



L A N D M A R K S  
P R E S E R V A T I O N  
C O M M I S S I O N  
S T A F F R E P O R T

FOR COMMISSION ACTION  
NOVEMBER 2, 2023

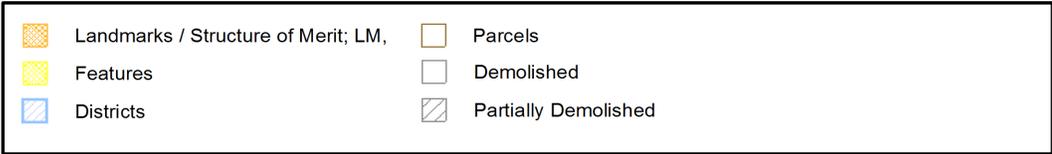
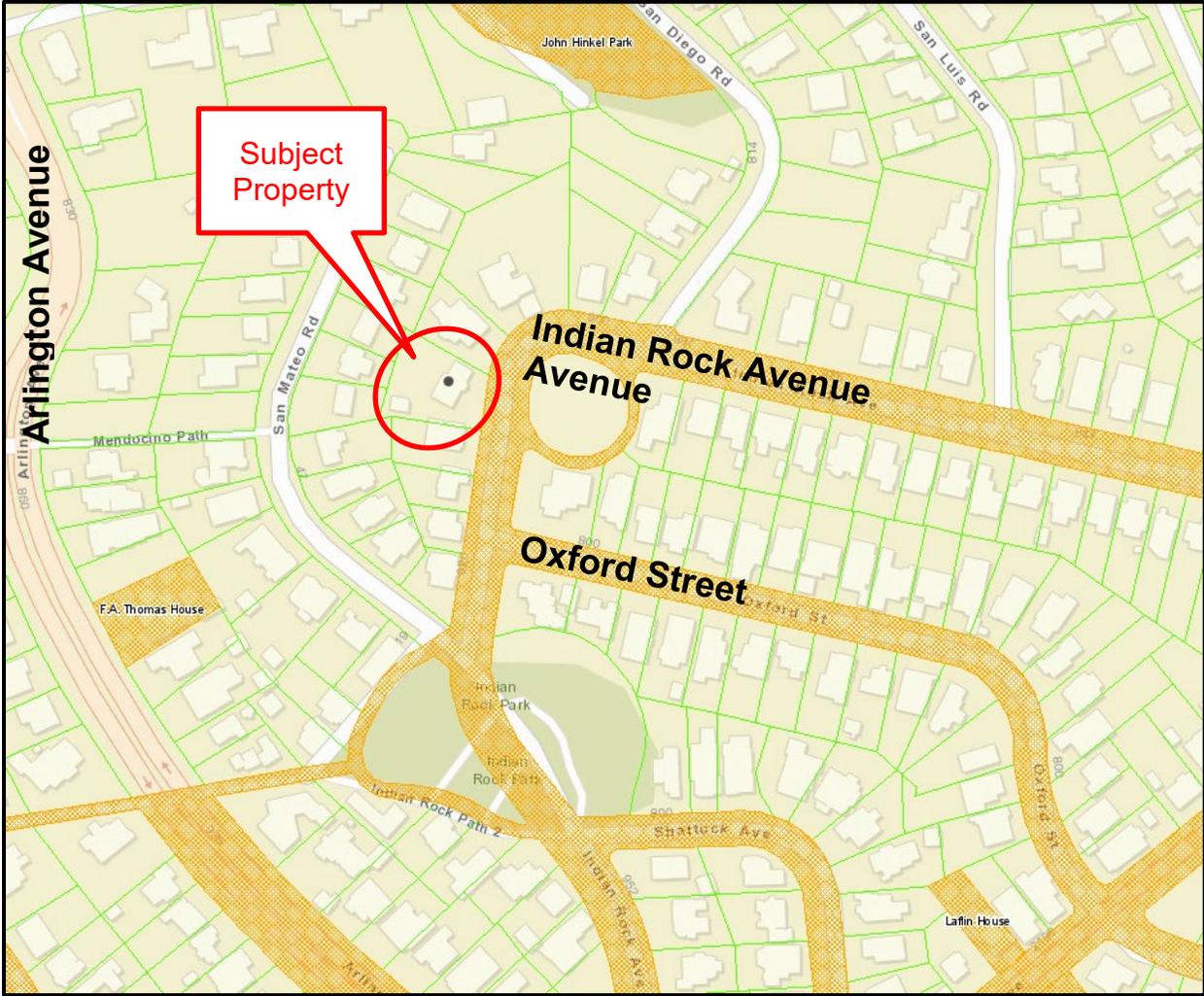
## 910 Indian Rock Avenue – Robert H. T. and Emma Lohse Marrenner House

Landmark application #LMIN2023-0002 for the consideration of City Landmark or Structure of Merit designation status for a residential building constructed in 1916 – APN 61-2579-10.

### I. Application Basics

- A. Land Use Designations:** Single Family-Residential (R-1) District, Hillside Overlay (H)
- B. CEQA Determination:** Staff recommends a finding of exemption from further environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3).
- C. Parties Involved**
- **Initiated by:** Verified Application of 83 Berkeley residents
  - **Application Author:** John Bernstein and Anthony Bruce, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association
  - **Property Owner:** Jacqueline & Gregory Emerson  
910 Indian Rock Avenue  
Berkeley, CA
- D. Staff Recommendation:** Resume and conclude the hearing; take final action.

Figure 1: Vicinity Map – highlighting nearby City Landmarks and Structures of Merit



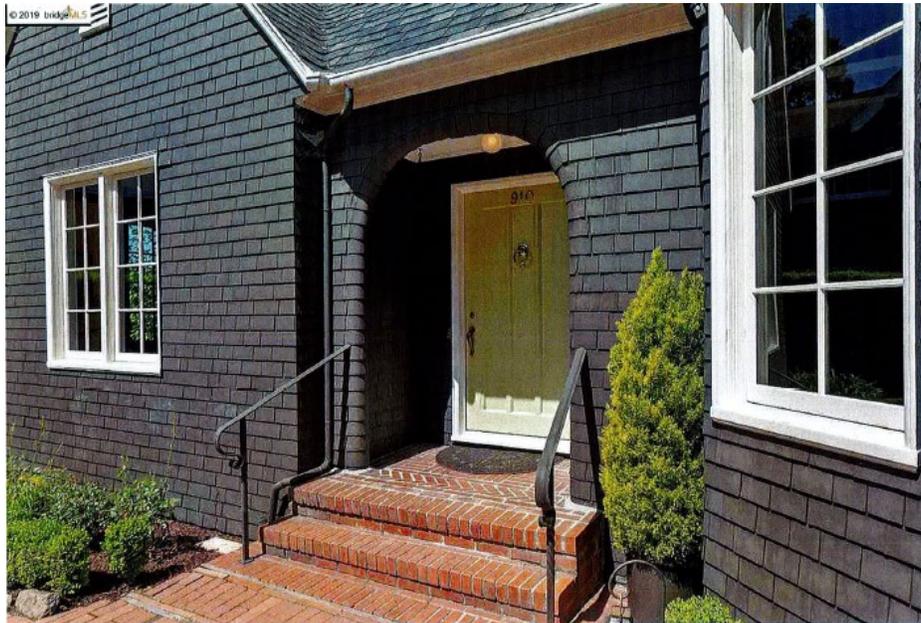
**Figure 2: Subject property, primary façade in 1920** (BAHA archive)



**Figure 3: Subject property, primary façade** (Kelly)



**Figure 5: Subject property, front entrance** (Realtor.com)



**Figure 6: Subject property, rear façade** (Realtor.com)



## II. Application Chronology

During Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items at their March 2, 2023 meeting, the Landmarks Preservation Commission received verbal testimony and correspondences from public about the subject property. Members of the public and a representative of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association were concerned about the proposed ministerial demolition of the building under the provisions of Senate Bill 9, and requested the LPC initiate Structure of Merit designation for the dwelling. The property owner also addressed the Commission and explained his concern that he had been misrepresented and that the potential historical significance of the property was being over-stated.

On May 2, 2023, the City received a Landmark application petition for the subject property that was accompanied by the requisite Landmark application and the signatures of 83 Berkeley residents. In accordance with Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Section 3.24.120, the petition and application initiated consideration of this property for designation status. Copies of the petition and application are provided as attachments to this report. On May 4, 2023, the LPC meeting agenda included an item to consider initiating the property for designation consideration, but the Commission did not discuss the matter upon learning that an application had been submitted on May 2 and a requisite hearing would occur within 70 days.

At their July 2023 meeting, the Commission opened the hearing as required for timely review under BMC Section 2.34.130, but continued the hearing without discussion upon the advice of staff. Meanwhile staff has conferred with the petitioners and the property owner on matters related to the pending Senate Bill (SB) 9 demolition application, whether the BMC allows for the withdrawal of the petition, and best timing for a continued hearing.

On October 23, 2023, the property owner submitted the attached letter explaining that he is opposed to the designation and no longer intends to demolish the building; see Attachment 5.

Staff posted and mailed advance notice of tonight's continued hearing on October 23, 2023, in accordance with BMC Section 3.24.140.

## III. Historic Resource Status

The subject property is not listed on the national or state registers of historically significant properties. It is located within the Northbrae neighborhood and abuts the City Landmark Northbrae Public Improvements that were established in 1907 and designed by John Galen Howard.

Other nearby City Landmarks include: the F.A. Thomas House at 883 Arlington Avenue (constructed 1911); John Hinkel Park (constructed 1919), located at Southhampton Avenue between San Diego Road and Somerset Place; and the Laflin House at 2119 Marin Avenue, designed by Walter H. Ratcliff, Jr, in 1910. See Figure 1, above.

#### IV. Property Description

The subject property is an approximately 10,000-sq. ft., interior lot on the west side of the 900-block of Indian Rock Avenue. It is a generally rectangular parcel that is oriented west-to-east with street frontage facing Indian Rock Avenue to the east. The lot features an approximately 2,700-sq. ft., three-story, main building that is set back from the front of the parcel, and a detached garage at the southwestern corner of the lot.

**Main Building Description.** The wood-frame building is clad in wood shingles. The primary roof is a side hip, with cross gable sections at the ends. On the front (east) elevation, there is an eyebrow dormer in the center of the roof, and on the rear (west) elevation there is a gable dormer. Brick stairs lead to the primary entrance on the front elevation, which is left of center. An arched recess leads to the paneled wood door. Right of the entrance is a bay window with a hip roof. There are two wood sash multi-lite casement windows on the front of the bay, and the sides feature single casement windows of the same style. The outer portions of the primary façade feature multi-lite wood sash double casement windows, with vents above the windows in the gable peaks. On the eyebrow dormer there are four wood sash multi-lite casement windows.

As stated in the application (Attachment 2), and the evaluation prepared by architectural historian Tim Kelley (Attachment 4) the building exemplifies the Shingle Style/Brown-Shingle Style, with a wood shingled exterior, eyebrow dormer, casement windows, and appears to be a cottage when viewed from the street. Since the lot slopes down toward the rear, the building appears smaller at the street, which enhances the cottage feel of the building. The Brown - Shingle style is related to the Shingle style, which is more common on the East Coast. The Brown-Shingle style emerged in the 1890s and lasted until around 1915 (City of Oakland, *Rehab Right*).

**Exterior Building Alterations.** The building was built as one and a half stories in the 1916. A 1956 building permit for interior alterations refers to the building as two stories. In 1961 a third bedroom was added to the upper floor, and a gable was added to the west side of the roof. At some point a kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom were added to the basement (no permits were located for this change), and the building is three stories when viewed from the rear. There have been no changes to the front façade, and current photos of the front match a 1920 photo of the front (see Figures 2 and 3).

**Construction History, Ownership, and Occupancy.** The first owners, Robert Hamilton Taylor and Emma Lohse Marrenner, commissioned architect Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. (1881-1973) to build a single-family dwelling in 1916. The builder was Leland Stanford Lewis. Robert Marrenner was an engineer in the railroad industry. The Marrenners resided at the property until 1955. Robert I. Ashby owned the property from 1956 to 1957. Don and Peggy Craig bought the house in 1959 and resided there until 2019. The Craigs were realtors.

**Architect/Designer.** Ratcliff was a long-time Berkeley resident and considered one of Berkeley's most prominent architects. He graduated from the University of California in 1903, and by 1906 worked in the firm of another prominent Berkeley architect, John Galen Howard. In 1909, Ratcliff established his Berkeley firm, which was successful due to the popularity of his English-style residential work. He was appointed Berkeley City Architect in 1913 and served for eight years.

Ratcliff's work includes residences, schools, churches, commercial structures, and government buildings located throughout the East Bay. Historians estimated that he completed more than 250 projects in Berkeley during his active years, and as many as 29 sites are designated as City Landmarks or Structure of Merit.

Attachment 2 is the Landmark Application prepared by John Bernstein and Anthony Bruce for Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, and Attachment 4 of this report contains the DPR 523 forms prepared by architectural historian Tim Kelley. Both include a detailed account of the property's history and occupants, a description of the main building, and historic as well as present-day comparative photographs of the property.

## V. Analysis and Evaluation

The analysis section of this report will refer to the research and information provided in the Landmark application (Attachment 2), and the DPR 523 forms (Attachment 4), regarding the subject property's historic context and existing conditions. This section analyzes the extent to which the property appears to meet significance criteria set forth in the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO), Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Chapter 3.

**Historic Context<sup>1</sup>:** Given its time of construction in 1916, location in the Northbrae area, type of construction (e.g.: residential/single-family), the subject site is

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<sup>1</sup> National Register Bulletin #15, Item V: *How to Evaluate a Property within its Historic Context* (2002); National Register Bulletin #16A, Section III: *How to Complete the National Register Registration – Period of Significance* (1997).

associated with the theme of residential development and the early development of Berkeley, generally. Its period of significance is understood to have begun with its construction in 1916.

**Landmarks Preservation Ordinance Significance Criteria.** When it designates a property as a Landmark, Historic District, or Structure of Merit, the Commission must find that the property meets one or more of the required criteria codified in Landmarks Preservation Ordinance (LPO), BMC Section 3.24.110. These criteria are relatively specific and appear to align with California Register and National Register criteria. The significance criteria for a Structure of Merit are broader than those for Landmarks status, and include properties that qualify individually as good examples of architectural design, or that qualify as contributors to the context of a larger streetscape or area.

The subject property does not appear to meet the LPO criteria for designation as a City Landmark though there are facts related to its architectural style and designer that would qualify it for consideration as a Structure of Merit.

#### **A. City Landmarks Designation Criteria**

##### Landmark– Architectural Merit– first/last/only

Per the HRE, the building was constructed in 1916 in the Brown-Shingle style by Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. Berkeley Ratcliff residential buildings were the subject of a 2006 Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association Tour “The Residential Work of Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. in Claremont Park.” The Brown-Shingle style is considered part of the First Bay Tradition, as both relate to the East Coast Shingle style. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(a) allows for the designation of a property which is the first, last, or only architectural property of its type in the region. The type of building is Brown-Shingle single-family residential. The subject building is not the first Brown-Shingle single-family residential building in Berkeley; there are other earlier examples in Berkeley, such as 195 The Uplands, which was built in 1908. In addition, the property is not the last Brown-Shingle or Bay Tradition single-family residential building in Berkeley, as there are many such homes in Berkeley, including 1 Panoramic Way, which was built in 1920. Therefore, since the building is not the first or last Brown-Shingle single-family residential building in Berkeley, it also cannot be the only. The subject building is not eligible for Landmark status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(a).

##### Landmark– Architectural Merit– outstanding example

*A Field Guide to American Houses*<sup>2</sup>, the Landmark Application, and the HRE describe the elements of the Shingle style. The subject building has the

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 372-384.

following characteristics of the Shingle style: wall cladding of continuous wood shingles, shingled walls without corner boards, side-hipped roof with cross-gables, casement and double-hung windows, and an eyebrow dormer. The HRE notes that the property is a locally significant example of a Brown-Shingle residence designed by Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. The Brown-Shingle style is related to the Shingle style, which is more common on the East Coast. The Brown-Shingle style emerged in the 1890s and lasted until around 1915 (City of Oakland, *Rehab Right*). BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(b) allows for the designation of a property which is a prototype of or an outstanding example of a period, style, or architectural movement or construction, or an example of the more notable work of the best surviving work in a region of an architect. The subject building appears to be a good example of the Brown-Shingle style since it possesses many of the elements of the style. But, there are other, more outstanding examples of the Brown-Shingle style in Berkeley, such as 37 Mosswood Road, which is a contributor to the Panoramic Hill National Register Historic District, and was also designed by Ratcliff. In comparison to the subject building, 37 Mosswood Road has more characteristics of the Brown-Shingle style, including a steeply pitched roof, strips of three or more windows, and a more defined front porch.

Since the subject building lacks some of the characteristics of the Brown-Shingle style it would not be considered an outstanding example of the style and, therefore, does not appear to be eligible for Landmark status pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(b). However, good examples of architectural design may warrant consideration as Structures of Merit (SOM) under BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(2)(c). Staff's assessment of the SOM *good design* criterion is discussed further below.

#### Landmark– Architectural Merit– exceptional value

Information on the age of the subject building and surrounding buildings can be retrieved from the City's property card records. The subject building and the other buildings on the block were built between 1912 and 1934. The Landmark application notes that the dwelling was constructed in the last stage of the Mason-McDuffie Company's development of Northbrae. The application also notes that the building is a mid-sized example of the Brown-Shingle style. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(c) allows for the designation of a property which is an architectural example worth preserving for the exceptional value it adds as part of the neighborhood fabric. The subject building is part of a block that was developed with houses between 1912 and 1934, and it is part of the Mason-McDuffie Company's Northbrae neighborhood, but the architecture of the building does not necessarily add exceptional value to the neighborhood. The building fits in among similar mid-sized residential buildings. The house is situated amongst buildings constructed around the same time, and is adjacent to the Landmark Northbrae Improvements, but the architecture is not unique enough to be exceptional, and therefore the building does not add exceptional

value as part of the neighborhood fabric. The subject building is not eligible for Landmark status under BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(1)(c).

#### Landmark–Cultural Value

The Landmark Application and correspondence from BAHA archivist Fran Cappelletti provide information on the former occupants of the subject dwelling. Robert and Emma Marrenner commissioned the house from Ratcliff, and Robert lived in the house until 1938, and Emma until 1955. Robert Marrenner was an engineer with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Don and Peggy Craig were well-known realtors in Northbrae and lived in the house from 1959 until 2019. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(2) allows for the designation of structures and sites associated with the movement or evolution of religious, cultural, governmental, social, and economic developments of the City. National Register Bulletin 15 provides guidelines for determining whether an individual associated with a property is significant, and National Register Bulletin 32 provides guidelines for evaluating properties associated with significant persons. Per the guidance from the National Register Bulletins, for a property to exhibit cultural value the persons associated must be individually significant within a historic context, and the property must be associated with the person's productive life. Although there are newspaper articles that mention Robert Marrenner's involvement in constructing railroads in Northern California, there is no evidence that he made significant contributions to history. Additionally, evidence has not been presented that the Craigs made significant contributions to history. Facts are known about the prior occupants, but there is no evidence to support the idea that they were important to the movement or evolution of cultural developments of the City. The persons associated with the property do not appear to have made significant contributions to history, and therefore the property is not significant for cultural value. The subject building is ineligible for Landmark status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(2).

#### Landmark– Educational Value

The subject parcel is within the vicinity of sites known to have produced prehistoric period archaeological resources. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(3) allows for the designation of a structure worth preserving for its usefulness as an educational force. Criterion 4 of the California Register and Criterion D of the National Register refer to the information potential of a site, which generally relates to archaeological sites. Per National Register Bulletin 15, the property must have information to contribute to our understanding of human history or prehistory, and the information must be considered important, for the site to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion D. Since it does not appear that archeological testing has occurred at the subject property, it cannot be determined what information can be found at the site, and whether that information would be considered important. The subject site has been determined to be archaeologically sensitive due to its proximity to known

archaeological resources, but it is not yet clear whether the site is worth preserving for its usefulness as an educational force. Not enough information has been provided to designate the property based on its usefulness as an educational force, and therefore it is not eligible for Landmark status for educational value. The subject site is ineligible for Landmark status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(3).

#### Landmark– Historic Value

The Landmark application and HRE discuss the property's association with historic events. The property is associated with residential development in Berkeley, particularly in the Northbrae neighborhood. The Landmark application notes that the dwelling was constructed in the last stage of the Mason-McDuffie Company's development of Northbrae. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(4) allows for the designation of a property which embodies and expresses the history of Berkeley/Alameda County/California/the United States. Per National Register Bulletin 15, to be associated with historic events a property must be associated with events important to a historic context, and that association must be significant. The subject property is associated with the theme of residential development in Northbrae, but the property does not necessarily embody or express the history of Berkeley. The property is one of many developed by the Mason-McDuffie Company. The development of this site for residential use is not a significant historical event because it did not play an instrumental or decisive role in this particular pattern of historical development. Since the property and building are not associated with significant historical events, the site therefore does not embody or express the history of Berkeley/Alameda County/California/the United States. The subject site does not meet the requirement for Landmark status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(4).

#### Landmark– National Register

The property is not listed on the National Register. Per Public Resources Code Section 5024.1(d)(1) the California Register includes properties formally determined eligible for, or listed in, the National Register. The HRE determined that the property is not eligible for the California Register under Criteria 1, 2, or 3. BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(5) allows for the designation of any property listed on the National Register. Since the property is not listed on the National Register, the property therefore is not eligible for Landmark status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(A)(5).

**Conclusion:** The subject property does not appear to exhibit historical significance that would make it eligible for designation consideration as City Landmark.

## **B. Structure of Merit Criteria**

### Structure of Merit– age

The Notice of Decision and Landmark application for the Northbrae Public

Improvements and the F.A. Thomas House provide information on the nearby Landmark and Landmark features. The site is located adjacent to the Northbrae Public Improvements, a Landmark feature constructed in 1907 by architect John Galen Howard. The Improvements include masonry stone pillars which serve as street markers, sidewalks with a soft rose-pink tint, Indian Rock Park, and Mortar Rock Park (across the street from 910 Indian Rock). The Landmark F.A. Thomas House is located at 883 Arlington Avenue, approximately two blocks away, was built in 1911, and finished in 1912. BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(a) allows for the designation of a structure which is contemporary in age with a designated landmark within its neighborhood. The subject building was constructed nine years after the Northbrae Public Improvements, and could be considered contemporary with the Improvements. The subject building was constructed four years after the F.A. Thomas House, and could also be considered contemporary with the F.A. Thomas House. Therefore, the building meets the requirement for Structure of Merit because it is contemporary with the Landmark Northbrae Improvements and the Landmark F.A. Thomas House. The subject site is eligible for Structure of Merit status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(a).

#### Structure of Merit– compatible

As discussed above, the subject property is located near two Landmarks, the Northbrae Public Improvements and the F.A. Thomas House. BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(b) allows for the designation of a structure which is compatible in size, scale, style, materials, or design with a designated landmark structure within its neighborhood. The subject building is not compatible in size, scale, style, materials or design with the Northbrae Improvements. The dwelling does not include masonry, which is one of the materials of the stone pillars of the Northbrae Improvements. The dwelling is not compatible with the paths and steps of the Northbrae Improvements. The subject building is also not compatible in materials with the F.A. Thomas House, which features Northbrae rhyolite, a local stone, and stucco. It is not compatible in style with the F.A. Thomas House because the F.A. Thomas House is of the Craftsman style, and features overhanging eaves supported by knee braces. The design of the F.A. Thomas House, with a large, prominent front porch, is also not compatible with the subject dwelling. Since the building is not compatible with nearby Landmarks it therefore does not meet the requirement for Structure of Merit. The subject site is not eligible for Structure of Merit status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(b).

#### Structure of Merit– good design

BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(c) allows for the designation of a structure which is a good example of architectural design. As described previously in the assessment of the Landmark criteria for architectural merit, the Marrenner House is a good example of the Brown-Shingle style applied to the design of a

single-family residential property. Though it lacks the refinements and some of the defining design elements of the more exceptional examples by Ratcliff and others, this Brown-Shingle residence is notable as an exemplar of the style, featuring Ratcliff's English cottage variations, such as symmetry of the roof form and a small entry porch, in contrast to the asymmetrical roofs and typically large entry porches of the Shingle tradition. Yet, the subject property expresses its Shingle style identity through features such as natural exterior materials, a steeply-pitched roof line, wood shingle cladding, wood windows, and an eyebrow dormer.

On its primary façade in particular, the building retains the integrity of its original design where there have been no changes to the front of the building since it was constructed. It retains all relevant aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling) that the National Park Service emphasizes are essential for architecturally-significant historical resources (National Register Bulletin 15).

Owing to its design by a local master architect, and sufficient integrity with which it conveys its identity as a Brown-Shingle house from its historic period, the Marrenner House is a good example of architectural design. Staff concurs with the findings of the architectural historian Tim Kelley and the Landmark application authors, that the subject property is eligible for local register designation as a Structure of Merit.

#### Structure of Merit– historic significance

BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(d) allows for the designation of a structure which has historical significance to the City and/or the structure's neighborhood, block, street frontage, or group of buildings. As discussed above, the persons associated with the property do not appear to have made significant contributions to history, and the property and building are not associated with significant historical events, therefore the building is not historically significant to the City or neighborhood. The subject site is not eligible for Structure of Merit status according to BMC Section 3.24.110(B)(2)(d).

**Conclusion:** Due to its design by Walter Ratcliff Jr., characteristic features of the Brown Shingle design style, and trademark design variations reflecting Ratcliff's notable residential work, the subject property is a good example of architectural design in Berkeley from its period of construction. Therefore, this property is eligible for designation consideration as a Structure of Merit.

### **C. Is the property *endangered*?**

In addition to the historical significance assessment provided above and the correspondence attached to this report, the Commission may elect to consider the following facts about the property:

- The property owner obtained permission to demolish the Marrenner House

on February 9, 2023 under the provisions of Senate Bill (SB) 9, California Government Code Section 65589, which vests project rights. This means the state law “freezes” the status of the project site with respect to local register designation. So, the subject property is “frozen” in its non-Landmark/SOM status for purposes of the demo permit.

- The May 2, 2023 Landmark application for 910 Indian Rock Indian Avenue states that the property is endangered.
- This designation hearing will proceed but any resulting designation status would not be applied to the vested SB9 demolition project. This means no Structural Alteration Permit will be required for the proposed demolition.
- The property owner has testified before the LPC that they are opposed to the designation of their property. They have re-stated their opposition in writing; see correspondence dated October 23, 2023 (Attachment 5).
- On October 23, 2023, the property owner stated in their correspondence to LPC that they no longer intend to demolish the Marrenner House. However, they have not withdrawn or cancelled the SB9 application.

Though the facts outlined above do not influence findings of historical significance, the likelihood of demolition determines whether a potential resource is endangered. The property owners maintain the right to demolition the subject structure ministerially and also state that they do not intend to demolish it. So, it is unclear whether the property is endangered. During tonight’s hear, the Commission may inquire to learn more about the likelihood of demolition given the circumstances of this case.

## VI. Rationale for Recommendation

Staff concludes that the Marrenner House is eligible for designation as a Structure of Merit and has prepared draft Findings for favorable action should the Commission agree with this assessment. The draft Findings include a requisite list of *Features to be Preserved*. There appears to be sufficient information to support final action and the Commission is encouraged to conclude the hearing after reviewing the case tonight.

### *Importance of Closing the Hearing*

Pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.150 the Commission may approve, modify, or disapprove a designation request. Any action must be undertaken by a majority vote of the Commission members. If the Commission is unable to arrive at a majority decision or fails to act within 180 days of closing the designation hearing, then the application would be summarily denied.

The Commission most often proceeds to final action without the need to formally close a hearing. However, given the complexity of this case and the high level of interest in the

final outcome, staff recommends that the Commission vote to close the hearing after receiving public comment and before proceeding to deliberation.

## VII. Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission take testimony from the public, close the hearing on this matter, consider the extent to which the property meets significance criteria for Structure of Merit designation status, pursuant to BMC Section 3.24.110, and then take final action to approve (or deny) this request as required.

### Attachments:

1. **Draft Findings for City Landmark designation approval**
2. **Landmark Application** for 910 Indian Rock Avenue, prepared by John Bernstein and Anthony Bruce for Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association; received April 26, 2023.
3. **Landmark Petition** for 910 Indian Rock Avenue, initiated by petition of 83 signatures of Berkeley residents; received May 2, 2023.
4. **DPR 523 forms**, prepared by Tim Kelley Consulting, received January 6, 2023.
5. **Correspondence Received** from the owner and consultant Mark Hulbert, received October 23, 2023.
6. **All Other Correspondence Received**

**Prepared by:** Fatema Crane, Principal Planner/LPC Secretary, [fcrane@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:fcrane@berkeleyca.gov), (510) 981-7410  
Allison Riemer, Associate Planner, [ariemer@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:ariemer@berkeleyca.gov), 510-981-7433



# ATTACHMENT 1

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## DRAFT FINDINGS FOR APPROVAL

NOVEMBER 2, 2023

### **910 Indian Rock Avenue – Robert H.T. and Emma Lohse Marrenner House**

**Landmark application #LMIN2023-0002 for the consideration of City Landmark or Structure of Merit designation status for a residential building constructed in 1916 – APN 61-2579-10**

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#### PROJECT/DESIGNATION DESCRIPTION

Structure of Merit designation of the property at 910 Indian Rock Avenue, Robert H.T. and Emma Lohse Marrenner House.

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#### CEQA FINDINGS

1. The project is found to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, Public Resources Code §21000, et seq.) pursuant to Section 15061.b.3 of the CEQA Guidelines (activities that can be seen with certainty to have no significant effect on the environment).

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#### LANDMARK PRESERVATION ORDINANCE FINDINGS

2. Pursuant to Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) Sections 3.24.110(B)(2)(c) of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance, the Commission finds that the subject main building meets the designation criterion for Structure of Merit (SOM) status because it is a good example of architectural design, specifically as an example of the work of Berkeley Master Walter H. Ratcliff Jr. Ratcliff was Berkeley's first and only City architect from 1913 to 1921, completed several institutional and commercial buildings from 1909 to 1927, and was especially accomplished in residential architecture. The Robert H.T. and Emma Lohse Marrenner House is an extant example of his residential work, though not an outstanding example of the Brown Shingle Style. The house contains many of the trademarks of the style, including natural materials, wood shingles cladding, wood windows, an eyebrow dormer, and a steeply-pitched roof, with the look and feel of a cottage – which attests to its Ratcliff variation. The building retains integrity in design, materials, and workmanship, and there have been no visible modifications to the front façade since it was constructed.

## FEATURES TO BE PRESERVED

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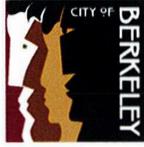
1. This Structure of Merit designation shall apply to the subject property and the following distinguishing features of the main building shall be preserved:

### Building

- Two-story massing at the front façade
- Wood shingle cladding

### Front elevation

- Primary roof with a side hip, with cross gable sections at the ends
- Eyebrow dormer in the center of the roof on the front elevation, with four wood sash multi-lite casement windows.
- Primary entrance with an arched recess
- Bay window with a hip roof, with two wood sash multi-lite casement windows on the front of the bay, and one wood sash multi-lite casement window on each side
- Two cross gable roofs, at either end of the front elevation, with multi-lite wood sash double casement windows, with vents above the windows in the gable peaks



Planning and Development Department  
Land Use Planning Division

**City of Berkeley**  
**Ordinance #4694 N.S.**  
**LANDMARK APPLICATION**

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**THE ROBERT H.T. and EMMA LOHSE MARRENNER HOUSE**  
**910 Indian Rock Avenue**  
**Northbrae**  
**Berkeley, California**



1. **Street Address:** 910 Indian Rock Avenue  
**County:** Alameda    **City:** Berkeley    **Zip:** 94707
  
2. **Assessor's Parcel Number:** 061-2579-010  
**Dimensions:** Irregular, 9446 +/- sq. ft.  
**Cross Streets:** Oxford Road, San Diego Road
  
3. **Is property on the State Historic Resource Inventory?** No  
**Is property on the Berkeley Urban Conservation Survey?** Yes  
**Form #:** 30599
  
4. **Application for Landmark Includes:**
  - a. **Building(s):** Yes    **Garden:** No    **Other Features:** No
  - b. **Landscape or Open Space:** No
  - c. **Historic Site:** No
  - d. **District:** No
  - e. **Other:**
  
5. **Historic Names:** Robert and Emma Marrenner House  
**Common Name:** Don and Peggy Craig's House
  
6. **Date of Construction:** 1916    **Factual:** Yes  
**Source of Information:** Building Permit; Urban Conservation Survey
  
7. **Designer:** Walter H. Ratcliff, Jr.
  
8. **Builder:** Leland S. Lewis
  
9. **Style:** Shingle Style
  
10. **Original Owners:** Emma and Robert Marrenner  
**Original Use:** Single-family residence
  
11. **Present Owner:** Greg and Jacqueline Emerson  
910 Indian Rock Avenue, Berkeley, California 94707
  
12. **Present Use:** Residential  
**Current Zoning:** R-1H    **Adjacent Property Zoning:** R-1H

**13. Present Condition of Property:**

**Exterior:** Good    **Interior:** Good    **Grounds:** Good

**Has the property's exterior been altered?**

Stylistically appropriate outbuilding added in 1922

**14. Description**

**Overall Description:**

**910 Indian Rock Avenue** is a two-story over basement rectangular-plan single family dwelling clad in wooden shingles and capped with a compound roof. The shingle siding as well as the many multi-light windows (over thirty in all) appear in excellent condition. The house sits somewhat removed from the street on a large lot which slopes downward away from the street. The rear façade, rising to a full three levels, continues the design motifs of the front facade. The primary roof type is a side hip, with cross gable sections at the outer corners, as well as an eyebrow dormer at center and a gable dormer on the rear facade. The freestanding garage is rectangular plan with a hip roof. The buildings appear to be in good condition.

The large lot slopes steeply to the rear of the house, creating a full 3-story façade toward the rear.

Adjacent to 910 Indian Rock is Mortar Rock Park, the most significant pre-contact tribal site in the City of Berkeley. Various authorities have suggested that the large lot at 910 Indian Rock may be the site of important Native American artifacts.

**Front (Southwest) Elevation**

The dignified primary entrance, facing onto Indian Rock Avenue is located on the primary facade left of center within an arched, shingled recess. The entrance features a heavy wooden door with an unusual design of three vertical panels. The façade is subtly asymmetric. To the right of the entrance is a canted bay window (serving a dining room) capped with a hip roof. The front facet of the bay features two wood sash multi-light casement windows, while the side facets feature single casement windows of the same style. The outer corners of the primary facade feature multi-light wood sash double casement windows. Above these windows, there are vents situated in twin gable peaks. The unusually wide eyebrow dormer, centered on the second story, features four wood sash multi-light casement windows. The relatively low front elevation, artfully echoing other houses in the neighborhood, effectively conceals the large size of the residence toward the rear.

[Detail photo of front elevation on following page]



*Detail of Front Elevation and Entrance (all photos except as noted: www.realtor.com)*

### **Side Elevations (Southeast and Northwest)**

The side elevations of the Marrenner House continue the motifs of the front façade, with brown-shingle siding and multi-light banks of casement windows. Typically for houses of this period and style, the side elevations are dominated by the roofs of the prominent front façade gables and slope down close to the ground to minimize the mass of the house from this aspect.

### **Rear Elevation (Northeast)**

The grand rear elevation, with a full three stories and nineteen multi-light windows, reveals the size of the Marrenner House. It continues the brown-shingle theme, and shows a sophisticated attention to detail for a rear elevation, bringing over key motifs from the front façade including a large, two-story bay window looking out over the rear lot, a wide, modified eyebrow dormer with a partial hipped roof, and a version of a Palladian window to the northeast. A door allows access to a walk-in basement level. The entire elevation appears original.

[Photograph on following page]

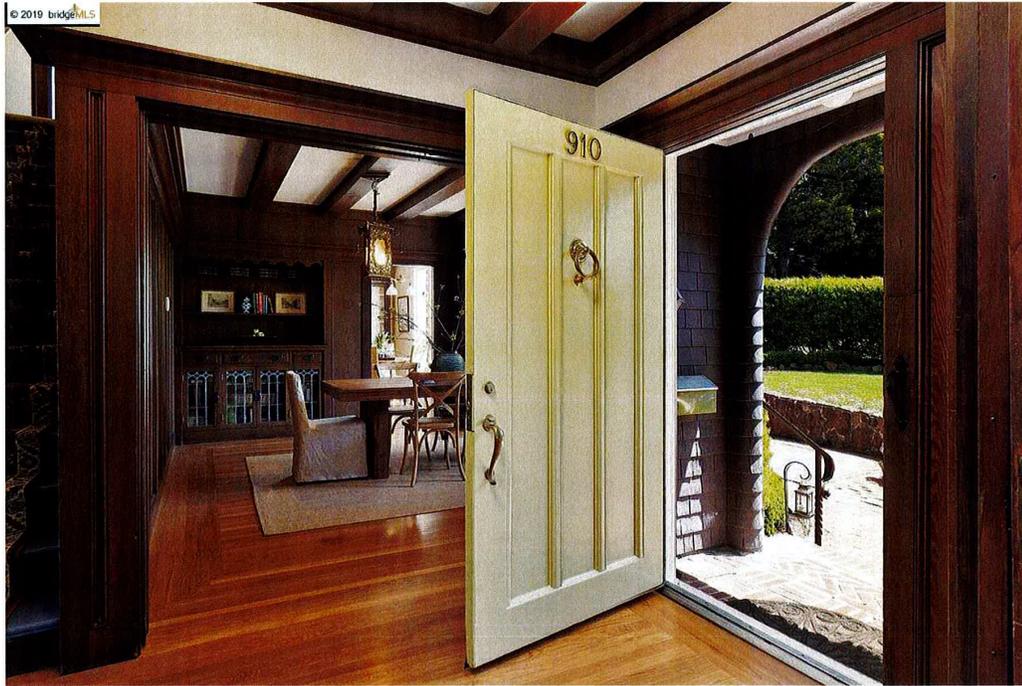


*Rear Elevation, incorporating key design elements from front facade*

### **Interior**

The elaborate and high-style interior of the public rooms on the first floor is finished extensively in old-growth redwood frame-and-panel work which has never been painted. Floors are straight-grained white oak and both the living room and dining room feature heavy redwood cornice moldings. Ceilings are distinguished by heavy redwood beams. The living room features an impressive fireplace front with wood paneling reaching to the ceiling and large bolection moldings. The panel above the fireplace is composed of highly-figured wood and the mantel is supported by two classical consoles, a feature typical of Ratcliff interiors.

[Interior photographs on following pages]



*Entranceway and Dining Room*



*Detail of Dining Room, Built-in Cabinets, and Bay Window*



*Detail of Living Room and Fireplace Front*

### **Features to be Preserved**

The Marrenner House retains a very high degree of integrity and fidelity to the original design, both internally and externally. Therefore the following should be preserved:

- Shingled elevations, especially front façade visible to public
- Multi-light casement windows
- Arched entryway and paneled front door
- Bay window
- Gables and multi-sloped roofs

## **15. History**

### **The Northbrae Development**

The Marrenner House was constructed in the last of the five planned stages of the Mason-McDuffie Company's Northbrae (the first section opened in 1907). Berkeley Square—the planned site for the new state capitol in a failed bid to move the capitol to Berkeley— opened in April 1910. Somewhat before 1906 the Mason-McDuffie Company had purchased several hundred acres in the North Berkeley Hills for the overall Northbrae project. This comprised

nearly all of Lot 88 of the 1854 Kellerberger subdivision of the Peralta land-grant known as the *Rancho San Antonio*, as well as some additional acreage to the north. Certain boundaries of the Northbrae tract still reflect ancient lot lines, including those of the “Domingo Peralta Reservation,” which was made up of lands reserved to his own use by the Peralta heir Domingo Peralta after the original subdivision.

Mason-McDuffie was known for excellent planning and employed recognized experts to lay out their projects. A note attached to the Mason-McDuffie papers (Bancroft Library) states:

” Between 1905 and 1917, the [Mason-McDuffie] company built three of the Bay Area's most beautiful residential developments: Claremont (Oakland) [sic], **Northbrae (Berkeley)** and St. Francis Wood (San Francisco). Duncan McDuffie insisted that only the best architects and landscape designers work on the residence parks, which became noted for their harmonious blending of man-made and natural environments. This reflected McDuffie's insistence that the natural contours of the land be maintained, and that gardens be planted in each of the company's developments.

Locally and nationally recognized architects were retained to work on Mason-McDuffie developments. Olmsted Brothers of Massachusetts designed the street plans for St. Francis Wood and for Park Hills, a 1930s development in the Berkeley hills; **John Galen Howard designed the fountains in Northbrae and Walter Ratcliff was responsible for the design of some of the homes in that development. . .**”



*Early photo of “Public Improvements” (The Fountain, Marin Circle), Northbrae Indian Rock Avenue is shown at the right. Photo: Anthony Bruce Collection*

A 1916 building permit fixes the date of construction of the Marrenner House. The cost was \$4000 and the builder was Leland S. Lewis. Unusually, a detailed 20-page set of specifications

has survived for this house in the files of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA). It specifies such important details as the use of “kiln-dried old-growth redwood lumber” for the extensive first-floor paneling.

### **The Shingle Style**

The classic work on the Shingle Style, Vincent Scully’s *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (Yale University Press) enumerates several characteristics of the style:

- **Wood shingle skin:** Shingles, generally brown, wrap the house, undulating over oriels, corners, and eyebrow windows.
- **Asymmetry** is evident, with cross gables and roof sections of different pitch, wings, turrets, bays and oriels.
- **Cottage air:** Often originating among summer homes along the Northeast coast and San Francisco Bay. Regardless of how large or detailed, these houses have a certain informality and connection to the outdoors.

As such, the Shingle Style corresponded closely with the “design with Nature” teachings of Charles Keeler and other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century theorists and was widely used during that period in the East Bay.

### **The Marrenner House and the Shingle Style**

The Marrenner House exemplifies all the salient characteristics of the Shingle Style. Though large in size, it deliberately assumes a “cottage-like air”. Wrapped in brown shingles, it displays large gables, eyebrow windows, and roofs of varying pitches. It carefully disposes these details in an asymmetric overall design.

### **Later History of the Marrenner House**

After commissioning the house from Ratcliff, Robert and Emma Marrenner lived at 910 Indian Rock for 34 years, selling to Robert Ashby in 1950 after Robert Marrenner’s death. In 1959, Don and Peggy Craig, well-known realtors in Northbrae, bought the house. The Craigs lived at 910 for sixty years until around 2019, when they sold to the present owners.

There have been no significant modifications to the house since its original construction.

### **16. Significance**

The Marrenner House is significant as a classic, well-designed example of a house in the California Brown-Shingle Style. Embodying all the key aspects of that style, as described in detail above, it stands out for the sophistication of its design by a celebrated Berkeley architect, Walter Ratcliff.

The significance of the Marenner house is supported by a formal historic review submitted to the City in 2022, performed by Kelley Consultants, a well-known historic preservation and permitting firm. That review recommended designation of the Marenner House as a **Structure of Merit**.

However, further research indicates that the Marenner House is eligible for Landmark status and for listing on the State Inventory of Historic Sites under Historic Criteria 2, 3, and possibly 4.

- **Criterion 2. The building is significant and eligible for City of Berkeley Landmark designation** for its association with an important Bay Area architect of the early 20th century, Walter H. Ratcliff, Jr. It is an excellent example of Ratcliff's middle period work. An immigrant from England, Ratcliff studied architecture at the University of California, and served as Berkeley City Architect from 1914–1920. Later, Ratcliff was Chief Architect at Mills College, completing the Master Plan for the nationally significant Mills campus. Ratcliff designed many gracious and livable residences and impressive public buildings during his career that lasted more than forty years. As Berkeley City Architect, he designed four firehouses for the City. At the same time, he designed the Claire Tappaan Lodge, a rural retreat, for the Sierra Club. Ratcliff, along with several others, urged the creation of the Berkeley City Arts Commission, which promulgated one of the first attempts in the nation to plan and zone an entire city. Additional research has determined that the Marrenner family, which commissioned the house, was intimately involved with the early growth of California and the City of Berkeley. Both sides of the family were among the early emigrants to California and Robert Marrenner served for decades as a high official in the Union Pacific Railroad.

- **Criterion 3. The building is eligible for City of Berkeley Landmark designation** for its architectural significance. It is significant as an early and excellent mid-sized example of the important brown-shingle style, incorporating all the classic elements enumerated by Vincent Scully in the standard work on the subject, *The Stick Style and the Shingle Style*. As such, it also corresponds with the naturalistic design principles of the Berkeley Hills, as articulated by Keeler and others. The house shows typical sophisticated Ratcliff details, including double gables, large bay windows, asymmetric elements, and judicious siting on its lot. The entranceway includes high-style molded shingles over an impressive archway. The interior is notable for extensive redwood frame-and-panel finishes, as well as an impressive bolection-molded fireplace front.

- **Criterion 4.** The site has **high potential archeological value** for its location only 30 feet from the most significant archeological and Native American site in the City of Berkeley, Mortar Rock Park. There is a high likelihood of artifact recovery or destruction should any excavation for new foundations be undertaken.

**17. Historic Value:** State Yes County Yes City Yes Neighborhood Yes

**Architectural Value:** State Yes County Yes City Yes Neighborhood Yes

**18. Is the property endangered:** Yes

**19. Bibliography**

Berkeley Assessment Records, The Bancroft Library  
Berkeley and Oakland Directories. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
Block Files, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
Bruce, Anthony. Walter H. Ratcliff, Jr., Architect: His Berkeley Work.  
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Carnall and Eyre, Map of Berkeley, California, 1880  
“Kellersberger’s Map of the Rancho San Antonio”, 1854. David Rumsey Map Collection.  
“Map of Berkeley showing the property of the Berkeley L.T.I. Association”, 1874, The Bancroft Library  
Mason-McDuffie Co. Plat of “Northbrae Properties”, c.1910.  
[https://northbraehistory.com/images/northbrae\\_properties\\_1909\\_thumb.jpeg](https://northbraehistory.com/images/northbrae_properties_1909_thumb.jpeg)  
Mason-McDuffie Papers, The Bancroft Library  
Nelson, Marie. Surveys for Local Governments – A Context for Best Practices of Historic Preservation,  
2005. [https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=23317](https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23317)  
Ormsby Donogh Real Estate Files. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
Permit Files, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
Scully, Vincent. The Stick Style and the Shingle Style, 1971. Yale University Press

**20. Recorder:** John Bernstein and Anthony Bruce for the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, 2023



<b>State of California — The Resources Agency</b> <b>DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION</b> <b>PRIMARY RECORD</b>	Primary # _____ HRI # _____ Trinomial _____ NRHP Status Code _____
Other Listings _____ Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____	

Page 1 of 4 Resource name(s) or number (assigned by recorder) 910 Indian Rock Avenue

**P1. Other Identifier:**

- \*P2. Location:  Not for Publication  Unrestricted  
 \*c. Address 910 Indian Rock Avenue  
 \*e. Other Locational Data: 61-2579-10

\*a. County Alameda  
 City Berkeley Zip 94707  
 Block: Lot:

**\*P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries.)  
 910 Indian Rock Avenue sits on the west side of the street between Oxford Street and San Diego Road. The street and the parcel slope up to the north. The parcel slopes down to the west. The building is set back from the front lot line, with a hedge separating the front yard from the street. A concrete and gravel ribbon driveway leads to the freestanding garage to the left of the residence. A brick walkway leads from the sidewalk to the primary entrance and to a front patio area. At the far right, a ramp leads to a deck providing access to a secondary pedestrian access on the secondary façade.

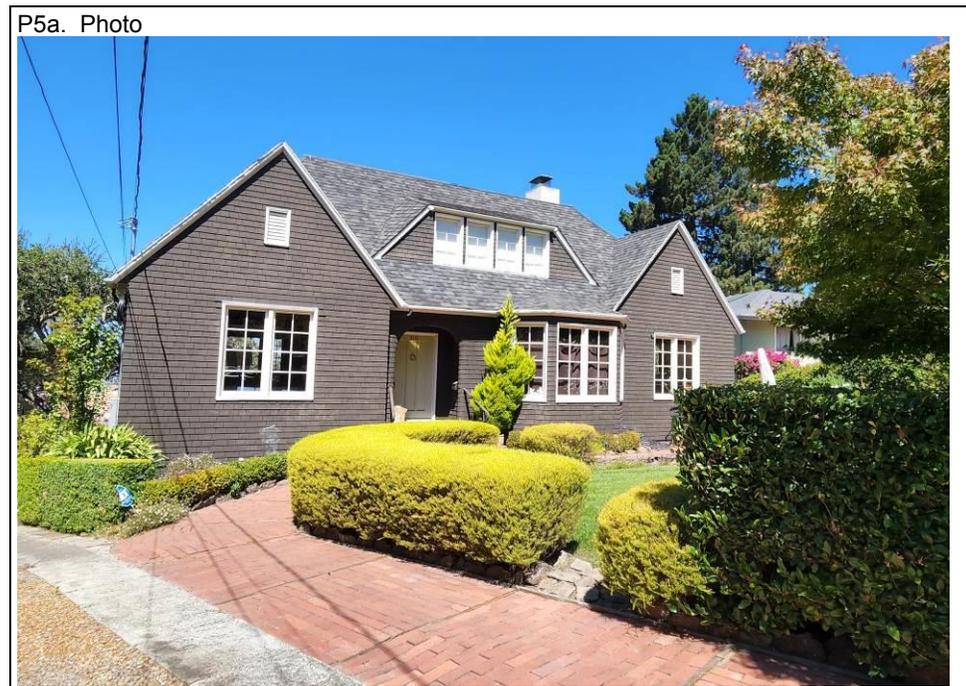
910 Indian Rock Avenue is a two story over basement rectangular plan single family dwelling clad in wooden shingles and capped with a compound roof. The primary roof type is a side hip, with cross gable sections at the outer corners, as well as an eyebrow dormer at center and a gable dormer on the rear façade. The primary entrance is located on the primary façade left of center within an arched recess accessed via a brick stair. The entrance features a paneled wooden door. Just to the right of the entrance is a canted bay window capped with a hip roof. The front facet of the bay features two wood sash multi-lite casement windows, while the side facets feature single casement windows of the same style. The outer corners of the primary façade feature multi-lite wood sash double casement windows. Above these windows, there are vents situated in the gable peaks. At center on the second story, there are four wood sash multi-lite casement windows on the eyebrow dormer.

The freestanding garage is rectangular plan with a hip roof. The front façade features a segmented roll up door.

The building appears to be in good condition.

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (list attributes and codes) HP 3 Single Family HP1. Unknown

\*P4. Resources Present:  Building  Structure  Object  Site  District  Element of District  Other



**P5b. Photo:** (view and date)  
 View from southeast. 8/19/2022

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:  historic  
 1916 per permit

\*P7. Owner and Address:

\*P8. Recorded by:  
 Tim Kelley Consulting  
 2912 Diamond St #330  
 San Francisco, CA 94131

\*P9. Date Recorded: 9/2022

\*P10. Survey Type:  
 Intensive

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none")

- \*Attachments:  None  Location Map  Sketch Map  Continuation Sheet  Building, Structure, and Object Record  
 Archaeological Record  District Record  Linear Feature Record  Milling Station Record  Rock Art Record  
 Artifact Record  Photograph Record  Other (list)

State of California — The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
HRI# \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 4

\*NRHP Status Code 5S2

\*Resource Name or # \_\_\_\_\_

- B1. Historic name: 910 Indian Rock Avenue  
B2. Common name: 910 Indian Rock Avenue  
B3. Original Use: single family residential      B4. Present use: single family residential

\*B5. **Architectural Style:** Shingle Style/Brown Shingle Style

\*B6. **Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

910 Indian Rock Avenue was constructed in 1916 and designed by architect Walter Ratcliff. This building has sustained no major primary façade alteration. Alterations to this building include: rear addition. The garage was added in 1922. See below for permit history.

\*B7. **Moved?**  No     Yes     Unknown    **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_    **Original Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*B8. **Related Features:**

none

B9a. Architect: Walter Ratcliff

b. Builder: Leland S. Lewis

\*B10. **Significance:** Theme NA    Area NA  
**Period of Significance** NA    **Property Type** residential    **Applicable Criteria** NA

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity)

#### Owners of 910 Indian Rock Avenue

The first owners, Robert and Emma Marrenner, commissioned architect Walter Ratcliff to construct 910 Indian Rock Avenue in 1916.<sup>1</sup> Robert was employed as an engineer for the shipbuilding industry. The Marrenners resided at the property through 1950. According to permit records, R. I. Ashby owned the subject property from 1956 through 1957, and Don and Peggie Craig owned the subject property from 1959 through 1998. No biographical information was found regarding R.I. Ashby or Don and Peggie Craig.

#### Architect

Walter H. Ratcliff was born in England in 1881 and moved to Berkeley, California by 1898.<sup>2</sup> He studied architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. He opened his own architectural firm in 1908, initially in San Francisco and later in Berkeley. This firm remains the oldest East Bay firm. From 1908 to 1912, he had designed 200 buildings throughout the Bay Area.<sup>3</sup> From 1914-1920, he was Berkeley's first and only City Architect, where he wrote the state's first zoning laws. Ratcliff was appointed to Architect and Planner of Mills College in 1923 completing the Master Plan designed by Bernard Maybeck. Ratcliff designed in a variety of styles including Berkeley's own Brown-shingle style, Tudor Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival. Historic resources and landmarks designed by Walter Ratcliff include: The Albra 2530-2534 Durant Avenue (1921); Berkeley Day Nursery 2031 Sixth Street (1927); and Frederick H. Dakin Warehouse 2750 Adeline (1907). (continued)

B11. **Additional Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes) \_\_\_\_\_

\*B12. **References:**

California Office of Historic Preservation. "Instructions for Recording Historical Resources." Sacramento, 1995.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.

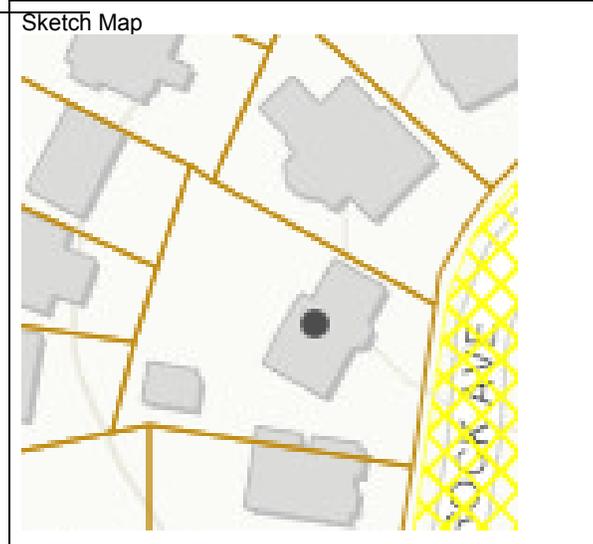
Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, rev. ed. 1998.

Sanborn Maps, Berkeley, California, 1950

B13. **Remarks:**

\*B14. **Evaluator:** Tim Kelley Consulting LLC

\***Date of Evaluation:** 9/2022



<sup>1</sup> Permit #5332, March 23, 1916

<sup>2</sup> *Berkeley Citizen*, Walter H. Ratcliff Landmark: Biography," accessed by <https://berkeleycitizen.org/landmarks/corpyard19.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> James Samuels, "Walter Ratcliff, Jr. Architect: 1881-1973," accessed by <https://berkeleyplaques.org/e-plaque/walter-ratcliff/>.

<b>State of California — The Resources Agency</b> <b>DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION</b> <b>CONTINUATION SHEET</b>	Primary # _____ HRI # _____ Trinomial _____
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Page 3 of 4      Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) \_\_\_\_\_  
\*Recorded by Tim Kelley Consulting LLC      \*Date 9/2022       Continuation       Update  
DPR 523B (1/95)      \*Required information

(continued)

Permits

- Permit #5332, March 23, 1916 – To build a one and a half story single-family building.
- Permit #12219, July 21, 1922 – To build a garage
- Permit #40020, November 15, 1935 – Reroof
- Permit #79373, March 22, 1956 – Enlarge doors in kitchen to arches. Remove back wall of closet.
- Permit #81388, January 8, 1957 – Repair damage cause by landslide. Install poured in place piles 6'0" on center all around house. Line up floors. Patch cracks and redecorate interior.
- Permit #91805, March 20, 1961 – Finish off existing attic to 3<sup>d</sup> upstairs bedroom. Opening west side of roof to install gable. Wiring as needed. Install floor joists.
- Permit #B-060177298, September 1, 1972 - Reroof
- Permit #98-00002733, July 7, 1998 – Reroof

Significance

- Criterion 1 (Events)

910 Indian Rock Avenue is not eligible for individual listing in the California Register under Criterion 1. This building did not make any significant individual contribution to the development of the neighborhood. Nor did it make a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California. Thus the property is not eligible for listing in the California Register under Criterion 1.

- Criterion 2 (Persons)

This building is not eligible for individual listing in the California Register under Criterion 2. It is not associated with any significant persons in the history of Berkeley or the State of California, as none of the owners or occupants were listed newspaper indexes or otherwise indicated to be important to the history of Berkeley or the State of California. Thus the property is not eligible for listing in the California Register under Criterion 2.

- Criterion 3 (Architecture)

This building is not eligible for individual listing in the California Register under Criterion 3. This building does not rise to the significance level of the California Register under Criterion 3. However, it is a locally significant example of a Brown-Shingle style residence designed by architect Walter H. Ratcliff. Both the style and the architect are significant to the history of Berkeley. Thus the property is not eligible for listing in the California Register under any aspect of Criterion 3, but is locally significant and should be recognized as a *Structure of Merit*.

- Criterion 4 (Information Potential)

This criterion ordinarily refers to potential archeological value. A full analysis of archeological value is beyond the scope of this report. The property does not appear eligible for listing on the California Register under Criterion 4.

Integrity

910 Indian Rock Avenue is locally significant with a period of significance of 1916. The building retains all aspects of integrity.

Conclusion

910 Indian Rock Avenue is not individually eligible for the California Register under any criteria. It is locally significant.

(This space reserved for official comments.)

State of California — The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
HRI # \_\_\_\_\_  
Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_

Page 4 of 4

Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder)

\*Recorded by Tim Kelley Consulting LLC

\*Date 9/2022  Continuation  Update

**135.**

**Robert H. T. Marrenner  
House, 1916**

910 Indian Rock Avenue

contractor: Leland S. Lewis

“1 1/2-story, 6-room,  
boards & shingles”

cost: \$4,000.

source: permit #5332, 23 March 1916

photo: c. 1920, BAHA



A central entrance flanked by slightly projecting, gabled wings is another theme running through Ratcliff’s work. In the cottage-like Marrenner House, a bay window pushes the front door off center, making a lively composition.

Source: Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association



Chairperson Albert Twu,

Members of the Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission ("LPC")

Re: 910 Indian Rock Avenue

Dear Chairperson Twu and Commission members:

My wife, Jacqueline, and I have lived in our home at 910 Indian Rock Avenue since 2019. It is our family home with our daughter, Hazel (7) and our son, Westley (11). Hopefully it can also be the home for Jacqueline's elderly and disabled mother, Melanie. It is our strong wish that you do not take any action to designate our family home as either a Landmark or as a Structure of Merit.

We ask for your support of our request on the following grounds:

- 1) 910 Indian Rock Avenue is no longer at risk for demolition.
- 2) The members of the Indian Rock / Northbrae community who submitted the designation application no longer support a designation at any level.
- 3) Kit Ratcliff does not support a designation and is partnering with us to ensure the home reflects the values of his grandfather, and the aesthetic of the Northbrae community.
- 4) Detailed architectural evaluation by a preservation architect supports our view that 910 Indian Rock Avenue is ineligible for "Landmark" status and should not be considered as a candidate for "Structure of Merit" status.
- 5) A landmarking designation at this stage in the permitting process is inconsistent with established City of Berkeley processes around home development and landmarking.
- 6) We, the home's owners, strongly oppose a Landmark or Structure of Merit designation.

**1. 910 Indian Rock Avenue is no longer at risk for demolition.**

Following the June LPC meeting, where the commission heard my request to demolish my home, Kit Ratcliff reached out to me to ask if we would consider some potential options for a remodel instead of a demolition/new construction. Since we were open to his input, he brought in multiple experts to support his recommendations. He convinced us that our family's livability requirements could be met via a remodel. We agreed not to pursue a demolition.

Kit has graciously agreed to oversee the remodel process, and we feel privileged to partner with someone with Kit's reputation and expertise to re-envision his grandfather's home. Although our remodel plans are in early days, it is our plan to largely preserve the existing facade, while making practical adjustments that reflect the needs of modern, multi-generational living. Kit is confident that all of this can be done in a manner that reflects the values of his grandfather, as well as the aesthetic of the Northbrae community.

**2. The members of the Indian Rock / Northbrae community who initiated the designation application no longer support a designation at any level.**

Because of our initial intention to demolish 910 Indian Rock Avenue, eight individuals served as the primary organizers behind the landmarking effort. None of these individuals support any designation at this time. Those individuals are: John Bernstein (landmark application author), Mary Beth Ray, Rocky Offner, Sharon Dahlgren, Rebecca Ratcliff, Ken Jones, Deborah Kropp and Alan Kropp.

In fact, John Bernstein, the application author, tried to withdraw the application but was unsuccessful in doing so.

**3. Kit Ratcliff does not support a designation and is partnering with us to ensure the home remodel reflects the values of his grandfather, and the aesthetic of the Northbrae community.**

We spoke with Kit at length prior to making the decision to move forward with a remodel, and he was extremely confident that we could make the livability improvements that are necessary to meet the needs of our family while remaining true to the aesthetic of Northbrae. Further, Kit expressed a strong view that his grandfather would be fully in support of remodeling the home in the manner we are pursuing.

**4. Detailed architectural evaluation by a preservation architect supports our view that 910 Indian Rock is ineligible for "Landmark" status and should not be considered as a candidate for "Structure of Merit" status.**

We have lived in Berkeley for over 20 years; hence, we are well aware of the LPC's mission and the importance of some of the work of Walter Ratcliffe to Berkeley's essence. Thus, prior to even considering demolition, we made it a point, on our own, to conduct extensive research on the history of the home and of Walter Ratcliff's life and work. We also spent a lot of time comparing our house to the many Berkeley Ratcliff designed homes which were and were not designated. To us, our home was really fairly modest and relatively unremarkable representation of Ratcliff's work.

After the June hearing we realized that we needed to engage an expert preservation architect, one who has appeared often before the LPC. Moreover, after reading Mark Hulbert's work on the Lafflin House - a home which I considered to be a relevant comparable given the architect, neighborhood and time period - we decided to reach out him. I asked Mr. Hulbert specifically if our house is of comparable quality and architectural importance to the Lafflin House - as well as other Ratcliffe work in the area - or if there are material differences that would lead to a different determination of any LPC status. I refer to Mr. Hulbert's report which will detail his reasoning as to why our home, while lovely, is not designation worthy.

The Tim Kelley report supporting a Structure of Merit (“SOM”) determination should be given little if any weight.

We understand that some have said, that because of its open-ended language, *any structure of any kind* could be designated as a SOM. But it is our view that even an SOM should stand out in our community. Every building, even every Walter Ratcliffe, does not automatically deserve SOM status. Otherwise, that determination would be meaningless.

Yet, the Tim Kelley report which was used as the historical architecture report in the Landmarking application does exactly that. It simply states (paraphrased for clarity): “the house is a brown shingle, and it was designed by Walter Ratcliff therefore it should be a Structure of Merit.” By this standard, thousands of Berkeley homes of a certain era would be SOM eligible. We believe such an overbroad and shallow application of landmarking status is not the objective of the City or the LPC.

**5. A landmarking designation at this stage in the permitting process is inconsistent with established City of Berkeley processes around home development and landmarking.**

According to our understanding of Secretary Crane’s statement to the LPC last May, since our new construction was submitted under the SB9 rules and preceded this application for designation, even if this Commission designated 910 Indian Rock Avenue, the demolition could still take place.

We are aware that there was surprise and dissatisfaction at this position. However, the City position as we understand it is clear: for a landmark designation to be able to stay the SB9 determination, initiation of the LPC process would have to precede the SB9 determination. That is, precedence is granted to the first City determination. Had the LPC process been initiated first, then the SB9 determination would be stayed.

Why is this the case? The City of Berkeley’s processing and building permit fees can be tens of thousands of dollars in non-refundable costs. To encourage homeowners to stay in Berkeley when they choose to expand their homes to accommodate their growing families, Berkeley provides a time in the process when homeowners can be assured of proceeding with a “green light” from the City. To allow otherwise opens the door for anyone opposed to a new build or remodel to “continue the fight” and create an environment where no commission decision (even LPC’s) would have any finality.

**6. We, the home’s owners, strongly oppose a landmark or structure of merit designation.**

We come back to where we started – we have been converted to the viewpoint that our family’s needs can be met via a remodeling process, and we are thrilled to be working with Kit on the remodel. We believe that due to our collaboration with Kit and our neighbors the result will be far superior to our initial submission.

However, this change comes at considerable cost, both in time and in money. We need to start this process over entirely – our use permit which was designated for a new home build will no longer apply, and the prior 21 months of design and development process will be a total loss. We need to move forward in as expedited a process as possible, and a designation will only add further time and cost to this process.

Time is more than important to us—it is essential. Our current home no longer meets the needs of our family. It was built as a 1 bedroom, 1 bathroom, 1 story house for a childless couple in another era. In addition, through neglect it has fallen into significant disrepair. Significant work is required to get the house into both a safe condition and one to support our growing family and our urgent need for multi-generational living. We have to create additional housing space for our elderly and disabled family mother who is desperately in need of the space.

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We recognize that the LPC plays a vital role in preserving significant structures in this City but, in this instance, we believe a designation is not just unnecessary but harmful. Kit's close involvement in the project will ensure that the re-envisioned home will be an extension of his late grandfather's vision and will continue to be an asset to the neighborhood. I would ask the LPC to trust Kit to do the right thing here and let us all move forward in a constructive and collaborative fashion.

We thank you in advance for your time and courtesy in this matter.

Sincerely,

Greg Emerson

Jacqueline Emerson

**PRESERVATION**  
ARCHITECTURE

August 24, 2023

City of Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1947 Center Street  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
Attn: Fatema Crane, Landmarks Preservation Commission Secretary

Re: 910 Indian Rock Ave., Berkeley

Landmarks Preservation Commissioners:

This correspondence provides historical considerations focused on the potential historic significance of the extant house at 910 Indian Rock Ave. (1916, Walter H. Ratcliff Jr., architect) in Berkeley's Northbrae neighborhood.

In sum, the subject residence is, at its 1-1/2 story front – which is the only public perspective – relatively diminutive. 910 Indian Rock Ave. is a shingled house yet not distinctively Shingle Style, as that architectural period dates to the latter 19th century and did not extend much into the 20th century except in derivative instances. Nor is 910 Indian Rock Ave. a clear or good example of Craftsman architecture, which succeeded the Shingle Style. It is more specifically an English country or cottage design that can be readily referenced to the residential works of British architects Edwin Lutyens and C.F.A. Voysey, whose work W. H. Ratcliff would have known and may have visited in his inspirational travels as a young adult.

In addition to being derivative and modestly traditional, the house at 910 Indian Rock is an average design in both its neighborhood and architectural context as well as in the oeuvre of its architect. Its dual front gables, without which the building would have no frontward architectural expression, are common in W. H. Ratcliff's work, as Ratcliff archetypally deployed all sorts of gables in his residential works, to such an extent that it his less typical roof designs that stand out as unique. By way of direct example, the residence at 2119 Marin Ave., which stands in the vicinity. Many other examples were also of course designed with paired and multiple front gables, including the directly adjacent and earlier house at 912 Indian Rock Ave. (1910, Edwin Bradley Mead, architect), as well as others in the Northbrae neighborhood, prominently including 828 Contra Costa (1924, Julia Morgan, architect), both of which are clearly more distinctive examples of this architectural treatment.

I authored the successful nomination to landmark the 1910 W. H. Ratcliff-designed Laflin House at 2119 Marin Ave., likewise authored the landmarking of the 1910 W. H. Ratcliff-designed McCormack House at 18 Alvarado Rd., as well as the 1929 George Blood Residence at 1495 Euclid Ave., each of those successful applications conjoined with the preservation benefits of the Mills Act. Over time, I've also closely studied the residences of Northbrae so am well-versed in the topic of the neighborhood's historical and architectural character. About which, I readily observe that 910 Indian Rock and 2119 Marin are, design-wise and origin-wise, apples and oranges. The Laflin house is an early residence to Northbrae and is a uniquely honest and simple house in W. H. Ratcliff's repertoire. Moreover, unlike 910 Indian Rock, the Laflin House has a unique and thus distinctive form, its roofline a one-of-a-kind W. H. Ratcliff. Both of the other landmarked residences are also distinctive: the McCormack House a Grand Tudor – with, yet again, paired front gables – which house is earlier and far more architecturally interesting than 910 Indian Rock; the Blood Residence not just a house but, in the words of the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, an “estate” and Ratcliff's “most ambitious [residential] project” (from Anthony Bruce, *Walter H. Ratcliff, Jr., Architect – His Berkeley*

Work, BAHA 2006). In my extensive overall experience with the architecture of W. H. Ratcliff, all three of those resources are unarguably distinctive thus preservation worthy.

Yet, admittedly, not all agree, as I came to realize during the recent 2119 Marin landmarking process. Unlike several of his contemporaries, all W. H. Ratcliff buildings aren't Berkeley Landmark or Structure of Merit contenders, which conclusion was directly expressed by several LPC commissioners and which perspective I respect. In fact, despite its clear distinctions, 2119 Marin Ave. was granted Structure of Merit rather than Landmark status, even then without unanimity. Understandably, Ratcliff's built work is too voluminous to consider otherwise while a range of those works – unlike 2119 Marin Ave. – are contextually as well as architecturally average, which judgment applies to the 910 Indian Rock residence. In its neighborhood, 910 Indian Rock is of no greater contextual import than any of the other modest homes.

In BAHA's chronological survey of W. H. Ratcliff's Berkeley works (cited above), 910 Indian Rock Ave. is his 133rd built project, of which by then only some fifteen were non-residential. Chronologically, the Laflin and McCormack House were numbers 47 and 48, respectively – which sequence adds to their distinction, as those almost polar residential designs, Simple vs. Grand, were being realized on Ratcliff's drawing boards at the same moment. Additionally, in that first decade of W. H. Ratcliff's career, there were just two built non-residential projects. Further, again chronologically, the other landmarked W. H. Ratcliff residence in Northbrae, the 1909 Buckman House, was the 24th of his built works. Furthermore, other than the two landmarked residences, 910 Indian Rock Ave. happens to be one of some eleven W. H. Ratcliff houses located directly in the Northbrae neighborhood, all but one earlier. And it is clearly questionable if any of those other houses are worthy of being deemed Structures of Merit.

Thus, unequivocally, the number of W. H. Ratcliff's preservation-worthy houses is limited as is, in turn, the importance of his architectural attribution. Rather, per the LPO, "notable" and "best" projects are the operative criteria. As such, while there are certainly others of W. H. Ratcliff's work deserving of landmarking, the 910 Indian Rock house does not embody the requisite architectural distinction or contextual importance. It is a relatively diminutive, average residential design.

An additional point factors into my professional historic architectural perspective on 910 Indian Rock. Specifically, that there are a significant number of the elder Ratcliff's buildings that have been landmarked – undoubtedly others yet which must meet a high standard – yet that it is time to focus historical considerations on the subsequent generations of works. There are contemporary and modern homes in the Northbrae neighborhood – including a number of the next generation of Ratcliff houses – many of which are prominently sited and which are welcome interventions in the context of the older and more traditional homes. Such later homes demonstrate the welcome evolution of residential architectural design, the introduction of which this neighborhood's urbane qualities has benefitted from. Like a range of precursors, numbers of modern and contemporary homes have expressive architectural characteristics and contribute to the neighborhood context, while 910 Indian Rock Ave. is, again, a relatively modest and average design.

Signed:



Mark Hulbert  
Preservation Architect & Historic Resources Consultant

**From:** [John Bernstein](#)  
**To:** [Crane, Fatema](#)  
**Subject:** Re: 910 Indian Rock  
**Date:** Thursday, October 26, 2023 8:15:12 AM

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City of Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission  
Fatema Crane, Secretary

Dear Ms. Crane and Commissioners,  
I am one of the leaders of the neighborhood group that addressed the issues of preservation at 910 Indian Rock as well as the chief proponent of the landmarks petition for the above property. While I and others understand that it is not possible to withdraw the petition, we would request that the Commission take no action on it at present, or, alternatively, table it indefinitely, in view of a negotiated understanding that has taken place among the neighbors and the Emersons, the owners of 910.

With the assistance of Kit Ratcliff, grandson of the architect of 910, and Allen Kropp, a respected engineer, a solution has been reached over the past few months under which the Emersons are no longer pursuing demolition of the structure. In fact, it has become clear that the house is eminently capable of restoration. The Emersons have therefore agreed to preserve the house while creating a sympathetic addition at the rear of the structure to serve the needs of their family. This addition will be largely invisible from the public road. Our group has been in frequent contact with these consultants and is convinced that this is an appropriate, contextual approach.

We believe that this negotiated solution will serve the needs of the structure and the neighborhood better than a landmark or structure-of-merit designation. Therefore we request no further action on the matter at this point.

Sincerely,

John Bernstein  
50 San Mateo Road

On Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 02:29:14 PM PDT, Crane, Fatema <[fcrane@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:fcrane@berkeleyca.gov)> wrote:

Mr. Bernstein,

Hello.

The hearing for 910 Indian Rock will continue on Nov 2 at the Landmarks Preservation Commission meeting. I hope you will attend.

When we last spoke, you mentioned that you were interested in withdrawing the LM petition that you authored and submitted with 50+ signatures from Berkeley residents. And, though I confirmed that there is not a means of withdrawing a petition within the Berkeley Municipal Code, I wonder if you'd like to submit a statement explaining why you believe the LM petition is no longer a matter of importance for yourself. You can't speak on behalf of all of the petitioners, but I hope you can speak for yourself.

I invite you to reply with a statement (brief or otherwise) that explains how your position has changed since you spoke to the Commission this summer. I will forward your statement to the Commission with their hearing materials if I receive it by 9AM tomorrow; after that, I will send it to them at their meeting.

I'm standing by for your reply.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Fatema

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Fatema Crane (pronouns: s/her)

Principal Planner, LPC Secretary

Land Use Planning Division

Planning & Development Dept.

City of Berkeley

Direct tel.: 510-981-7413

Office tel.: 510-981-7410

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**From:** John Bernstein <jcbernstein@att.net>  
**Sent:** Friday, July 07, 2023 2:33 PM  
**To:** Crane, Fatema <FCrane@berkeleyca.gov>  
**Subject:** 910 Indian Rock

**WARNING:** This is not a City of Berkeley email. Do not click links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Will this be considered further in August?

Do you agree that the matter cannot be withdrawn?

Thanks,  
John