



CITY OF GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM

Report: Nibley Park (1103 E. Mountain Street): Nomination to the Glendale Register of Historic Resources.

1. Resolution to designate Nibley Park, located at 1103 E. Mountain Street, as a historic resource on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources as GR-135;
2. Motion to deny the request of the property owner to designate Nibley Park, located at 1103 E. Mountain Street, as a historic resource on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources.

COUNCIL ACTION

Item Type: Public Hearing

Approved for January 26, 2021 **calendar**

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Submitted by:

Philip S. Lanzafame, Director of Community Development

Prepared by:

Jay Platt, Principal Planner

Reviewed by:

Michele Flynn, Director of Finance

Michael J. Garcia, City Attorney

Approved by:

Roubik R. Golanian, P.E., Interim City Manager

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council designate the property at 1103 E. Mountain Street, known as “Nibley Park,” as a historic resource by listing it in the Glendale Register (as GR-135) based on the findings in this report.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Project Summary

On February 25, 2020, City Council directed Planning staff to prepare a nomination to the Glendale Register of Historic Resources for Nibley Park, a City-owned public park at 1103 E. Mountain Street in the Rossmoyne Historic District. The park is currently identified as a contributing feature of the district. On August 20, 2020, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) reviewed the nomination and voted unanimously (5-0) to recommend to City Council that Nibley Park be listed in the Glendale Register. This report, which includes the information presented by Planning staff to HPC for its review, provides historical information about the park.

Introduction

The City of Glendale, owner of the property known as Nibley Park and located at 1103 E. Mountain Street, proposes that the property be considered for local listing on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources. Based on a field visit to the property, information obtained from City records, and the nomination and historical documentation prepared by the City (included in this report and attached as Exhibits 1, 2, and 3), the property is a cultural landscape that appears to meet eligibility criteria 1 and 2 for listing in the Glendale Register of Historic Resources.

Glendale’s Historic Preservation Ordinance (Glendale Municipal Code Section 15.20) establishes the process for designating historic properties and outlines the procedure for considering future alterations of such properties. The ordinance’s designation criteria are purposely written to encompass a broad range of potential historic places, allowing for consideration of an open space, such as Nibley Park, that has few historic features dating to its establishment or historically-significant subsequent changes. The term “cultural landscape” is appropriate for Nibley Park, as can be seen in the National Park Service’s definition: “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.” Section 15.20.010.A of the Glendale Municipal Code identifies cultural landscapes as among the types of properties that can be worthy of being identified and protected by the City.

Historic Significance and Eligibility of Property

Historical Background

In 1925, a two and one-half acre site on the north side of Mountain Street near Viscano Drive was deeded to the City of Glendale by the Nibley Investment Company as a public park named for, and probably by, the firm's owners, C.W and Alex Nibley. It was a key feature of the Rossmoyne subdivision that was developed by the company beginning in 1923, most of which is designated today as the Rossmoyne Historic District. The history of Rossmoyne's development is well laid out in the Historic Resources Survey prepared by Historic Resources Group in 2008 for the Royal Boulevard Historic District, which was the second phase of the Nibley's development in the area; information relevant to the current nomination is included below:

In 1923, the Haddock-Nibley Company of Los Angeles purchased the Rossmoyne Ranch from Judge Erskine Mayo Ross for subdivision and residential development. The purchase is described as extending "approximately one mile on either side of Glendale Avenue and Verdugo Road," including "property east of Verdugo Road to a point where it intersects with Glendale Avenue." Retaining the "Rossmoyne" name for the development, Haddock-Nibley announced one million dollars in capital improvements including sewers, utility lines, grading, street pavement, and lighting. Judge Ross's original 1,100-acre estate was evidently sold in portions, including a large tract sold to L.C. Brand that was eventually marketed as the Brand Boulevard Tract. Contemporary newspaper reports describe the purchase of an 800-acre estate by the Haddock-Nibley Company. . . .

The Haddock-Nibley Company was organized in 1921 by Lon J. Haddock in partnership with C.W. Nibley of Salt Lake City and his nephew Alex Nibley. Haddock had come to California in 1920 from Utah where he had organized the Utah Manufacturers Association and was affiliated with "one of Utah's largest real estate firms." His relationship with the Nibleys prior to the Haddock-Nibley partnership is unknown, although it is assumed they had some form of association in Utah. C.W. Nibley was identified by the *Los Angeles Times* as a "Salt Lake City capitalist" and "president of the Nibley Investment Company." His nephew Alex Nibley is identified as a vice president of the same company. The younger Nibley apparently looked after interests in California while his uncle remained in Utah. The Haddock-Nibley Company had previously developed real estate in Culver City, Venice, the "Glendale Heights" subdivision in Glendale, and other areas before the purchase and subdivision of Rossmoyne.

Haddock sold out his interests in Rossmoyne to the Nibleys in 1925, after which activity in Rossmoyne is attributed to either the Nibley Investment Company (C.W. Nibley, President) or Rossmoyne Investments & Securities Company (Alex Nibley, President) for the remainder of the 1920s. The initial Rossmoyne tract was subdivided and laid out in 1923 and 1924.... Construction began immediately after subdivision and homes in Rossmoyne proved to be very popular. By 1927, most of the homes constructed within the initial subdivided areas had been built.

The donation of otherwise valuable developable land as a city-owned public park is one of the most striking aspects of the history of the Rossmoyne subdivision. Gifts such as this were not the norm for speculative real estate developments of this era, either in Glendale or elsewhere in the Los Angeles region. The effort to preserve and celebrate open space in Rossmoyne was undoubtedly tied to the Nibley's marketing efforts to promote the area's Romantic, natural foothill setting – an effort common among developers of land along the Verdugo foothills to emphasize Glendale's removed from, yet easy access to, downtown Los Angeles. The difference at Rossmoyne appears to be the Nibleys' choice to give the land to the city, which, in hindsight, seems a shrewd decision to reap marketing benefits while absolving the firm of future responsibility for maintaining the park. This "donation" can be contrasted with the 1926 development of Brockmont Park, another foothill subdivision one-half mile to the west (and also now, in part, a historic district), for which a different developer created a private park solely available to its residents. That this park was later sold off for new housing lots suggests that, regardless of motive, the Nibley's choice resonates today and continues to provide a benefit to historically park-deprived Glendale. Though not bearing on the importance of Nibley's relation to the area's development, it is interesting to note that Alex Nibley actually put his money where his mouth was by moving with his family from Lafayette Square in Los Angeles to a house in Rossmoyne, which still stands at 1016 Rossmoyne Avenue.

Regardless of the Nibley's motives in donating the park, the racist and anti-Semitic restrictive covenants they enforced on properties sold in Rossmoyne call into question whether the park was actually, or ever intended to be, a truly "public" space. Further research would be needed to explore this aspect of the park's history and place it within the context of the city's history of hostility toward its non-White residents and visitors. No documentation has been found to date, however, indicating that any of the racist and anti-Semitic public gatherings that took place in other public spaces in Glendale from the 1920s through the 1960s occurred in Nibley Park.

Description

Nibley Park is composed primarily of relatively flat, tree-shaded open spaces intended for active and passive recreation. Covering two-and-a-half acres, it has almost 380 feet of frontage along E. Mountain Street to either side of its intersection with Don Jose Drive. The land slopes upward from the street toward the northwest and the park is bounded by residential lots at its sides and rear. When it was deeded to the City in 1925, it was primarily a wooded landscape that, over the years, has become increasingly “deforested” and programmed to meet the recreational needs of local residents. Early photographs depict a denser oak and sycamore canopy and limited open space. Over time, this transformed through both attrition and design, into the more open landscape we see today, with stands of trees, especially toward the park’s edges, intermingled among grassy and paved open areas devoted to active and passive uses. Some of the existing trees likely predate the creation of the park, but most others appear to be later additions, including large pines and numerous Chinese elms.

A key character-defining feature of Nibley Park, along with its use as an open park space, is the row of palm trees that line its frontage along East Mountain Street. Early photographs show these as young, recently-planted specimens that have now grown to their current, landscape-defining heights. This planting pattern is at odds with the native landscape that existed at the park’s inception, but the juxtaposition is now an important element of the park’s history and also a character-defining feature. It is likely that this palm-lined roadway influenced, or was at least conceived at the same time as, the Nibley Investment Company’s decision to line Royal Boulevard with the same type of palms, which are now a character-defining feature of that historic district’s streetscape.

Alterations and Integrity

Aside from any trees that predate the park and the row of palms running along Mountain Street, there are no known original features in Nibley Park. A dry-laid rock retaining wall toward the rear edge of the property has certainly been in place for some time and may be original. At least one house that backs up to the park has a rear yard pathway that aligns with stone steps at a break in this wall, providing park access to its residents (a metal gate in the chain-link property-line fence still marks this connection). The stonework at the rear of this house is very similar to that found at many retaining walls and rear yards in Rossmoyne that employ rounded rubble stones laid in mortar. The retaining wall in Nibley Park was not only built without mortar, but also has more angular stones than seen elsewhere in the area, so it is difficult to link them stylistically with other area walls. At this time, there is no conclusive information or evidence about the provenance of this wall. Even if not original, its apparent age and picturesque quality point toward its consideration as a character defining feature of the park even if it was a later addition. Another wall next to the tennis courts features similar stones as the rear wall but is in better repair. The relationship between this wall and the courts suggests

that either the courts were designed to align with a preexisting wall or the wall was built at the same time during the 1960s. This wall should also be considered a character-defining feature.

Ultimately, the park's key historic significance lies in its ongoing use as an open space, which continues to link it to the Nibleys and the early development of the city. The recreational features have clearly changed over the years and little is known about how the park looked in its first several decades. The tennis courts were added in the 1960s and the existing brick and wood fence along Mountain Street was built sometime before 1977 (based on photograph in the *Los Angeles Times* from that year in which the current fence is visible). While it is likely that children's' play equipment has been a park feature for decades, the current equipment was installed in recent years. The bathrooms and the small parking area at the west corner of the park are also relatively recent additions.

Character Defining Features

Though there are few original or known historic features in Nibley Park, several can be identified as important character-defining features that should be protected. These include:

- Palm trees along the Mountain Street frontage.
- Oak, sycamore, and other mature trees throughout the park.
- Juxtaposition of the formally planted palms with the more naturalistic placement of other trees.
- Low fence along the Mountain Street frontage (the existing brick and wood fence is not historic, but the presence of a low barrier has been part of the park since its inception).
- Stone retaining walls and steps at the rear of the park and stone walls at the west side of the tennis courts. Though their provenance remains unknown, these should be considered as character-defining features due to their apparent age and connection to the early use of stone retaining walls throughout the Rossmoyne subdivision. If subsequent research indicates otherwise, HPC may consider the new information in its future design review consideration.
- Use as a public park, with significant tree cover and open spaces dedicated for active and passive recreation.

Finding of Eligibility

After reviewing the nomination and its supporting documentation the Historic Preservation Commission concluded that Nibley Park is a cultural landscape that appears to meet Criteria 1 and 2 of the eligibility criteria for listing in the Glendale Register of Historic Resources.

Association with Significant Events [Criterion 1]

To meet Criterion 1, a property must be “identified with important events in national, state, or city history, or exemplify significant contributions to the broad cultural, political, economic, social, tribal, or historic heritage of the nation, state, or city, and retain historic integrity.”

Nibley Park retains strong associations with its initial development as an open, somewhat natural, space devoted to public enjoyment. In addition, it is strongly associated with the Rossmoyne subdivision, one of the most important components of the city’s early developmental heritage and recognized today as a designated historic district. Though Nibley Park has been altered over the years, it retains its character as a public space intended for the recreational use of city residents, thereby maintaining its connection to an original aspect of this neighborhood’s development. The original goal of creating an amenity to set the Rossmoyne subdivision apart from other early Glendale developments continues to this day, allowing the park to still convey its role in the social and economic historic of the city.

Association with Significant People [Criterion 2]

To meet Criterion 2, a property must be “associated with a person, persons, or groups who significantly contributed to the history of the nation, state, region, or city, and retains historic integrity.”

Nibley Park is closely associated with C.W. and, especially, Alex Nibley, who led the subdivision and development of the Rossmoyne neighborhood and became an important figure in Glendale’s historical early residential development. The choices made by Alex Nibley and his companies regarding the street layouts, plantings, and amenities continue to differentiate Rossmoyne from most of the city’s other 1920s subdivisions, as does his decision to donate Nibley Park to the city. In addition to his key role in the area’s development, Alex Nibley chose to reside with his family in Rossmoyne, connecting him to the neighborhood and his namesake park not just through his role as developer, but also by his choice to live there and perhaps use this public amenity of his creation.

Staff Determination

Staff concurs with the finding of the Historic Preservation Commission that, pursuant to Section 15.20.050 of the Glendale Municipal Code, the property at 1103 E. Mountain Street is eligible for listing in the Glendale Register of Historic Resources based on the above findings.

Environmental Review

The project is exempt from further CEQA review as both Class 31, “Historical Resource Preservation” and Class 8, “Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment,” exemptions pursuant to Sections 15331 and 15308 of the State CEQA

Guidelines because it provides for the enhancement and protection of a historic resource.

FISCAL IMPACT

Listing this property on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources will have no fiscal impact.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: List Nibley Park (1103 E. Mountain Street) on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources, finding that the property meets designation Criteria 1 and 2.

Alternative 2: Reject listing Nibley Park (1103 E. Mountain Street) on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources, finding that the property does not meet any designation criteria.

Alternative 3: The City Council may consider any other alternative not proposed by staff.

CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE

Not applicable.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Glendale Register Nomination

Exhibit 2: Current Photographs

Exhibit 3: Historical Photographs and Documentation

Exhibit 4: DPR 523a from Rossmoyne Historic District survey

Exhibit 5: HPC Staff Report (August 20, 2020)