

ARTHUR AND GERTRUDE SERCY REESE HOME
541 East Santa Clara Avenue; 1221 South 6th Avenue
CHC-2022-6876-HCM
ENV-2022-6877-CE

FINDINGS

- The Arthur and Gertrude Sercy Reese Home “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as one of the early residences constructed within the original African American neighborhood of Venice, now known as Oakwood.
- The Arthur and Gertrude Sercy Reese Home “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as the long-time home of Arthur Reese, the town decorator for Abbot Kinney’s Venice of America and one of the founders of Oakwood as an African American enclave.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Arthur and Gertrude Sercy Reese Home meets two of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria.

The subject property “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as one of the early residences constructed within the original African American neighborhood of Venice, now known as Oakwood. Located at the center of Oakwood, the Reese Home tells the story of the establishment of the Black community in Venice. From the early 1900s to 1950, Blacks migrated from the South seeking improved living conditions, greater financial opportunities, and increased freedom from racially hostile communities. Many Blacks arrived to work as manual laborers, service workers, and servants to wealthy white residents. Some of the earliest Black residents of Venice settled there because they were hired as employees of Abbot Kinney and his Venice of America seaside resort that opened in 1905. By hiring them, Kinney made it possible for Blacks coming to Venice, such as Arthur Reese, to take part in the American dream: to start a family and own a home. Many of the workers took advantage of the opportunity and over time owned several properties that provided housing for their respective extended families as exemplified by the subject property. At the time of the opening of Venice of America, housing was sporadically scattered throughout the area, but most of the land that would eventually become Oakwood remained undeveloped. Most of the early homes in the close vicinity of the subject property still standing today were constructed between 1908 and 1915. By 1918, there were nine homes on the 500 block of Santa Clara Avenue, one of which was the subject property, and more than half are no longer extant.

In addition, the subject property “is associated with the lives of historic personages important to national, state, city, or local history” as the long-time home of Arthur Reese, the town decorator for Abbot Kinney’s Venice of America and one of the founders of Oakwood as an African American enclave. Reese was one of the first Black residents in Venice and a highly respected entrepreneur and businessman known for his cartoon-like papier-mâché heads featured at the annual Mardi Gras Festival that he initiated. After being hired by Kinney for his pleasure pier, Reese recruited other family members to move to Venice to help supply the Kinney Company with labor,

accounting for a majority of the 33 Blacks living in the Oakwood section of Venice by 1912. In this way, Reese played a significant role in building the emerging Black community in Venice as well as supporting them through his civic engagement and involvement in local affairs. He designed the subject property as a home for himself and his family where he resided for more than 30 years.

While the applicant also argues that the subject property “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as an excellent example of an Arts and Crafts bungalow, staff are unable to make this finding. Although the Reese Home has a number of interesting original features, many of which were designed by Arthur Reese himself, such as the fireplace in the living room, it is a modest example of the architectural style. There are other more intact and exemplary single-family residences designed in the Craftsman architectural style which are already designated as Historic-Cultural Monuments, including the Perrine House (1908, HCM #662), the Edward Alexander Kelley Hackett House (1910, HCM #719), and the Statton Residence (1911, HCM #855).

Despite interior and exterior alterations over the years, the subject property retains a high level of integrity of location, materials, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (“CEQA”) FINDINGS

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 “*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*”

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 “*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*”

The designation of the Arthur and Gertrude Sercy Reese Home as an Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code (“LAAC”) will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of an irreplaceable historic site/open space. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31, and none of the exceptions to a categorical exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 applies. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction of historic buildings and sites in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2022-6877-CE was prepared on November 16, 2022.