

From: [Gregory W. Smith](#)
To: [Sadowsky, Steve](#)
Subject: RE: J.J. Hegman House, 4714 Rowena Street, Austin
Date: Wednesday, April 14, 2021 10:27:24 AM
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Hello Steve

I'm still racking my brain over this. There's so much circumstantial evidence that I wish added up to a clear narrative supporting individual significance. The house is cool and unusual, but I'm struggling to come up with a clear argument that would convince the NPS staff of its individual significance.

The archival record is incomplete and hard to reconcile with what we see today. I'm confident that the core house dates to the first decade of the 20th century at the latest. It was modified at some point with the application of stucco and the pop-up roof, and I don't think these changes would prevent it from contributing to a district.

The association with Hegman is sketchy, and even if it could be proven to have been his residence at some point, he lived in other houses as well. Is the house significant under Criterion B for association with Hegman as a theater owner? The theaters themselves (the Ritz in particular) better represent this aspect of his productive life. Is it significant for its association with Hegman as the developer of a subdivision? I would think the house at 108 E. 48th Street, where he also lived at some point, seems like a better fit. I don't understand why he would leave the 2-story brick house on a large lot in the heart of his subdivision for a older house immediately to the west. It doesn't add up.

I think the best shot would be Criterion C in the area of architecture, as a modified turn-of-the-century house (I'll call it Queen Anne Cottage). The key to this argument would be to detail when and by whom the changes were made, AND argue that these changes themselves are architecturally significant. This case would be more easily made if the alterations were of a type that reflected changes in popular taste - we've done this in nominations where a house is substantially updated to reflect an entirely new style (often Beaux Arts after the Columbian expo, or an old plantation style perhaps popularized by Gone With the Wind). That's not the case here, and we can only guess at the motivations of the person or persons who undertook the alterations. It's difficult to even make a case for local significance because the house is an outlier. Is the house architecturally significant because it's unusual and without peer?

I would love to see the house preserved, but I'd be more confident in making an eligibility determination that points to a clear nomination strategy that the NPS would buy. If you write up the most solid and succinct case for the building's architectural significance, I'll forward it to our NPS reviewer for a preliminary determination.

Greg



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From: Sadowsky, Steve <Steve.Sadowsky@austintexas.gov>

Sent: Monday, March 8, 2021 6:07 PM

To: Gregory W. Smith <Greg.Smith@thc.texas.gov>

Subject: J.J. Hegman House, 4714 Rowena Street, Austin

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Hi Greg:

This is the property that we spoke about earlier. The J.J. Hegman house is remarkably intact and has a very unusual (for Austin) second story that makes this house akin to an airplane bungalow, while still retaining a more traditional wing-and-gable plan with a hipped roof. The house has an artistically-crafted plaster exterior with notable application “tails”, also unusual as an exterior material in Austin, an ornate wrought iron railing on the porch, and a wood-sided second story that pops up from the rear of the house and is crowned with a hipped roof. These features all attest to an artistic presentation and an exotic ambience unmatched in other houses of this vintage and size in Austin, and tie directly in with the identity of the builder, a man who made his fortune in motion picture theaters in the city. The only modification to the house is the standing seam metal roof.

If approved for a tax credit project, the applicant proposes to repair any deteriorated wooden elements and cracked stucco plaster on the house, but primarily the work would be to repair the foundation and upgrade mechanical systems in the house. It is currently a rental property, and would remain a rental property after the renovations. We feel that the house has historical and architectural significance, and would qualify individually as a historic landmark, and certainly as a contributing structure within a potential historic district encompassing the J.J. Hegman Subdivision, platted by the owner of this house.

J.J. Hegman was a pioneer in the theater industry in Austin, having ownership of several movie theaters downtown in the early twentieth century. One of his theaters was the first to show motion pictures exclusively, in contrast to the other theaters in town, which started off as vaudeville houses and still retained a stage for performances. Hegman’s concept of showing motion pictures exclusively was a bold risk in a city with fierce competition for the entertainment dollars of its citizens. Hegman also pushed the

envelope in showing movies on Sundays, in violation of city and state blue laws; again his pioneering spirit became the norm as Austin's blue laws were dropped for many classes of businesses.

The Hegman House on Rowena Street is architecturally unusual, standing apart from the other houses in the neighborhood, which is characterized by modest 1920s bungalows and cottages of the 1930s through the 1950s. This house may be much older than its purported ca. 1932 construction date as established by city directories, given its wing-and-gable plan and turn of the century details in the projecting front bay. The house was outside the city limits prior to the 1930s, when it first appears in city directories as the home of the Hegman family; further investigation may be warranted to discover any earlier history of the house. It could be that this is a turn of the century house that the Hegman family remodeled in the early 1930s to reflect their taste and to represent their association with the glamorous world of the movies. The second-story pop-up may also date from the time of the 1930s makeover, as it features wood siding rather than the stucco of the ground floor. In any case, the house represents an artistic expression that is remarkable in the city. I am attaching photographs of the house for your review and evaluation, and hope that you will see the architectural and historical significance of this house that would benefit greatly from eligibility as a tax credit project for its preservation.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need further information.



Steve Sadowsky
Historic Preservation Officer
City of Austin, Texas
974-6454

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