santa Monica Planning and Community Development Department. *Historic Resources Inventory Update for the Central Business District and Third Street Promenade, April 12, 1998: Final Report*.

City of Santa Monica Building and Safety Department. Building Permits.

City of Santa Monica Building and Safety Department. *Santa Monica Historic Resources Inventory, 1985-1986: Final Report*.

City of Santa Monica Community Development Department, City Planning Division, State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation DPR523 forms, “Continuation Sheet: Main Street District, 2667-2671 Main Street, 1983” and “Continuation Sheet: Mendota Block, 2663 Main Street, Main Street Commercial District (formerly Main Street), December 2007.”


Ingersoll, Luther A. Ingersoll’s Century History: Santa Monica Bay Cities, 1542 to 1908. Los Angeles: Luther A. Ingersoll, 1908.


Los Angeles Directory Company, Santa Monica City Directory. Various dates.

Los Angeles County Tax Assessor’s Information.
Los Angeles Public Library. On-line Database: California Index. www.lapl.org


Polk’s City Directories, City of Santa Monica, various dates.


Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, City of Santa Monica.

Santa Monica Public Library, Santa Monica Index.

Santa Monica Public Library, Santa Monica On-line Image Archives, City of Santa Monica.

Santa Monica Renters’ Rights. Santa Monica Renters’ Rights web page (www.smrr.org).


Storrs, Les. Santa Monica, Portrait of a City, 1875-1975. Santa Monica: Santa Monica Bank, 1874.


Warren, Charles S. ed. Santa Monica Community Book. Santa Monica: Cawston, 1944.


MISCELLANEOUS ATTACHMENTS

Location Map

Current Tax Assessor Map

Previous Evaluations: DPR 523 Forms


Historic Images & Current Photographs
2667-2671 Main Street

Common name: Mendota Block

Historic name: Mendota Block

Legal description: Santa Monica Commercial Company's Tract, Lots 55 and 56, Block Q

Present owner: Camille O. Cosby, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York NY 10012

Ownership: Private

Present use: Retail commercial and offices

Construction date: 1913 (estimated)

Architect: Not recorded

Condition: Excellent

Alterations: Door locations changed and new windows installed 1959; seismic upgrading 1979

Has structure been moved? No.

Related features: Under same ownership and included in the same legal description is the New Orleans Building directly to the north; constructed 1979; James Mount, architect

Sources: City of Santa Monica Building Permits, Tax Assessment Books, Los Angeles County Archives.

Architectural style: Commercial vernacular with Classical influence

Description: The Mendota Block is a two story brick building with an imposing cornice and a patterned brick frieze. The ground floor is given over to retail shops and is composed primarily of full-height show windows with brick piers. The second floor is pierced by a series of single windows. Since the building faces both Main and Hill streets, both facades are treated similarly.

Individual significance: 3

Ser. No.: 0406-77-16
UTM: 11/363170/3763090
Photograph: 2667-2671 Main Street

Date taken: September 1983
Photographer: Leslie Heumann
Address on Inventory: 2663 Main St
Legal Address (Tax Assessor): 2663 Main St, Santa Monica, CA 90405
Property Name: Mendota Block

Description: The property contains a two-story commercial/store & office building. It was designed in the Vernacular Commercial style. The resource is recorded in the Historic Resources Inventory with a prior evaluation of 5D. Note: This property was given a 2667 Main Street address in previous surveys. Since this property was last surveyed, it appears that storefronts have been altered. As such, it continues to qualify for its previously determined designation as a Santa Monica Structure of Merit. However, it appears to continue to qualify as a contributor to the previously identified Main Street Historic District.

Alterations: Changes have been made to the property since it was last evaluated. Alterations have been made to the storefront(s).

Updated Status Code: 5D3
Historic District(s): Main Street Commercial (formerly Main Street)
Evaluation: The survey evaluated the resource on the property as falling under criterion A.4 - Contributes to a district embodying 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.

Santa Monica Citywide Historic Resources Survey
Prepared for: City of Santa Monica
1685 Main Street, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2200
Prepared by: P. Moruzzi, M. Potter, K. Lain
ICF International
811 W 7th Street, Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90017

APN: 4288002035
PHOTO - 1: Photo of property (west elevation) as used by artist James Turrell, c. 1970, photo by James Turrell

PHOTO - 2: Photo of property (left) looking east on Hill Street, c. 1970, photo by James Turrell
PHOTO - 3: Photo of property taken for 1983 survey as recorded on inventory form

PHOTO - 4: Current context view of property looking northeast, 2014
PHOTO - 5: Oblique view of west (Main Street) and north (side) elevations, looking southeast

PHOTO - 6: North (side) elevation, looking southwest
PHOTO - 7: East (rear) elevation, looking southwest

PHOTO - 8: East (rear) elevation, looking northwest
PHOTO - 9: Oblique view of south (Hill Street) and east (rear) elevations, looking northwest

PHOTO - 10: South (Hill Street) elevation, looking north
PHOTO - 11: Ground floor detail along south (Hill Street) elevation, looking northwest

PHOTO - 12: Ground floor detail along south (Hill Street) elevation, looking northeast
PHOTO - 13: Ground floor detail along west (Main Street) elevation, looking southeast

PHOTO - 14: “Mendota Block” brick plaque on west (Main Street) elevation
PHOTO - 15: Cornice detail at southwest corner (note rust on cornice)

PHOTO - 16: South elevation (Hill Street) upper story detail, looking northwest