

MARSTON HILLS
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Marston Hills consists of seventy (70) single- to two-story homes laid out along two bluff tops jutting out over open parkland near the northern-most limits of Balboa Park. Marston Hills was developed between 1923 to 1936, and is bordered on the north, roughly, by Pennsylvania Avenue; on the east by Richmond Street; on the west by Cabrillo Canyon and the 163 freeway; and on the south by Balboa Park. Marston Hills was a re-subdivision of Blocks 216 to 222 (inclusive) of University Heights, in the City of San Diego, according to the amended map made by G.A. D'Hemmecourt. Included are parts of Blocks 11, 12, 19 and 20 of Crittenden's Addition. Also included were all of Lot 1, Block 8; Lot 1, Block 9; and Block 18 of La Canyada Villa Tract.

Although averaging over sixty-years old (in 1992), the homes in Marston Hills were built in a time of traditional building materials and high-quality construction methods. High-quality woods were used in suspended hardwood floors, framing, built-ins, and doors. Lath and plaster walls with hand troweled stucco exterior surfaces were the norm, offering a variety of color and texture. Hand-laid tile was common in bathrooms and kitchens, with beveled mirrors and glass cabinet doors. Mission- or Spanish-style terra cotta clay roofing tiles were produced locally and used throughout the subdivision. Other romantic details, like vaulted ceilings, arched windows, hand-worked wood trim and detailing, built-in bookshelves, fireplaces and chimneys, were standard features of these custom-built homes.

Albeit most houses built over sixty years ago (in 1992) often have to have electrical wiring and plumbing updated, they are essentially modern in concept. The houses of this period were built after a major technological leap in the building and outfitting of single-family housing in America. Unlike their Victorian forebears, homes built after the turn of the (twentieth) century had indoor plumbing, showers, electric lights and sockets, functional kitchens and either floor or wall mounted heating units. Semi-private front porches and private patios provide shade and extra space. Before domestic air conditioning, these features were essential in Southern California.

These houses were also the first to allow space for the family automobile. Builders usually placed the garage (often in the same style as the house) at the end of a long driveway, or along a back alleyway. (A small number of houses in Marston Hills can be found with built-in garages, primarily those built after 1930.) This allowed for ample off-street parking and didn't compromise the design of the house's façade. By the late 1950s, an increase in the size and number of family cars, coupled with a reduction in building lot size, led to the garage-dominated L-shaped house. Much of the front lawn and façade of these houses were devoted to a built-in garage with direct access to the street. Although convenient, this arrangement compromised the house's aesthetics, giving it a "cookie cutter" feeling of mass production. The small single-family house of the Marston Hills

· Transcribed for clarity (not content) by Marston Hills resident Robert Bowen from the original document prepared on July 12, 1992 by Alexander D. Bevil, Land Use Historian. Revision date: June 26, 2018.

period, with its semi-hidden detached garage, allowed space for the automobile (which again are getting smaller in 1992) without the dominance of the built-in garage.

Because the area was developed by a single individual -- San Diego businessman and civic leader, George W. Marston -- its homes all contain a consistency of style and plan. Marston, through his background as a park commissioner and pioneer real estate speculator, was recognized as an authority on landscape gardening and community development. While park commissioner in 1905, he was the principle promoter of the initial improvement of Balboa Park, and one of the initial developers of Mission Hills in 1908. In 1903, Marston had bought and developed a ten-acre site to the west of Marston Hills where he erected a magnificent home for himself and his family, and sold off the remaining lots to friends and relatives for a tidy profit.

In 1923, Marston, his wife Anna, and his sister Lilla Burnham, all planned to develop the land east of their homes along 7th Avenue which overlooked a broad canyon known as Cabrillo Canyon. Originally named the Park Side Hill Addition, the name was changed to Marston Hills the following year. Marston hired Los Angeles landscape architect and urban planner, Ralph D. Cornell, and his partner, Theodore Payne, a noted nurseryman and horticulturalist, to subdivide over fifteen-acres of land he owned across from his home on 7th Avenue. Cornell and Payne worked with civil engineer, David A. Loebenstein, to lay-out and develop Marston Hills. Loebenstein, who came to San Diego in 1908 from Hilo, Hawaii, had been involved in the surveying and platting of many subdivisions in San Diego. (Loebenstein, himself, had a house built at 1087 Myrtle Way ca. 1927.)

Cornell had met Marston through his position as advising landscape architect of Pomona College (Marston was a trustee). In 1922, through the insistence of Marston, Miss Ellen Browning Scripps (another trustee) had employed Cornell to work with Guy Flemming, the custodian of the park, to develop a master plan for the preservation of Torrey Pines Park. Cornell, along with his partner, Payne, who was a specialist in native California flowers and plants, stressed the idea that the then city-owned park, and the surrounding land owned and held in trust by Miss Scripps, should be preserved in its natural state. It was this underlying philosophy which helped transform Torrey Pines from a city park to a state reserve in 1956.

Marston Hills was only eight minutes away from downtown San Diego by car via Park Boulevard, completed in 1924; yet, on account of its unique park-like setting, home sites were promoted as offering the quiet and seclusion of the country. It was the convenience of access to the city and the planned park-like surroundings which attracted residents to the tract. Under the expert advice of Cornell and his associates, full advantage was taken of the tract's topography. While most of the home sites were laid on somewhat rectangular lots, others were of irregular dimensions for the best possible effect regarding landscape development and vistas.

In 1925, Marston deeded 15.85 acres of the arroyo and canyons within Marston Hills to the city, under the mandate that it be set aside solely as parkland. A redwood pergola (at the west end of Myrtle Way) was designed by Cornell, Payne and Loebenstein, and given to the city along with the land. Promotional ads for the sale of lots publicized the semi-rural park-like

atmosphere of the tract, yet emphasized its nearness to downtown San Diego via Park Boulevard. That year, the first houses were being constructed in the tract along Myrtle Way.

The pace of construction in the 1920s has been categorized as being midway between the slow expansion of homes in the nineteenth century and the massive tract developments of the post-WWII era. In response to a major influx of new residents into the area during the 1920s, real estate speculators purchased and subdivided parcels of land in already platted additions. They installed the infrastructure -- water and water and sewer hook-ups, street lighting, curbs, sidewalks, paving, and street trees. Several unique features of the area that reflect these plans are the tall Queen Palms lining the streets. Also, in the canyons leading into the wide arroyo, are introduced plant species integrated with native. Many of these introduced plant species were originally cultivated and introduced into the market by Payne at his nursery in Los Angeles. The open arroyo is interspersed with tall eucalypti, another species popularized by Payne. Other features of the tract are the deep setbacks, the absence of tall curbs and the use of red-tinted sidewalks and driveways. (Local legend has it that the use of red-tinted sidewalks in San Diego was suggested by Kate Sessions in 1907, who hated the glare caused by natural concrete.)

George M. Hawley was given exclusive rights to the sale of lots in Marston Hills. For many years prior, Hawley had experience developing real estate in the University Heights area. Since its original development in 1888, Hawley had been involved with the sale of real estate in University Heights, and later Normal Heights, which he and his partner, D.C. Collier, subdivided in 1906.

When Hawley was involved in the sale of land in University and Normal Heights, in 1906 he built for himself the first house of a planned tract of custom-built homes along Panorama Drive. In 1925, Hawley moved from his home on Panorama Drive into a custom-built home (one of the first) in Marston Hills (1048 Myrtle Way -- since demolished). It stood on a bluff top similar to the one on Panorama Drive. Hawley lived in this home until his death in 1935. Another home (1092 Myrtle Way) was also built at this time and was the home of John K. Durrill. Durrill was Secretary-Treasurer of the George M. Hawley Investment Company.

As was the norm, Marston, as the principle property owner and sub-divider, was not involved in the building of any homes. Instead, through Hawley, lots were sold to individuals who either hired architects or builder/contractors to design and construct their houses based on designs found in formalized pattern books. These pattern books contained designs and plans of architect-designed houses which were shown to their clients. However, one house in the tract, the Frank Dames residence (1054 Myrtle Way), has been identified as having been designed by noted San Diego architectural firm of Richard Requa and Herbert Jackson.

Many of the other homes in the first unit of development -- Myrtle Way and Avenues up to Richmond Street, including Vermont Street -- have been identified as being designed and built by Ralph E. Hurlburt and Charles H. Tifal. The layout of Hurlburt and Tifal-designed homes resemble clusters of rustic Andalusian farmhouses. Other signature design features of this noted local building design and contracting firm are the use of multi-hued red tile roofing

material, enclosed arched entry vestibules, vaulted ceilings and high semi-circular arched multi-pane windows.

The Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style was the dominant style used throughout Marston Hills at this time. From the highly decorative eclectic forms of the mid-1920s to the more austere Monterey Revival and California Ranch forms of the mid-to-late-1930s, Marston Hills is virtually a study guide to the style.

Having evolved from the previous Mission Revival Style, examples of Spanish Colonial Revival were built in Southern California as early as the 1890s. However, the widespread appeal of the revival style has been attributed to the popularity of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition held in San Diego's Balboa Park. The buildings designed for the exposition by Bertram G. Goodhue and Carleton M. Winslow were interpretations of Spanish, Italian, Moorish and Spanish Colonial palaces, churches and gardens.

The term Spanish Colonial Revival actually involves a number of Mediterranean designs -- including the Lombardic of Northern Italy, the Plateresque, Churrigueresque and neo-Classic of Spain and her American colonies, and the Islamic of North Africa and Moorish Spain. By the 1920s, Spanish Colonial Revival became the style for all of Southern California. Real estate developers utilized this romanticized vision of Hispanic California in their advertisements for new subdivisions. Whole communities were laid-out and planned as Southern California versions of Andalusia or Seville. Locally, the communities of Mission Hills and Kensington were developed with whole tracts of individually architect- or builder-designed Spanish Colonial Revival houses.

Richard Requa, one of the pioneers in the development of the Spanish Colonial Revival movement in residential architecture, wrote in the San Diego Union in 1925:

In its fullest sense, architecture is a logical, satisfying and sincere expression of its builders and the purpose for which the building is erected.... Unquestionably the logical style for Southern California is a development of the mission architecture and the related styles of the Mediterranean countries. This is true because of similarity of climate, topography, verdure and other conditions. However, it is a great mistake to call the architecture of our buildings, designed in this style, Mission or Spanish architecture, as it is to refer to the architecture of Italy as Grecian because Italy's architecture was inspired by and their ornamentation taken from the style developed in Greece.

Requa went on to state:

A group of conscientious architects in Southern California have been endeavoring for a number of years to develop a southern California style. This style is inspired by and developed from the missions of California, the architecture of the Mediterranean countries, the colonial style of Mexico and even the humble Indian pueblos of the southwest. Their consistent endeavors... have now been recognized and praised throughout the United States. This splendid and beautiful architectural development in Southern California has been responsible for (the) rapid growth of the southwest. Architectural and homelike magazines throughout the country devote more space to the illustration of Southern California architecture than from any other section of the country.

After the 1915 Exposition, it was recognized by Requa and others that the Hispanic tradition could not be realized by a scattering of individual buildings. The character of the smaller cities of Andalusian Spain and the provincial regions of central and Northern Mexico was the result of the spaces between buildings, of the variations formed in the way these buildings related to each other and the street, and above all, in the importance and variety of their gardens.

All improvements, whether architectural or horticultural, had to have the approval of Marston to insure the beauty and harmony of the neighborhood. (Requa may have been the consulting architect, but evidence of this fact has not revealed itself.) Lots were only sold to those individuals who planned on erecting their own homes. Prices for unimproved lots ranged from \$1,500 along Cypress Way, to \$8,500 for the arc-shaped lot along Myrtle Way. No lots were available for speculation. All construction had to start within one year from the date of purchase. Cost restrictions were also placed on the homes. Depending on the lot, costs ranged from \$6,500 to \$15,000. The use of these restrictive covenants conveyed Marston's and other developers' paternalistic philosophy regarding the need for proper planning in order to prevent conflicting use of the land (and a benign form of elitism and exclusion). Until that time, few restrictions were placed on residential development in San Diego.

Historically, with the possible exception of the laying out of the Royal Spanish presidio on Presidio Hill, proper planning and development had never been initiated in San Diego by its local municipal government. Primarily a western boom town, San Diego had experienced haphazard development between 1870-1900 without consideration of the proper use of land in relationship to residential and commercial use. By 1925, houses in San Diego built during this time were already between 25- and 55-years old. Built before the advent of the servant-less household, indoor plumbing and electricity, or for that matter the garage and the lawnmower, most were considered obsolete. Parts of downtown San Diego and its older satellite subdivisions in which these homes were located, such as Golden Hills, Logan Heights and Middle Town, were being overrun by an ever-expanding financial and commercial center. Many homeowners converted these houses to multi-family rentals and deferred repairs. Their former residents were migrating out to the attractive, planned communities of Marston Hills, Kensington Manor, Mission Beach and La Jolla Hermosa. In their place were families of lower income levels -- primarily Asians, Mexican-Americans, Blacks and others.

By 1925, the greater use and reliance upon the automobile allowed for the placement of these subdivisions further and further away from the central business and commercial district. In addition, a well-developed electric streetcar system allowed greater access to the business and cultural activities available in downtown San Diego. Likewise, the streetcar, and later the automobile, stimulated commercial development along major streetcar lines and through streets, all located within short walking distance of new housing tracts.

Private developers, like Marston, Hawley and Collier, were strong advocates of architectural controls. These men realized that because of the tremendous growth that San Diego was experiencing in the 1920s, it was imperative that planning and architectural controls be established in the laying out of subdivisions.

John N.D. Griffith, Executive Secretary of the San Diego Realty Board, writing in the San Diego Union, also in 1925, stressed that:

A subdivision, if properly laid out, is an asset to a city. On the other hand, if improperly laid out, it speedily becomes a great liability to the community. San Diego realtors... endeavoring to capitalize to the utmost the natural beauties of the city, realize(d) the value of careful planning of home tracts... The National Association of Real Estate boards has long realized the value of city planning, which provides for future city needs and thus saves the economic waste of rectifying mistakes.

Through the writings in the popular press of Marston and respected architects and realtors like Requa and Griffith, the general public was well informed regarding the benefits of planned development. Developers and realtors then formulated specific proposals which could be sent before the City Council to serve as the basis for legislative action. They even persuaded the banks and lending agencies not to make loans except on approved plans. (Most of the men who were involved in real estate development were also on the boards of these banks and lending agencies.)

Phase two of the development of Marston Hills consisted of the development of the northern section of the subdivision. In 1926, construction began on a large U-shaped Spanish Colonial Revival style residence on a bluff top where Cypress Way and Avenue meet. Just like the earlier Hawley residence, this sprawling Mexican hacienda-style house was the anchor attraction of the tract. It was built for Dr. Harry M. Wegeforth, and his wife Rachel. Dr. Wegeforth was the principle founder of the San Diego Zoological Society and Zoo in 1916 and is credited with establishing one of the finest zoological and horticultural specimen collection in the world.

Between 1926-27 several medium-priced homes were built along Myrtle Way in a transitional style between the highly decorative Spanish Colonial Revival style of the early-to-mid-1920s, and the more austere California Ranch style of the late 1920s to early 1930s, whose historic progenitors were both the adobe and board and batten rural farm buildings of 19th century California.

These were all spec houses built for Marston by local building contractor Robert P. Shields. One of these homes, 1008 Myrtle Ave, was owned by the Marston's daughter, Mary. The north side of Cypress Avenue was also developed between 1929 to 1930 in the California Ranch style. (Several more homes were built up to the corner of Cypress Avenue and Vermont Street, and a number of two-story mansions were built along the south side of Cypress Avenue after 1930.)

In 1926, Marston re-subdivided a finger of land jutting out over the northeastern part of the arroyo east of Richmond Street, and south of Cypress Avenue, into Cypress Court. Again, civil engineer Loebenstein was the surveyor. Several impressive two-story Spanish Colonial revival style homes were built here (with the majority after 1930).

The ensuing Depression of the 1930s did little to slow down development in Marston Hills. Building continued into the mid-1930s. Of particular interest is the re-subdivision of several lots on another finger of land which jutted out into the eastern-most section of the arroyo. In

1933, Ralph E. Hurlburt, who had been involved in the original 1924 development of Marston Hills, and the design and building of a number of exceptional custom-built homes in the San Diego area, hired civil engineer David A. Loebenstein to re-subdivide this area. He and his partners, designer Ralph L. Frank and general contractor Jim C. Slaughter, and horticulturalist Milton P. Sessions, designed, built and landscaped five distinctive two-story homes in this area. The primary architectural style was Monterey Revival, a fusion of both Spanish and New England Colonial Revival, with Classic Revival and Adamesque detailing.

While not directly associated with the development of Marston Hills, adjacent to the southeast corner of the development is a two-story Monterey Revival style residence, which needs to be included for its architectural and historical significance. Originally known as the "Casa de Tiempo," it was a model home designed by San Diego architect Sam Hamil for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition in Balboa Park. It served as a showcase house to stimulate interest in the Federal government's housing program set up to help jumpstart the nation's economy out of the Depression. The house blends vernacular Rancho architecture with imported early 19th century New England Adamesque and Classic Revival. This \$50,000 model home was visited by over 1,000 Expo visitors and given away when the first year of the Expo was over. The fully furnished home (with a brand new 1935 Auburn automobile in the garage) was given to Jorge Almada, the son-in-law of President Elias Callas of Mexico. Originally located near the present-day children's zoo in Balboa Park, it was relocated to its present location, 1212 Upas Street ca. 1938.

Around 1970, E.F. Weerts, a property owner in Marston Hills, filed an application for a permit to construct and operate a planned residential development on the east side of Cabrillo Canyon. It was to be located along the southwest line of Cypress Avenue and, the northwest line of Cypress Way, more particularly in portions of Lots 1, 2, 8 and 9 of the northern section of Marston Hills. On January 5, 1972, the Planning Commission of the City of San Diego denied the permit and Mr. Weerts appealed the decision. On February 10, 1972, testimony was heard before the San Diego City Council by Mr. Weerts and opposing residents who wished the area to remain undeveloped. The Council upheld the recommendations of the Planning Commission because it agreed that the proposed facility would not contribute to the general well-being of the community. It also stated that the granting of the permit would have adversely affected the General Plan of the City of San Diego. Following this decision, the Planning Commission was directed to initiate public hearings on rezoning said portions of Lots 1, 2, 8 and 9, and any other appropriate property in and along both sides of the canyon straddling State Highway 163 in Cabrillo Canyon, as a Land Conservation Zone, thereby protecting it from further encroachment.

The decision to keep the area from further development was tempered by the homeowners' appreciation of the relationship between their homes and the park-like surroundings as originally planned by Marston. It is this feeling of neighborhood which has kept Marston Hills a well-preserved representation of a pre-planned post-WWI housing development typical for its time and location, reflecting both the mores of the developers and the people who built their homes there. Through its historical continuity of development, its uniformity of architectural styles, setting, materials and craftsmanship, and its association with one of San Diego's most respected civic leaders and community developers, George W. Marston, Marston Hills conveys

a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness. It is also reflective of the work of master architects Richard Requa and Herbert Jackson, builder/contractors Ralph E. Hurlburt and Charles H. Tifal, urban planner Ralph D. Cornell, civil engineer David A. Loebenstein and horticulturalists Theodore Payne and Milton P. Sessions. A great many of the houses are owner-occupied (some by their original owners), attesting to their appeal and longevity. While there are several noncontributing 1960s to 1980s-built residences located within the district, for the most part, they are still compatible in scale and setback to the original homes and still contribute to the sense of neighborhood.

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July 12, 1992