

5.2.4 Mill Street Historic District



Setting

Established in 1987, the Mill Street Historic District is a residential neighborhood bounded by Pepper and Toro Streets on the east and west, and Peach and Palm Streets on the north and south. The Mill Street District is part of one subdivision, The Town of San Luis Obispo, recorded in 1878, although the area informally has been referred to as Fremont Heights. For its land area, Mill Street Historic District has the highest concentration of historic structures of the City's five Historic districts. It is a relatively small district, with an area of 20 acres or 0.03125 square miles, and as of January of 2010 had 84 listed historic properties.

The Mill Street district was developed at the turn of the 20th century, with the majority of the existing buildings dating from the 1900s to 1920s, the district's primary period of historical and architectural significance. The district was developed on high ground with originally very wide (100 ft) lots in response to both the seasonal flooding and fires that plagued early development in San Luis Obispo. A few of these wide lots remain in the 1300 block of both Mill Street and Palm Street, but the majority of them were later re-subdivided into 50-60 foot wide lots.

Site Features and Characteristics

Common site features and characteristics include:

- A. Trees spaced at regular intervals along the street (especially on Mill Street)
- B. Distinctive Camphor Trees lining both sides of Mill Street between Johnson and Pepper, a key entry corridor for the district
- C. Consistent street yard setbacks of 20 feet or more
- D. Coach barns (garages) recessed into rear yard
- E. Finish floors raised 2-3 above finish grade
- F. Front entries oriented toward street, with prominent walk, stairs and entry porches.
- G. Front building facades oriented parallel to street



1344 Mill Street, South Elevation

Architectural Character

Developed during a population boom in San Luis Obispo circa 1900s-1920s, the district's residential architectural styles reflect the prosperity of its residents. While older and more elaborate residences are located on the 1300 block of both Palm and Mill Streets, the majority of

historic homes were more modest residences. The close proximity to the court house meant that Mill Street was home to many county employees, including county assessors, attorneys, and county clerks. The Mill Street District encompasses many different architectural styles, including revival styles popular at the turn of the twentieth century. These styles include Neo-classic Row House, Victorian (with elements of Gothic Revival, Queen Anne, Stick and Eastern Shingle), Tudor Revival, Mission Revival, and Craftsman Bungalow, with many homes borrowing architectural details from more than one style. Most buildings in this district were built by local builders, including E.D. Bray and James Maino and were influenced by architectural pattern books of the time period.



1264 and 1270 Palm Street, South Elevation

Predominant architectural features include:

- A. One- and occasionally two-story houses
- B. Mostly gable and hip roof types
- C. Traditional fenestration, such as double-hung, wood sash windows, ornamental front doors, wood screen doors
- D. Ornamental roof features, including prominent fascias, bargeboards, prominent pediments or cornices
- E. Painted wood or stucco surface material, including siding and molding

Individually Contributing Elements in the Mill Street District

Not all historic resources in the Mill Street Historic District were built during the district's period of significance. Those buildings date from the late 1800s, generally do not exhibit the signature architectural elements described above, but do contribute to the historic character of San Luis Obispo in their own right based on age, architectural style or historical association. By virtue of their significance, these resources also merit preservation.

For example, the Buckley House at 777 Johnson Avenue is a converted carriage house built in the 1880s and is significant for



777 Johnson Avenue, East Elevation

its design, specifically the board and batten siding, of which there very few examples are left in the City. The Shipsey House at 1266 Mill Street, a National Register property, is an example of Eastern Stick and significant for both its architectural style and its association with William

Shipsey, attorney and mayor of San Luis Obispo from 1898 to 1901.

Non-Contributing Elements in the Mill Street District

Non-contributing buildings are those that both do not meet the criteria outlined above and have not achieved historical significance. Most of the post—1950 contemporary buildings in the district fall into this latter category.

Non-contributing architectural styles, materials or site features include:



- A. Aluminum sliding windows
- B. Rectilinear, “boxy” shape
- C. Metal or other contemporary material siding, or “faux” architectural materials or features.
- D. Unarticulated wall surfaces
- E. Non-recessed or offset street entries to buildings

1243 Mill Street, North Elevation



*1262 Mill Street; 1261 Mill Street; 1143, 1137 and 1127 Peach Street;
Righetti House, 1314 Palm Street*
