

# HISTORICAL EVALUATION

3840 Clay Street  
San Francisco, California  
August 3, 2007



Figure 1. Location map showing 3840 Clay Street



Figure 2. 3840 Clay Street, from south

Address: 3840 Clay Street

Block No.: 0992-008

Date of Construction: June 1900

Source for date: *California Architect & Building News* (October 1899)

Architect: Peirce (Charles V.) & Copeland (William G.)

Contractor: Same

Original Owner: Edson W.A. Waterhouse

Historic Name: Waterhouse Residence

Common Name: 3840 Clay Street

Original Use: Single-family residence

Present Use: Single-family residence

Has the building been moved? No. If yes, provide date:

Original Location:

Architectural Style: Colonial Revival (altered), Late Moderne

### Property Description:

The large single-family residence at 3840 Clay Street in San Francisco's Presidio Heights neighborhood, is a two-story, wood-frame dwelling with a full basement and attic. The dwelling sits on an irregularly shaped lot measuring 35' x 142.78' x 35.40' x 137.33'. The property is located roughly midway along the north side of Washington Street, between Cherry and Maple streets (**Figure 1**). The building is rectangular in plan with a two-story rear porch extension and a shallow curved bay window at the front. The roof is hipped and features an altered box dormer facing the street, as well as historic dormers on the west elevation and the rear elevation.

The house itself sits on a partially graded lot, with a concrete retaining wall forming the southern property line. The retaining wall encloses a small ivy-filled lawn panel. A flight of eleven concrete steps leads up to a cement walkway between the lawn and the house. A paved driveway spans the west property line, allowing vehicular access to the rear of 3840 and its neighbor at 3844 Clay Street. The rear of the subject property is presently occupied by a deteriorating one-story frame garage that dates to 1911.

The primary south-facing façade is set back from the sidewalk about 12' (**Figure 2**). The primary façade is two bays wide and entirely finished in stucco with the exception of a small area on the second floor which is infilled with flush wood siding. A portion of the "daylight" basement is visible above the walkway. The basement, partially clad in Roman brick, is illuminated by several wood casement windows. A flight of nine marble steps leads from the walkway to the integral entrance porch in the left (west) bay. The stairs are flanked on either side by retaining walls constructed of Roman brick. The porch, which retains its original tile floor, features "x"-shaped wood balusters and a paneled wood ceiling (**Figure 3**). The east wall of the porch features a historic shallow bay window and the north wall contains the historic entrance with a marble threshold, incised Colonial Revival architrave moldings and a paneled oak door.

Above the entrance, at the second floor level, is a small double-hung wood window. The right (east) bay is occupied by a shallow curved bay window containing tripartite windows on both the first and second floors. The window on the first floor consists of casements divided into narrow horizontal lights by narrow wood muntins. The window on the second floor is comprised of three double-hung wood windows. Alterations in 1939 resulted in the removal of the historic cladding and architectural detailing and its replacement with stucco. The only area not stuccoed is a paneled section of the second floor delimited by narrow bezel moldings which is clad in wood dropped siding. The original frieze and cornice were also removed and stuccoed. Today, the façade terminates in a simple wood box cornice.

The west elevation, which is three bays wide, is set back from the adjoining residence at 3844 Clay by approximately 10', allowing a substantial portion of this wall to be visible from Clay Street (**Figure 4**). Due to its quasi-public nature, the west elevation most likely matched the façade in regard to use of materials and ornamentation. The southernmost bay closest to Clay Street was stripped and finished in stucco in 1939 to match the façade but everything behind it has evidently remained intact.

The historic portion of the west elevation is clad in redwood rustic siding at the basement level and clapboard siding at the first and second floor levels. The basement features a row of windows embellished with cornice moldings and keystones. The west elevation originally featured unusual recessed pilasters, only one of which survives today at the rear of the building. The left bay features a large Palladian motif window (a common element in the work of Copeland & Peirce) on the first floor and a double-hung wood window on the second floor. Both feature mass-produced Colonial Revival millwork detailing, including an arched hood embellished with dentil moldings (first floor) and a triangular pediment embellished with a Greek fret molding (second floor). These elements are found on other houses designed by the same firm illustrated on page 8. The center bay has a window with an arched hood matching the window in the left bay. Located higher than other windows on the first floor, it collides with a bay window on the second floor. The bay window is detailed similarly to the pedimented window in the left bay but its awkward placement harms the harmonious disposition of the west elevation, suggesting that it may be a later addition, albeit incorporating historic trim. The west elevation terminates with a blank recessed frieze and a projecting wood cornice. Acanthus leaf brackets probably visually supported this cornice based on their existence on the rear elevation and other residential commissions by Copeland & Peirce. A pair of arched dormer windows with Colonial Revival detailing caps the roof. Based on other houses designed by the same firm, the now heavily altered dormers on the façade probably matched these original dormers.



**Figure 3. Porch, from south**

The rear elevation of 3840 Washington Street faces north toward the interior of the block (**Figure 5**). Clad in redwood rustic channel siding, the north elevation is comprised of a two-story extension consisting of a glazed porch with a pedestrian entry on the first floor and a chamfered bay window on the second floor. According to Sanborn maps, this porch was one-story until at least 1950, although it appears to be older. Moving west, the right bay of the rear elevation turns in to meet the main body of the house. At the first floor level there is a pair of French doors. The stairs are now gone. Above the doors is a double-hung window at the second floor level. Foliate brackets in the shape of furled acanthus leaves line the cornice in this area, suggesting that similarly detailed brackets may have been employed elsewhere and subsequently removed. The frieze features an egg and dart molding, which would most likely have been found on the other elevations.



**Figure 4. West elevation, from north**

The interior of 3840 Clay Street was surveyed as part of this report but most of the original interior materials have already been removed as part of a permitted interior alteration. Remaining historic features include exposed fir framing and flooring, pocket doors between the parlor and the foyer, a brick and stone fireplace in the parlor, the main stair with turned balusters and Composite pilasters and some sheathing in the attic.

The exposed framing indicates that some alterations have occurred within the building. The framing and sheathing of the second floor bay window on the west elevation appear to be newer than neighboring areas, suggesting that it was added at a later date. Patches and modifications to the framing at the front of the house suggest that the bay window on the façade may have been



**Figure 5. North (rear) elevation, from north**

modified during the 1939 remodel. Certainly the windows were replaced but the unusual “swaled” bay window appears to be an original feature of the house.

### **Surrounding Context:**

Presidio Heights was platted as part the Western Addition in the mid-1850s but the area remained rural until the 1890s. Early maps show a large number of individual landholdings, most in the ten-to-twenty acre range. The irregular boundaries of some of these holdings survive in some of the parcel boundaries, including those of 3840 Clay Street. Based on the large number of tank houses, stables, and barns that appear on the earlier Sanborn maps of 1893 and 1899, farming and ranching operations appear to have been the dominant economic activities in the area until the 1906 Earthquake. Today Presidio Heights consists primarily of large, free-standing single-family residences. Developed from the early 1890s to the early 1920s, as high-end residential development spilled over from adjoining Pacific Heights, the houses in the area represent many styles, ranging from the Queen Anne to Period Revival styles. Sanborn maps indicate that Presidio Heights was largely built out by 1915 although vacant parcels remained into the 1950s.

### **Construction History:**

In October 1899, San Francisco carriage maker Edson H. A. Waterhouse commissioned the architectural firm of Copeland (William G.) & Peirce (Charles V.) to design a large frame house at 3840 Clay Street in Presidio Heights.<sup>1</sup> Although all early sales ledgers were destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake, it seems likely that Waterhouse purchased the property from an A. Beerman sometime between 1894 and 1899.<sup>2</sup> According to the “Building Intelligence” section of *The California Architect & Building News* (CABN), the house cost \$6,500 to build. Copeland & Peirce appear to have handled both the design and the construction.<sup>3</sup> Water service was provided to the property sometime after May 4, 1900, indicating the house was complete.<sup>4</sup> According to other CABN listings, Copeland & Peirce also designed and built the dwelling next door at 3844 Clay Street in 1899. Although heavily altered today, both houses appear to have been built to the same design. According to the 1915 Sanborn map, both houses featured identical footprints, matching setbacks, and shared a common driveway. The shared driveway suggests that the Waterhouses and the Hughsons (the original owners of 3844 Clay) collaborated in the property acquisition and the construction of the two houses. Not only did the shared driveway facilitate access to the rear of both parcels, but it also freed up more land for landscaping.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to San Francisco City Directories, Copeland & Peirce was active in San Francisco from 1895 to 1905.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 1894 San Francisco Block Book, A. Beerman owned a 50 *vara* parcel that included what is now 3840 Clay. Most blocks in the Western Addition were surveyed into six equal 50 *vara* parcels. A *vara* is an archaic Spanish unit of measurement approximating a yard or 33 inches. Much of San Francisco was surveyed using the *vara* as the standard unit of measurement, including the 50 and 100 Vara Surveys downtown. Although the lots on the subject block: Assessor’s Block 990 (Old Western Addition Block 844), were 50 varas wide (137’ 6”), they were of different depths. Instead of being neatly bisected lengthwise, forming six uniform 50 *vara* lots, the subject block is bisected by a diagonal line. Evidently the “ghost” of an older pre-grid landholding, this diagonal makes the lots along Clay Street somewhat longer than their counterparts along Washington Street and gives them their irregular trapezoidal shape.

<sup>3</sup> *California Architect and Building News* (October 1899). Prior to the adoption of state licensing of architects in 1901, virtually anybody with a working knowledge of construction could call himself and architect. Many self-described architects of the Victorian era were in actuality builders or contractors who handled both design and construction.

<sup>4</sup> Spring Valley Water Company, Water service application records for 3840 Clay Street (May 4, 1900).

### Copeland & Peirce

According to San Francisco city directories, the San Francisco-based partnership of William G. Copeland and Charles V. Peirce was active for a decade, spanning the years 1895-1905. There is no file on the firm at San Francisco Architectural Heritage or at the San Francisco Public Library. Furthermore, neither the firm nor either partner appears in the *San Francisco Call* Index of 1894-1898 or the later *San Francisco Newspaper Index* of 1904-1959. There are however thirty project listings in the “Building Intelligence” columns of the CABN between 1895 and 1900. Featured in each edition of CABN, the Building Intelligence column was a tally of building and alteration permits filed during the previous month.

Most of the listings in the CABN were for routine carpentry, plumbing, and painting jobs, suggesting that Copeland & Peirce were carpenters who called themselves architects for marketing purposes. There were also at least a dozen listings in the CABN for new houses. Several were located in areas destroyed in 1906 but the author located and photographed several extant residences designed by the firm in undamaged parts of the city, including a two-story house at 1657 Hayes Street, built in 1893; a three-story house at 1910 Page Street, built in 1896; a three-story house at 1737 Golden Gate Avenue, built in 1900; and a two-story house at 709 Scott Street, also built in 1900. These four houses are illustrated below in Figures 6-9.<sup>5</sup>

All of the houses display a naïve vernacular quality characteristic of untrained designer/contractors reliant in large part on building trade journals and millwork catalogs, and an individualistic interpretation of popular taste. Many of the surviving dwellings by Copeland & Peirce have one or more of the following features: curved or chamfered bay windows, elaborately sculpted dormer windows, acanthus leaf brackets, segmental arched and/or pedimented windows, inset balconies and porches with turned balusters, attenuated Ionic pilasters, and most common, an arched window, often arranged in a tripartite “Palladian” motif. Seemingly influenced by New England Colonial and Colonial Revival architectural traditions gleaned perhaps from building journals, travel, or books, the architects incorporated ample amounts of mass-produced millwork that gave their work a characteristic appearance that departed from the work of many of their contemporaries, many of whom continued to use Queen Anne motifs well into the first decade of the twentieth century. Although their architecture has an unlearned quality, most of their commissions survive today, attesting to their desirable qualities as exuberant and imaginative carpenter Victorians.

---

<sup>5</sup> The street addresses for construction projects were rarely provided in the CABN “Building Intelligence” columns. Instead, jobs were listed by intersection. When trying to find a house by an architect in a given area the author



Figure 6. 1737 Golden Gate Avenue



Figure 7. 709 Scott Street



Figure 8. 1657 Hayes Street



Figure 9. 1910 Page Street



### Edson W. A. Waterhouse

3840 Clay Street was built for Mr. Edson W.A. Waterhouse, a prominent wagon maker and parts supplier for wagon builders throughout the West Coast (**Figure 10**). According to his obituary, Waterhouse was born in San Francisco on August 9, 1873. His father, Columbus Waterhouse, also a wagon maker, employed his son as a day laborer in the shop as soon as he could work. The younger Waterhouse learned the wagon-making trade from the ground up and by 1898 he had become president of Waterhouse & Lester Company, which by this time had five branches in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Sacramento, and Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> In December 1896 he married Helen Van Winkle, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. S. Van Winkle of San Francisco.<sup>7</sup> With his family and career secured, Edson Waterhouse purchased the lot on Clay Street and built a house that suited his position in life.



**Figure 10. Edson Waterhouse**  
Source: *San Francisco Call* (12.01.1896)

Waterhouse & Lester continued to prosper despite the invention and growing popularity of the internal combustion engine. Wagons continued to be used for drayage purposes well into the twentieth century, forming the backbone of Edson's industry. According to the 1901 San Francisco City Directory, Waterhouse & Lester was a wagon maker and "supplier of wagon and carriage hardware, hardwood lumber, iron, steel, coal, and blacksmith's supplies."<sup>8</sup> The company's facilities were located at 16-22 Beale Street until 1905, at which point the company moved to 534-44 Howard Street. According to the city directories, Edson Waterhouse served as president and manager of the company while his brother Seymour acted as the secretary. After the 1906 Earthquake, the company rebuilt its facilities at 534-44 Howard and began to branch into motor vehicle supplies. After Edson's death in 1919, Seymour Waterhouse transformed Waterhouse & Lester into a wholesale hardware distributor.<sup>9</sup>

The Waterhouse family lived at 3840 Clay Street for the next two decades until Edson's death in 1919. According to the 1910 Census, ten years after they moved into the house at 3840 Clay Street, the Waterhouse household consisted of Edson (aged 35), his wife Helen (aged 29), and their three children: Alden (aged 8), Gladys (aged 7), and Edson Jr. (aged 5).

<sup>6</sup> "Big Wholesale Co. Chief Dies," *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 29, 1919), 5.

<sup>7</sup> "Under a Bell of Fragrant Flowers: Nuptials of Edson Waterhouse and Miss Van Winkle," *San Francisco Call* (December 1, 1896), 11.

<sup>8</sup> San Francisco City Directory, 1901.

<sup>9</sup> San Francisco City Directories, 1905-1925.

Two servants lived with the family: Hilda Rocovoda (?), a 32 year-old Bohemian-born cook; and Mary Hamraskin, a 45 year-old German-born laundress.<sup>10</sup>

Edson Waterhouse died in January 1919 at the age of 44, a victim of cerebral hemorrhage suffered after a fall at the Olympic Club in San Francisco. He died at 3840 Clay Street within three weeks of his accident. According to his obituary, printed in the January 29, 1919 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Waterhouse was “a national figure in the manufacture of wagon materials and motor vehicle supplies.” He was also president of the American Iron, Steel and Heavy Hardware Association, chairman of the executive committee of the Steel and Supply Association of California, and a member of the Olympic Club. He was survived by his wife Helen, his three children, his mother Amelia Waterhouse, his sister Mrs. Nellie Waterhouse Dorne, and his brother Seymour W. Waterhouse of San Jose.<sup>11</sup>

A year after the death of Edson Waterhouse, the 1920 Census listed Helen as the head of household at 3840 Clay. Her three children were still living with her, as well as a French-born maid named Jeanne Laustang (aged 35).<sup>12</sup> San Francisco city directories list the Waterhouse family at 3840 Clay through 1926. In September 1927, Helen Waterhouse sold 3840 Clay to Emanuel P. and Esther W. Lewis.<sup>13</sup> According to the San Francisco city directories, Emanuel Lewis was secretary employed by D.N. & E. Walter Co., a wholesale supplier of carpets, rugs, linoleum, drapes, upholstery, and hardware located at 562-72 Mission Street.<sup>14</sup> The Lewis family was listed at 3840 Clay Street in the 1930 Census. The family at that time consisted of Emanuel (aged 59), his wife Esther (aged 51), their two daughters: Georgiana (aged 19) and Marjorie (aged 10); and a German-born servant named Winne Gobbes (?). The census indicated that the house was worth \$12,000 in 1930.<sup>15</sup>

In March 1936, the Lewis family sold 3840 Clay Street to Anne W. Heron.<sup>16</sup> Ms. Heron was not listed in the city directories, suggesting she may have been an absentee owner. In January 1939, Anne Heron sold the property to Oze and Mary B. Van Wyck.<sup>17</sup> According to the San Francisco city directories, Oze Van Wyck was employed by Shell Oil Corporation as an advertising executive. The Van Wycks remained at 3840 Clay until November 1945, when they sold the house to Ralph E. and Eva A. Van der Naillen.<sup>18</sup> According to San Francisco city directories, Ralph Van der Naillen was a partner in the brokerage firm of Douglass Van der Naillen & Co., at 130 Bush Street in San Francisco.<sup>19</sup>

The Van der Naillens resided at 3840 Clay Street until December 1954, when they sold the property to James B. and Margaret B. St. Clair.<sup>20</sup> According to the San Francisco city directories, James St. Clair was employed by California Stevedore & Ballast Co., located at

---

<sup>10</sup> United States Census, 1910 (San Francisco, Cal.-Enumeration District 212).

<sup>11</sup> “Big Wholesale Co. Chief Dies: Edson W.A. Waterhouse Fails to Rally from Collapse of Three Weeks Ago,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 29, 1919).

<sup>12</sup> United States Census, 1920 (San Francisco, Cal.-Enumeration District 276).

<sup>13</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder’s Office, Deed of Transfer, breviate no. 15665 (September 7, 1927).

<sup>14</sup> San Francisco City Directory, 1928.

<sup>15</sup> United States Census, 1930 (San Francisco, Cal.-Enumeration District 38-209).

<sup>16</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder’s Office, Deed of Transfer, breviate no. 18212 (March 5, 1936).

<sup>17</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder’s Office, Deed of Transfer, breviate no. 19071 (January 17, 1939).

<sup>18</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder’s Office, Deed of Transfer (November 30, 1945).

<sup>19</sup> San Francisco City Directory, 1948-49.

<sup>20</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder’s Office, Deed of Transfer (December 17, 1954).

Pier 26 and the Robert Dollar Building. From 1960 to 1975, city directories record James St. Clair's profession as a salesman for Madison & Burke, real estate and insurance. From 1975 until his death in 1985, he was listed as vice president of his old company, California Stevedore & Ballast Company.<sup>21</sup> After James' death in 1985, Margaret St. Clair continued to own and live at 3840 Clay Street until May 1993 when she sold the property to Robert and Deborah Dupire-Nelson.<sup>22</sup> The Dupire-Nelsons owned the property until they sold it to the current owner in 2007.

### Record of Alteration

The house at 3840 Clay Street has undergone a considerable number of alterations over its lifetime, significantly impacting its integrity and detracting from the potential significance of the property. Unfortunately, there are very few alteration permit applications on file at the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection to indicate the scope and date of the vast majority of these alterations.

### *Sanborn Maps*

The following section itemizes conditions at the property in each of the years Sanborn maps were published for the Presidio Heights neighborhood: 1893, 1899, 1913, and 1950.

**1893** The 1893 Sanborn map depicts a sparsely developed neighborhood, with large undeveloped 50 *vara* lots – six to a block – comprising much of the area between Clay Street and the Presidio. The subject property is shown as being part of two 50 *vara* lots with 275' of frontage along Clay Street. The only buildings on the block were a pair of frame dwellings on Washington Street. The still-rural condition of the area is indicated by the presence of water tank houses and stables at the rear of several properties. Interestingly, the ghost boundaries of a farm or landholding that preceded the subdivision of Presidio Heights is reflected in the property lines of the area bounded by Maple, Clay, and First (Arguello) streets, and the Presidio. The irregular northerly property line of 3840 Clay is a remnant of this older landholding.

**1899** The 1899 Sanborn map indicates that the neighborhood had changed little in the six years since the first map was published in 1893. Although some of the 50 *vara* lots had been subdivided into smaller house lots and developed with single-family frame dwellings, many of the larger holdings remained intact. Meanwhile, the subject property had been subdivided into two 50 *vara* parcels, each with 137' 6" of frontage along Clay Street. There were still only two houses on the entire block, and both of these were on Washington Street.

**1913** The 1913 Sanborn map indicates that significant changes had occurred in Presidio Heights since 1899. Well over half of the neighborhood was built out, although there were still larger vacant tracts remaining. The 1913 map indicates that 3840 Clay Street was in place, along with its "twin" next door

---

<sup>21</sup> San Francisco City Directories: 1954-1985.

<sup>22</sup> San Francisco Assessor/Recorder's Office, Deed of Transfer, Book F886, Page 716 (May 25, 1993).

at 3844 Clay Street. The map indicates that both were two-and-a-half-story frame dwellings with basements and one-story rear porches. Both featured identical one-story “auto houses,” or garages, at the rear of the lots, suggesting that both were built at the same time, perhaps as stables. Interestingly, the 1913 Sanborn map shows a single bay window on the west side of the house but not one on the street façade, suggesting that it was not noticed by the surveyor due to its shallow arc.

**1950** The 1950 Sanborn map indicates that Presidio Heights was entirely built out. Some of the irregular lot lines had been corrected to make previously unbuildable lots feasible to develop. Other lots, particularly along Jackson Street, acquired very large single-family houses that occupied nearly the entire footprint of the lot. The 1950 map indicates that 3840 Clay had not undergone any changes that would have resulted in changes to its footprint. The map shows only a single bay window on the west elevation but none on the façade. The rear porch was still depicted as being one-story in height. Meanwhile, its former twin at 3844 Clay had been remodeled to include a large chamfered bay window on the façade.

#### *Permit History*

The permit record for 3840 Clay Street is meager. Although early building and alteration permits were destroyed in the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, post-quake record keeping tended to be reliable, particularly after 1915. However, if the property owner did not file an alteration permit application, or if staff at the Department of Building Inspection can not find the records, the task of determining when the alterations occurred becomes much more difficult. Aside from a permit application to build a garage in 1911, the only other surviving pre-1993 permit application documents that the façade and the first bay of the west elevation were remodeled in 1939. The permit application indicates that the original wood clapboard siding and ornamentation were removed and the entire wall refinished in stucco.

It is worth noting that the alterations were performed in 1939, the same year the property was purchased by new owners Oze and Mary Van Wyck. Vaguely rendered in the Streamline Moderne style, popularized by the Golden Gate International Exposition then under way on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, the style was often employed to give an aging Victorian house a new modern look. Victorian millwork was difficult to maintain and many property owners, particularly in the Depression, aimed to reduce their maintenance bills by permanently removing deteriorating woodwork.

Although not documented in the permit record, physical evidence suggests that other alterations have occurred. Changes to the framing indicate that most of the windows have been replaced, possibly in 1939. At some point after 1915, an addition was built atop the rear one-story porch. In addition, some decorative detailing along the west elevation appears to have been removed, including an egg-and-dart frieze molding and acanthus leaf brackets, both of which survive on the rear elevation. Alterations to the framing on the west elevation suggest that the chamfered bay window on the second floor is a later alteration.

A photograph taken of 3840 Clay Street ca. 1955 by the San Francisco Assessor’s Department shows very similar conditions to what appears today, suggesting that few

exterior alterations occurred after 1939. Listed below is a tally of alteration permits on file for 3840 Clay Street.

- 1911** Edson Waterhouse filed a building permit application to build a garage, or “auto house” at the rear of the property.
- 1939** Oze and Mary B. Van Wyck applied for an alteration permit to remodel the façade and part of the west elevation.
- 1993** In April 1993, owner Margaret B. St. Clair filed an alteration permit application to install plywood and anchor bolts around the perimeter foundation to complete a previously unpermitted seismic upgrade. The \$14,611 job was completed by Meylan Construction.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1993 another alteration permit was filed by Nina Hatvany to remodel the kitchen, add a half bathroom, relocate the master bathroom, add a closet to the master bedroom, and relocate several partitions in the attic. The work was estimated to cost \$50,000. No contractor was listed and it is unlikely that this work was ever performed.<sup>24</sup>

- 1994** In January 1994, new owners Bob Nelson and Deborah Dupire filed an application to build an addition at the rear of the house and miscellaneous interior remodeling. The proposed work was estimated to cost \$797,700. The permit was not issued until June 1997 and the work does not seem to have been completed.<sup>25</sup>

In May 1994 Bob Nelson filed another permit application to renew an expired permit filed in April 1993 to remodel the kitchen, add a half bathroom, relocate the master bath and closet, and move interior partitions in the attic.<sup>26</sup>

- 1998** In October 1998, Bob Nelson filed a permit application to remodel the façade and add a garage to the front of the property. The contractor was Plath Construction and the estimated cost of the work was \$40,000.<sup>27</sup> None of the work planned by Nelson or Dupire between 1993 and 1998 appears to have been completed based on the fact that they continually renewed permits over the following nine years to prevent them from expiring.

---

<sup>23</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Margaret B. St. Clair to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 09306406, April 29, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Nina Hatvany to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 09307106, April 29, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Bob Nelson and Deborah Dupire to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 09401679, January 5, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Bob Nelson and Deborah Dupire to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 09407286, May 6, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Bob Nelson to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 09822387, October 2, 1998).

**2007** In May 2007, Deborah Dupire-Nelson applied for a permit to remove and replace “damaged and existing” lath and plaster and drywall throughout the house, repair dry rot in the garage, and replace the roof. The work was estimated to cost \$25,000.<sup>28</sup>

### Historic Survey Information:

The Property is (Mark all that apply)

- yes Constructed prior to 1906 Earthquake  
yes Listed in the 1976 Architectural Survey and more than 50 years old  
no Listed in *Here Today*  
no Listed in a San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey & more than 50 years old  
no Listed in the Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Survey  
no General Plan Referenced Building  
no National Register and California Register Status Code of 7  
no Listed in the North Beach Survey, Local Survey Codes 4, 5, or 6  
no Other informational Survey  
 Name of Survey n/a  
no Other

### Evaluation:

The Waterhouse Residence at 3840 Clay Street was included in the 1976 Survey, a reconnaissance survey completed by the San Francisco Planning Department. The survey sheet acknowledged that 3840 Clay Street had been heavily altered but that it is a worthy candidate for restoration. The survey does not meet current state standards and is no longer recognized as a valid register of historic resources. Evaluation of the property for listing in the California Register is beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, based on the information uncovered in the preparation of this report, the residence does appear to have some level of historical significance as an early pre-quake dwelling in the Presidio Heights neighborhood and as the home of an important carriage maker and supplier, Edson Waterhouse. However, integrity concerns would most likely prevent the property from being listed.

### Recommendations

Although heavily altered, 3840 Clay Street does appear to be a good candidate for restoration. The structure is solid and the materials of good quality and in relatively sound condition for a 107-year-old structure. Physical evidence, surviving trim on the west and rear elevation, as well as clues from other houses designed by Copeland & Peirce, can inform the process of restoring the façade and the first bay of the west elevation.

<sup>28</sup> San Francisco Bureau of Building Inspection, “Application of Deborah Dupire-Nelson to make additions, alterations or repairs to building at 3840 Clay Street,” (File No. 2007-05-15-1322, May 15, 2007).

*Façade*

Based on observable conditions on the west elevation, the stucco material should be removed from the façade and this wall re clad in rustic siding at the basement level and clapboard on the first and second floor levels.

One of the most difficult issues to resolve is how to detail the shallow “swaled” bay on the façade. The curvature of the bay is so subtle that it escaped recordation on the Sanborn maps. Other houses by the same firm feature curved bay windows but they are all typical semi-circular compositions. However, based on existing examples, Copeland & Peirce typically detailed each floor level of their bay windows differently, giving the top floor the most elaborate treatment. Comparable buildings by the same firm typically feature curved bay windows with flush wood siding, intermediate wood cornices embellished with dentil moldings, and tripartite wood double-hung windows divided by attenuated Ionic or Corinthian “pipe” colonnettes. Sometimes the intermediate cornice is “broken,” i.e.; it is interrupted to provide space for additional embellishment such as a plaster cartouche or flared Colonial Revival “high-boy” moldings (see 1910 Page Street). Copeland & Peirce seem to have liked plaster cartouches and most of their surviving houses feature applied ornament on the spandrel panels at each floor level.

The windows on the façade are clearly not original. Evidence from other houses by Copeland & Peirce suggest that the windows in the swaled bay should be in a tripartite, either all of the same size or in a “Palladian” motif consisting of an arched center window flanked on either side by smaller double hung windows divided by narrow colonnettes (See 709 Scott Street).

The frieze and cornice should be restored to match a small section at the rear of the house where the recessed frieze (with its unusual “denticulate” detailing), egg-and-dart cornice molding, and acanthus leaf bracketed entablature survive intact.

The dormer at the attic level was remodeled at an unknown date. Based on the appearance of the surviving historic dormer on the west elevation, as well as comparable buildings designed by Copeland & Peirce, we suggest rebuilding it to match the dormer on the west elevation.

*West Elevation*

The first bay should be designed to match the restored façade, in particular the bay window on the second floor. The entry porch was extensively altered in 1939. Comparable houses designed by Copeland & Peirce nearly all possess curved porticos supported by fluted Corinthian or smooth Composite columns.

The recessed pilaster at the rear of the west elevation most likely had a corresponding counterpart at the front corner. This feature probably existed between the first and second bays, to the rear of the porch, providing an element of symmetry.

The awkward intersection of the second-floor bay window with the first floor window in the center bay suggests that the former is an unfortunate alteration. Changes to the framing around the bay window also indicate that this feature is a later addition, although original window trim appears to have been reused. It is our suggestion to remove this element, reuse

the trim and pediment and reconstruct a window that matches the existing window at the second floor level in the left bay.

### **Conclusion**

Designed in 1899 by Copeland & Peirce and constructed that following year for wagon tycoon Edson Waterhouse, 3840 Clay Street was part of the early development of Presidio Heights as an affluent residential area during the early twentieth century. Nearly unknown today, Copeland & Peirce appear to have operated what would be called a “design-build” firm today. Their surviving works are largely single and multiple-family dwellings built for up-and-coming businessmen or speculative developers in upper-middle-class neighborhoods of San Francisco. Most of their surviving work displays an unusually exuberant take on the eastern Colonial Revival style that stands out from its neighbors. Typical features include curved bay windows, projecting entry porticos, balconies, pedimented windows, acanthus and Palladian motif windows. 3840 Clay Street was heavily altered in 1939 when the façade was stripped in reclad in stucco and wood in a simplified Streamline Moderne mode. The building is a good candidate for restoration. Although no historic photographs have turned up, it can be restored using physical evidence, surviving materials and trim elsewhere on the building, and other buildings designed by the same firm.



## Sources

- Biographical Index, San Francisco History Room.  
*Block Book of San Francisco*, 1894, 1901, 1906, 1909.  
*California Information File*.  
*California Architect and Building News*.  
California Office of Historic Preservation. *California Register and National Register; a Comparison*.  
California Office of Historic Preservation. *Instructions for Recording Historical Resources*.  
*Sanborn Maps, San Francisco, California*. 1899, 1905, 1913, 1950.  
*San Francisco Chronicle Index*, 1950-1980.  
*San Francisco Department of Building Inspection. Permits for 3840 Clay Street*.  
*San Francisco Newspaper Index*, 1904-1949.  
San Francisco Office of the Assessor/Recorder. *Sales Books No. 1, 2, 3: Western Addition and Sales Ledgers 1914-2005*.  
San Francisco Planning Department. *Preservation Bulletin Number 1*.  
San Francisco Planning Department. *Preservation Bulletin Number 18*.  
Spring Valley Water Company Tap Records: 3840 Clay Street  
U.S. Census Bureau. Thirteenth, Fourteenth & Fifteenth Census of the United States  
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *National Register Bulletin 15; How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*