



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 625-4501

LFB 316/87

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: San Remo Apartment Building
606 East Thomas Street

Legal Description: Pontius Second, Block 54, Lot 6

At the public hearing held on December 2, 1987, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the San Remo Apartment Building as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 106348:

Section 3.01(4): It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction;

Section 3.01(6): Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city;

DESCRIPTION AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The 1906 San Remo Cooperative Apartment Building is a four story 19-unit structure situated at the northeast corner of East Thomas and Belmont Avenue East on Capitol Hill in a neighborhood of contemporary residential structures and more recent apartment buildings. The lot and structure as notable for their pie shape, following the curve in East Thomas paralleling the connection between Denny and Olive Way immediately to the south. In addition, the slope of East Thomas to the west causes the apparent height to vary from four stories on Belmont to three stories as the building stretches east along East Thomas. The building closely follows the street line and has an unusual presence for

its size due to the high percentage of the facade facing streets, the bold curve of the entry facade facing East Thomas, the height and mass of the building in relationship to nearby residential structures, and unusual architectural characteristics.

The building is in a good state of preservation with most original physical elements intact. Construction is of clear fir, balloon framed on a one-story masonry foundation wall at the exterior and piers at the interior. Above the one-story masonry bearing wall, the exterior fir walls are covered by veneer masonry. The roof is sloped and hipped on the street elevations with a hidden flat roof over the central and rear portions of the building.

The exterior of the structure is in an Italian/Spanish Revival style and has massing similar to urban dwellings constructed throughout southern Europe. The facade features a vertical tripartite division topped originally by a sloping tile roof. The base story is of clinker brick with a corbelled double header top course. The first and second stories are treated as a unit and constructed of a slightly variegated buff colored sand/lime brick seen also on the Arlington Hotel and other contemporary structures. The top of the two story, piano, level features an elaborate wood ogee molding with dentils below. The third story/fourth floor facade is stucco over brick veneer. Window openings in the facade are deeply set and rectangular. Original wooden double-hung sash remains generally in place although some replacement aluminum sash has been installed.

In organization and plan, the building is clearly a product of its time and peculiar site. The building incorporates many features of apartment houses found in much more developed urban surroundings and incorporates features established by New York City's reform housing/zoning codes of the late 19th century. These features include sliding fire doors, fire walls and particularly, interior shafts for providing light and air to rooms without access to exterior walls. The fire escapes are not known to be original.

Entry features include a protruding porch with half-fluted wood columns (replacements) topped with terra cotta Corinthian capitals, and an ornate shed roof, formerly covered by roman tile. The whole is surmounted by a symmetrically aligned loge window with small engaged columns, a decorative frieze and mannerist pediment.

The San Remo Apartment House was among the first of dozens of apartments and residential hotels built on Capitol Hill as the city expanded east. Fire insurance maps from 1905 show only single family residences lining the western slope of Capitol Hill. Just three years later, the San Remo and a few other large apartment houses signaled the steady transition of this

neighborhood to high-density, multiple family units which continues to this day. While not large in size, the San Remo reflected in its design contemporary concerns of adequate natural lighting, ventilation and quality interior living and social spaces.

The architect of the San Remo was William D. Van Sicien, who apparently designed the apartment building for a Hardman family, about which little is currently known. Active in San Jose, California, through the early 1890's, Van Sicien was a frequent contributor of architectural drawings and designs to California Architect and Building News, the leading building trade publication on the west coast. Published designs show an early use of Spanish and Italian motifs and revival forms and he has very likely instrumental in the introduction of these styles to the northwest. The timing of Van Sicien's apparent departure from San Jose and arrival in Seattle make him a likely respondent to Klondike Gold Rush and its economic impact on the city.

Van Sicien's name first appeared in Seattle City Directories for the year 1901, where he was listed as draftsman for the architectural firm of Charles Saunders and George Lawton. In the following year he established an independent practice and was elected member of the Washington State Chapter of the AIA. He served as second vice-president of the Chapter in 1905. His most active years appear to have been between 1906 and 1909. During this time major commissions still extant in Seattle include the Eitel Building (northwest corner Second and Pike), the Northern Bank Building (now Seaboard Building, northeast corner Fourth and Pike), the Western Electric Company Building (1518 First Avenue South) and the nearby Palmer Building. His many residential commissions include a large home for Paul Murphy in Laurelhurst, and elaborate Spanish Revival design. Elevations and renderings for his buildings appeared with frequency in local newspaper and building a trade journals, such as Pacific Builder and Engineer and the Seattle Daily Bulletin. The AIA Washington State Chapter's Exhibition of Architecture and the Allied Arts at the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition featured six designs by Van Sicien, including number 330, the San Remo Apartment House.

The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:

The entire exterior of the building, including the roof, and the interior public lobby and stairwell.

Issued: December 3, 1987

Karen Gordon / K

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

KG:dlv

cc: Robert Weaver, Chair, Landmarks Preservation Board

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