

To: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee of Denver City Council
From: Jenny Buddenberg, Senior City Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: January 15, 2019
RE: Landmark Designation for the Samsonite House at 637 Galapago Street, #2018L-010

Staff Recommendation:

Based on ordinance designation criteria and findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a structure, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a Structure:

Application:	#2018L-010
Address:	637 Galapago Street
Zoning:	U-RH-3A, UO-3
Council:	#3, Paul Lopez
Blueprint Denver:	Area of stability
Owner:	Eric Wayne Arthur Kratzer and Meghan Laurel Hinman Arthur
Applicant(s):	Owners

Case Summary:

The property owners submitted a Landmark Designation application for 637 Galapago Street to CPD on November 19, 2018. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for December 18, 2018.

At the public hearing, LPC recommended the landmark designation application for 637 Galapago Street based on History Criteria 1a and 1c and Architecture Criterion 2a, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and the December 11, 2018, staff report. Vote 8-0-0.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30-4, Denver Revised Municipal Code, a structure must meet the following criteria:

1. Meet one designation criteria in two or more of the following categories:
 - History
 - Architecture
 - Geography
2. Maintain its historic or physical integrity
3. Relate to a context or theme

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the structure application meets History Criteria 1a and 1c and Architecture Criterion 2a.

1. Historical Significance

To have historical significance, the structure or district shall be thirty (30) or more years old or have extraordinary importance to the historical development of Denver, and shall:

a) Have direct association with the historical development of the city, state, or nation

The Samsonite House, built in 1890, is directly associated with the Shwayder family and their business, the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company, founded in Denver by Jesse Shwayder in 1910. While residing at 637 Galapago Street between 1900 and 1921, the Shwayder family established and expanded the business to a national market and designed the trademark “Samson” case named for the Hebrew strongman Samson. The luggage company eventually became the internationally renowned Samsonite luggage manufacturer. The company’s success contributed to Denver’s commercial economy and helped the city compete economically on a national scale.

c) Have direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence on society

The property is directly associated with the Shwayder family who lived at the address during the time their luggage company, the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company, started and evolved into a nationally marketed business, eventually becoming Samsonite. Their story relates to Denver’s entrepreneurial activity at the turn of the 20th century, specifically the upward mobility of the Shwayders from eastern European Jewish immigrants to leaders of a locally prominent manufacturing plant.

The patriarch of the family, Isaac Shwayder, immigrated to Central City, Colorado, from England in 1879 to join his uncle who had established himself as a salesman in the mining town. The family had earlier escaped Poland and the Tsarist government of the Russian Empire. Isaac had spent his time in England studying to become a rabbi and cantor. He lived in Central City for two years before his wife Rachael and two children, Solomon and Jesse, joined him. He opened and ran a successful store in the nearby mining town of Nevadaville and became a major figure in the thriving Jewish community, serving as rabbi and cantor at religious festivals.

As the Shwayder family grew they moved to Denver, eventually settling at 637 Galapago Street in 1900. Once in Denver, Isaac owned a grocery store, furniture store and ultimately luggage shop before his son Jesse helped transition the family business into a luggage factory in 1910—the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company.

The family business was led by Jesse who served as president of the company from 1910 to 1960 with the assistance of several family members. During the time the family lived at 637 Galapago Street, family patriarch Isaac passed away (1916). The family invested Isaac's life insurance money into the business and it continued to thrive, becoming renowned for durable and inexpensive luggage with innovations like hidden locks. The family-centric business often marketed itself with images of family members balancing on suitcases to illustrate their strength. The company expanded many times over the years, and evidence of their factory presence in Denver remains, including a ghost sign on the Zang Building at 1553 Platte Street that reads "The Shwayder Trunk Mfg. Co."



Figure 1 The Shwayders in front of 637 Galapago St in 1905. (Image Source: Berry, Hannah Shwayder, "The Tale of a Little Trunk and Other Stories," 1977, page 3.)

2. Architectural Significance

To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:

a) *Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type*

The 3,000 square foot, two-story residential structure embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Italianate Style. The front façade is clad with a polychrome of rusticated rhyolite stone, red sandstone, and yellow limestone. All other elevations are clad in brick.

Characteristic elements of the Italianate Style are apparent in the verticality of the structure, decorative brackets in the flat-roofed cornice, prominent two-story bay window, and tall,

narrow windows. Nine ornamental sunburst motifs are incorporated into the lintels on the front façade, resembling abstracted pediments above the doors and windows.

The Italianate Style and stone façade composition are unique to the block and the flat-roofed row house is a rare building form in the surrounding Lincoln Park and Baker neighborhoods. Other rhyolite façade town houses near this property do not meet the level of fine detail with the polychromatic variation of stone decorative elements. The building stands out amongst its neighbors which are more modestly sized and designed, although of a similar time.



Figure 2 Front façade on east side of house. (Photo by Patrick Salazar)

The building retains a high degree of design quality and integrity with minor alterations over time. Windows and doors have been replaced and a two-story rear porch addition was constructed in the early 1900s that by 1930 had been enclosed. Windows on the side elevations have been filled in and others added. The most significant alteration is the rotating style of the front porch, which was of a Victorian spindle style in 1905, brick and stucco in the late 1970s, and by 1982 a simple concrete and flagstone stoop which remains today. Despite these changes, the building is clearly identifiable as an exemplary Italianate Style that retains most of its original character-defining features.

Integrity:

Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain its historic or physical integrity, defined as “the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven qualities that define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The property retains a high degree of integrity with modest changes. It is in its original location and although there have been some changes to the surrounding area due to increased development in the neighborhood since the building’s construction in 1890, the neighborhood is still residential in nature; therefore, the site retains both integrity of location and setting. The alterations to windows, doors, and both front and rear porches are not found to impact the building’s overall integrity. The integrity of design, materials, and workmanship is excellent and the continued use as a residence helps retain a strong sense of feeling and association.

Relate to a Historic Context/Theme and Period of Significance:

During the period of significance from 1890 to 1921, the property gained historical and architectural significance. The structure relates to Denver’s economic development and overall growth at the turn of the 20th century, associated with an increase in population due to immigration and the importance of immigrant workers to Denver’s economy. The Shwayder family typified this as Eastern European Jewish immigrants who developed a successful family-run business, the Shwayder Trunk Manufacturing Company, later the Samsonite luggage company. The architectural significance of the property that lends to the period of significance is met by the unique, late example of the Italianate Style house characterized by a polychromatic stone front façade and row house form.

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan (2000) and Blueprint Denver (2002):

The proposed designation is consistent with applicable plans including the Denver Comprehensive Plan (2000) and Blueprint Denver (2002). It meets several Comprehensive Plan Goals, Visions, Objectives and Strategies, including Strategy (1-C) to “Preserve Denver’s architectural and design legacies while allowing new to evolve.” The comprehensive plan envisioned Denver in 2020 as vibrant, with well-preserved and appropriately used structures representing every era of the city’s history.

Blueprint Denver identifies this property to be in an Area of Stability. The plan identifies landmark preservation as a tool to reinforce areas of stability. Blueprint Denver notes that for areas of stability, it is important to respect valued development patterns and attributes of the area, including existing buildings, particularly those adding distinctive character and identity. It also notes that historic designation is one of the most successful and common tools to preserve a neighborhood’s special qualities.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the following legal description:

Lot 30, Block 17, Elmwood Addition to the City of Denver, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado

Public Review Process:

Community Planning & Development has met or exceeded all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

Notifications:

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - La Alma/Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association
 - West Denver United
 - Center City Denver Residents Organization
 - La Alma Neighborhood Association
 - Denver's Art District on Santa Fe
 - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
 - Historic Denver, Inc.
 - Colorado Preservation, Inc.
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation
 - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing
- Owner notification letter regarding City Council meetings

Public Comments:

As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received 0 comment letters, emails, and signature support cards from individuals regarding the 637 Galapago Street application.

- At the LPC public hearing one member of the public commented
 - 1 in favor and 0 opposed

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation application
- Map of property
- Draft LPC Public Hearing meeting record