



COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MEMO REPORT OF FINDINGS FOR CERTIFICATE OF DEMOLITION ELIGIBILITY

March 24th, 2020

Address: 900 E 1st Avenue

Legal Description: Carmen Court Condominiums Units 76, 84, 90, 900, 908 & 916 according to the Map thereof recorded in Condominium Plat Book 5 at Page 57, 58, and 59 and the Condominium Declaration thereof recorded in Book 1444 at Page 687.

Current Building Name: Carmen Court Condominiums

Construction Date: 1925

Source of Information: Denver Assessor's Office; Sanborn Insurance Maps from 1904, 1904 (corrected to 1925), 1929-30, 1929 (corrected to 1937), 1929 (corrected to 1951), 1929 (corrected to 1956), 1929 (corrected to 1958), 1929 (corrected to 1961), 1962 (corrected to 1967); Denver City Directories; Federal Census Records 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Denver householder's Directory and Street Avenue Guide 1924-1950; Denver building permits 1915-1955.

Architectural

Architectural Style: Pueblo Revival/Spanish Revival

Architect/Builder: Burt L. Rhoads

Source of Information: Denver Post & Denver Public Library

Historical

Original owner: Johnson Investment Co.

Original use(s): Apartment Building

Current use(s): Condominiums

Historical background:

Carmen Court was constructed in 1925 as a six unit apartment complex. The complex was constructed by the Johnson Investment Company, which had its offices in the First National Bank Building in Denver. The apartments were designed by Bert L. Rhoads who, until sometime just before the construction of Carmen Court was the Chief Engineer for the Gates Rubber Company. It is believed that he designed the factory buildings out of which Gates Rubber operated until the 1990s, the last of which were demolished in 2014.

Little is known of Rhoads' architectural career beyond the Gates Rubber Factory and some other residential commissions. However, his abilities as a designer are apparent in the status of Carmen Court at the time of its construction. Advertisements in the Denver Post from the year of its opening and for several years thereafter advertise the building as "Six Spanish home

apartments with latest conveniences known," and "Utterly impossible to describe in print the complete originality of its interior arrangement and decoration." For one of the earliest open houses, the advertisements even note that for several days an apartment would be shown "completely furnished by the Denver Dry Goods Company." The units were described as four-room, five-room, or six-room, each with separate outdoor entrances and at least two sides of exposure. As well, several were noted as having basement garages.

Ready Tomorrow

**Carmen Court—Absolutely Unlike Any Other,
Apartment House in the West**

Utterly impossible to describe in print the complete originality of its interior arrangement and decoration. In general terms, its architecture is Spanish, but that doesn't half tell it. A separate private outside entrance for each apartment, and exposure on at least two sides for each apartment. Automatic heat, sound-proof walls. Finish, floors and built-in features the very last word in up-to-dateness.

Tomorrow and for a few days from 2 to 5 o'clock one apartment will be shown, completely furnished by the Denver Dry Goods Company.

Four-room and six-room apartments, \$150; five-room, \$125; basement garages under the 4 and 6.

Located at First and Emerson, with beautiful landscaping under way.

VAN SCHAACK & CO.
210 First National Bank Bldg. Main 133.

Figure 1: October 28, 1925 Denver Post Advertisement for Carmen Court.

Additionally, special note was made of the landscaping outside the building and its prominent location at the corner of Emerson Street and 1st Avenue across from Arlington Park (now Hungarian Freedom Park), Speer Boulevard, and Alamo Placita Park beyond. The parcel is composed of over 5 whole lots at the corner of the block; however, the building was designed to hug the interior lot lines, leaving most of the parcel at the corner open as a grand yard that appears almost as an extension of the park across the street.

Construction photographs taken by Rhoads' brother, Harry Mellon Rhoads who was a prominent Denver photographer, show the grand front yard which is terraced with large axial paths and steps leading to the individual entrances of the six units. In the photographs the front landscape is barren while today it is filled with mature trees, plantings, and grass. The central axial path has since been removed from the landscape and a portion of the terraced hill leading up to the building has been dug-out beneath the end unit along Emerson Street to allow the installation of exterior basement access.



Figure 2: Carmen Court nearing completion in 1925; Photograph taken by Harry Mellon Rhoads.

Also, of note is a sign in one of the construction photographs advertising that the building has been constructed with Balsam-Wool insulation; a new insulation material which was first manufactured by The Wood Conversion Co. in Minnesota and was spreading in use across the country at the time of construction.



Figure 3: Close-up of the Balsam-Wool Sign in front of Carmen Court in 1925.

In 1936, Carmen Court was purchased by George and Ethel M. Keeler who lived in Unit 916 and retained the apartment complex until 1977 at which point the building was converted to condominiums. The building remains condominiums to this day.

Source of Information: Denver Assessor's Office; Sanborn Insurance Maps from 1929-30, 1929 (corrected to 1937), 1929 (corrected to 1951), 1929 (corrected to 1956), 1929 (corrected to 1958), 1929 (corrected to 1961), 1962 (corrected to 1967); Denver City Directories; Federal Census Records 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Denver householder's Directory and Street Avenue Guide 1924-1950; Denver building permits 1915-1955; Denver Post; Denver Public Library, Digital Collection.

Designation Eligibility Assessment

Landmark Designation Criteria:

A structure or district may be designated for preservation if, due to its significance, it meets the criteria listed in subsections (1), (2), and (3) below

(1) The structure or district maintains its integrity;

(2) The structure or district is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance; and

(3) The structure or district meets at least 3 of the following 10 criteria:

- It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society;
- It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;
- It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;
- It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;
- It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;
- It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;
- It represents an era of culture or heritage that allows an understanding of how the site was used by past generations;

- It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;
- It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

Integrity: If a structure maintains its integrity, it may be designated for preservation.

- Has integrity
- Does not have integrity

Does the structure have potential for designation?

- Has potential for designation
- Does not have potential for designation

The building at 900 E 1st Avenue has potential for designation as it *embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type*. The structure represents a unique hybridization of the Pueblo Revival and Spanish Revival architectural styles. The predominant use of stucco around the entire structure lends itself well to either style; however, the massing is extremely reminiscent of towns such as Taos Pueblo (just south of Colorado's southern border), constructed by the Native Puebloan peoples of the Southwestern United States. Though symmetrical overall, the structure does not read as such since its scale and the large area of landscaping between the structure and the street obscure the overall form. Instead, the structure reads as a series of stepped and variegated masses, that generally increase in height as the structure recedes from the street and the park. As well, the curved parapet walls capping most of these masses remind one of adobe construction which often features battered and irregular walls. The structure does lack an important decorative characteristic of Pueblo Revival architecture: vigas, which were historically the exposed ends of roof rafters in true Puebloan architecture. Though sometimes real in revivalist architecture, they were more often a decorative abstraction of that historic construction detail. Instead, the exterior of the structure is decorated with small clusters of terracotta tile that accentuate doorways and windows. These roof tiles are far more reminiscent of Spanish revival architecture and lend themselves to an interpretation of this structure as blending elements of both these southwestern styles. This blending is very common in Denver and is considered by many to be a distinguishing feature of the city's architectural tradition. Each architect or builder would pick and choose tenets of different styles, mixing and matching them to achieve unique designs. Carmen Court represents one such unique blend of the Pueblo Revival and Spanish Revival styles.

The building is also potentially significant as it *is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder*. The architect of Carmen Court was Bert L. Rhoads. Rhoads, prior to engaging in a private practice as an architect, worked as the Chief Engineer of the Gates Rubber Company, designing many of the now lost factory buildings that made up their massive south Denver compound. Few of his commissions are known; however, a very large Washington Park West Home at 500 S Ogden Street is attributed to him (this home is

almost as large as the six unit Carmen Court). This home was constructed for a leading members of the Gates Family in the Spanish Revival style with stucco walls and deep, terracotta tile eaves. This home, in connection with Carmen Court begins to establish the oeuvre of Rhoads and his fluency in southwestern architectural styles. As the only known example of Rhoads multi-unit design, and for its grandeur, Carmen Court represents a significant example of his work.

As well, 900 E 1st Avenue has potential for designation as it *contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement*. The innovations that this structure represents are twofold. First, in his design, Rhoads incorporated the use of individual entrances for each apartment, a feature that would have been very uncommon for a multi-unit building during the 1920s. More common at that time were small apartment blocks with a few shared entrances. However, to lend a sense of high status to the apartment building, each unit was provided with its own front walk, individual stoop and front door. Additionally, Rhoads had Carmen Court constructed with Balsam-Wool insulation, a wood fiber-based insulation that was coming into use across the country during the 1920s. One of the construction photographs found in the Denver Public Library's collection shows a sign on site that reads, "Ask Bert L. Rhoads, These Unusual Homes Are Insulated With Balsam Wool, The Most Efficient Heat Insulator Known, Cool Homes In Summer, Warm Homes In Winter." (See Figure 3) As well, advertisements in the Denver Post suggest that the date of construction for Carmen Court places it at the forefront of using this new technology in the Denver area. A single advertisement was found, dating to 1924; however, beginning in 1926, after construction of Carmen Court, there are numerous advertisements every year, suggesting that Rhoads sought to use a recently innovated material in an effort to develop a modern apartment building with low operating costs and maximum comfort.

Additionally, the building has potential for designation *due to its prominent location or physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community, or contemporary city*. Located at the corner of 1st Avenue and Emerson Street, 900 E 1st Avenue is situated on a prime location, across 1st Avenue from Arlington Park (now Hungarian Freedom Park) and within easy view and access to and from Speer Boulevard. Additionally, the size of the lot and the placement of the building on it are prominent physical characteristics that make the building unique. The parcel is large, extending across over 5 whole lots, but the building does not cover this land. Instead it was designed to hug the interior of the parcel, leaving most of it open at the corner as a grand yard that appears almost as an extension of the park across the street. This prominent location, the uncommon style and design of the building, and its uncommonly large park-like parcel make Carmen Court a familiar feature of the neighborhood. This status would have been true at the time of its construction, and remains true today, as one real estate listing for a condominium unit stated in 1986, "You know this beautiful Spanish compound off Speer by Denver Country Club. Santa Fe Stucco with tile and hardwood accents..." Carmen Court is situated in a truly picturesque location, while also maintaining a high degree of visibility and access to Denver's Downtown and the elite and desirable Country Club neighborhood.

Overall Carmen Court retains a high degree of integrity, based on comparisons between the extant structure and construction photographs. The structure retains its stucco exterior, original steel casement windows, and terracotta details. The most significant changes made to the property effect the landscape. The central axial path running diagonally from the corner of 1st

Avenue and Emerson Street has been removed. As well, a portion of the terraced hill leading up to the building has been dug-out beneath the end unit along Emerson Street to allow the installation of a basement. While these changes have altered the original appearance of the site, they do not significantly detract from the design of the original structure, or the feeling of the place as the large landscaped area at the corner of the property retains that function and relationship to the structure. Overall, these alterations do not detract from the property. It retains a high degree of integrity and therefore still has the ability to communicate its architectural and geographic significance.