



R-37

Date: September 18, 2007
To: Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Vice Mayor Bonnie Lowenthal, Chair, Housing and Neighborhoods Committee
Subject: **TO DEVELOP A "NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER STABILIZATION" (NCS) PLAN**

The Housing and Neighborhoods Committee, at its meeting held, July 17, 2007, considered communications relative to the above subject.

It is the recommendation of the Housing and Neighborhoods Committee to the City Council that the communications be received and approved.

Respectfully submitted,

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE

Vice Mayor Bonnie Lowenthal, Chair

Prepared by:
Daisy Gomez

Unanimous vote



~~**R-28**~~
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Date: June 5, 2007

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Council Member Gary DeLong, Third District 
Council Member Tonia Reyes Uranga, Seventh District 

Subject: **AGENDA ITEM: Neighborhood Character Stabilization Plan**

The 2010 Strategic Plan states, "Our neighborhood infrastructure is gradually deteriorating...we need new public policy, infrastructure and land planning strategies to ensure reinvestment in our neighborhoods." The Plan supports neighborhood efforts to create beauty and pride by establishing Strategic Action N4.4 to "develop and implement neighborhood identity initiatives that create or extend physical neighborhood identity and cohesiveness through master planning..." and Strategic Action N4.6 to "promote historic preservation and neighborhood appreciation"

The character of our neighborhoods is being irreversibly altered as the phenomenon of "mansionization" and "tear-downs" tears across fabric of our city. The term "mansionization" is commonly defined as new construction or additions on residentially zoned lots that are out-of-scale with the surrounding neighborhood, but which comply with the current City zoning regulations. The City must act now to prevent further damage to the character of our neighborhoods as "tear-downs" that include demolitions and major remodels have increased by nearly 500% since 2005.


We are requesting the City Council's consideration to enact a "Neighborhood Character Stabilization" (NCS) plan. The NCS would evaluate current zoning design guidelines and review of floor area ratios (FAR) to achieve consistent guidelines. If a demolition or major remodel is determined to be acceptable under the NCS, the massing, height, set backs and density must be carefully codified. This process would be an improvement over our current system of granting variances, not letting developers know that preservation and adaptive re-use are vital to our city, and continuing to allow inappropriate building throughout the city, thereby creating an extremely difficult development process for investors, homeowners and residents.

Recommendation: **Request the City Manager to report to the City Council on development of a "Neighborhood Character Stabilization" (NCS) plan to prevent the demolition of character defining structures. The "NCS" could include an educational component, financial incentives and design guidelines and permitting to enforce adaptive re-use and restoration.**



Date: July 17, 2007

To: Housing and Neighborhood Committee

From:  Suzanne Frick, Director, Planning and Building Department

Subject: Neighborhood Character Stabilization Plan and Demolition of Structures 45 Years or Older

This memorandum is in response to a City Council action taken to refer "Neighborhood Character Stabilization" to the Housing and Neighborhoods Committee for review. The City Council requested that "Neighborhood Character Stabilization" should be considered concurrently with the demolition of structures over 45 years of age. As part of the review, staff was to present options for the committee's consideration. This report provides background on the issues, a survey of construction activity, and options for consideration.

Background

A Neighborhood Character Stabilization Plan is a strategy to respond to the issue known as "Mansionization". This term is used to characterize new structures or additions that are larger in size and out of character with the existing houses in a neighborhood. Many of the concerns about this subject involve remodels that are larger in overall size, and resemble large box structures, hence making them out of character with the style and feel of the rest of the neighborhood. These houses may appear as if they loom over their neighbors and take away from the privacy and separation between homes that currently exist.

In Long Beach, these types of issues, size and character, are regulated by zoning standards. Typical zoning standards regulate building height limits, placement of the house back from the street, and adjacent properties, the maximum amount of the lot that can be covered by the home, and the maximum square footage of a house (FAR).

FAR is the development rule that determines the maximum building size allowed on the lot. The maximum building size varies depending on the size of the lot. For example, the FAR calculation for a 3,000 square foot house located on a 6,000 square foot lot, would be .50 (3,000 floor area / 6,000 lot area = .50).

Standards vary across zoning districts, however, the most prevalent residential zone in the City, R-1-N (Single Family Residential, standard lot), allows a maximum .60 FAR. Using the example above the maximum size of a house in the R-1-N would be 3,600 square feet.

Due to the increase in building activity throughout the City, there has been a significant increase in the number of requests for demolitions. This has created situations where demolition permits have been issued for structures that potentially have historic significance. New homes built as a result of the demolition of an existing smaller home are part of a phenomenon called "tear

downs". The demolition of houses that are more than 45 years old may contribute to the loss of character in a neighborhood due to the loss of relatively modest sized homes (around 1500 square feet) and the construction of new larger homes, which could be twice the size.

Approach by Other Cities

Mansionization is not unique to Long Beach. This issue has been studied locally and nationally in many cities. Staff researched single-family residential regulations from a number of local cities. Planning staff in Beverly Hills utilizes design and style guidelines to determine whether a hearing is required in addition to a maximum FAR. Pasadena uses FAR limitations and required step-backs through an encroachment plane. Rancho Palos Verdes uses maximum lot coverage regulations in addition to Planning Commission review of all second story projects. Redondo Beach implements administrative design review, appealable to Planning Commission, as well as a recommended FAR of .65 which can be increased to .80 with bonus elements. Manhattan Beach does not utilize design review, but regulates mass and bulk through variable FAR based on lot size. Among larger cities, San Jose allows a maximum of .45 FAR by right, but uses staff and Zoning Administrative review for projects that propose higher FARs.

City of Los Angeles Neighborhood Character Stabilization

The City of Los Angeles is in the process of developing new standards to address the Mansionization issue. In early 2005, the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (DCP) began work on a Baseline Mansionization Ordinance. The intent of this ordinance was to develop a citywide proposal that would address over-sized single-family dwellings.

Temporary measures, in the form of geographically specific mansionization Interim Control Ordinances (ICO), have been passed. Interim Control Ordinances temporarily prohibit the issuance of building and demolition permits for the construction, demolition, addition or alteration of any building or structure located within a defined geographic boundary for one year. The purpose of the neighborhood specific ICO's is to protect the neighborhood character and preserve the neighborhood's potential historic resources including buildings, landscaping, and natural features until studies on a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone and down zoning can be completed and the proper regulatory controls instituted.

The City of Los Angeles generally has more liberal residential zoning regulations than the City of Long Beach. For example, the maximum allowable FAR for the typical R1 single-family residential zone in Los Angeles is approximately 1.6, compared to .60 in Long Beach. Los Angeles uses a different definition of "lot area", however, for comparison sake, using the 6,000 square foot lot example, Long Beach would allow a maximum size home of 3,600 square feet, while the current Los Angeles regulation would allow a maximum size home of

approximately 9,600 square feet. As a part of the Baseline Mansionization Ordinance Los Angeles has proposed to lower the maximum FAR in R1 zones to .40-.45 depending on the size of the lot (.45 for lots <7500 square feet, .40 for lots >7500 square feet).

The Los Angeles Planning Commission approved the Baseline Mansionization Ordinance on Thursday, June 28th, which decreased overall FAR requirements, provided incentives to limit in size and encourages second story modulation, and made provisions for increased FAR on lots that are less than 5,000 square feet. This item must still be heard by the Los Angeles City Council.

Recent Trends in Long Beach

Major remodeling and demolition activity has increased in the last several years. Much of this activity has taken place in the R-1-N zone, single-family neighborhoods. To understand the pattern and nature of demolitions and large remodels in Long Beach a two-part methodology was used.

1. The first task was to determine where in the City this type of development is taking place. A map was produced showing single-family home demolitions and major remodels (over \$150,000. value), for the last 4 years (see Attachment A).

While demolitions and major remodels have occurred all over the City, there are several neighborhoods that are experiencing more of this activity than others. Based on the clustering of activity indicated on the attached map, the following neighborhoods are most affected: Belmont Heights, Belmont Shore, the Peninsula, Naples, Alamitos Heights, the Rancho Estates, Los Altos, Lakewood Village, and Los Cerritos.

2. The second task was to decide if the development occurring in these neighborhoods is out of character with the neighborhood. Because character and scale are the primary elements of mansionization, these terms must first be defined.
 - The term character refers to the architectural style and building materials existing throughout the neighborhood. This term is more qualitative than quantitative.
 - Scale refers to the size, height, and volume or mass of a structure. Zoning standards typically establish the scale of a building through development standards such as height, setbacks, floor area, and lot coverage. Scale is more quantitative than qualitative.

Staff photographed a sampling of new construction and remodels that have occurred over the last four years (see Attachment B). Several of the neighborhoods mentioned above, Belmont Shore, the Peninsula, Naples, Lakewood Village, Los Altos, and Alamitos Heights have experienced

demolitions and associated remodels, however, in these areas the houses appear to blend in well with the existing neighborhood. As noted in the photographs, many of the remodels use materials that are prevalent in the neighborhood, and included other physical features, such as stepped back second stories and window patterns that are in keeping with the neighborhood.

The Ranchos Estates and Los Cerritos have also experienced large remodels and demolitions. Most of these projects have been done in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. However, if the pace of construction activity increases, the character of the area may change. At this time these two areas appear stable and no new development standards are proposed. Staff will continue to monitor future development activity in these areas and remain in communication with the neighborhood associations to identify issues. If necessary, staff will return to the committee if problems occur.

In Belmont Heights it was more common for the remodels to be much larger than existing houses in the neighborhood and therefore appear out of character. The remodels have used materials inconsistent with the area, introduced new roof types and second stories that are out of scale with the neighborhood.

The zoning ordinance sets forth the permitted development standards for a neighborhood. When new houses or significant remodels appear out of character and scale, it is an indication the development standards for the area need to be revised. In Long Beach, the development standards for single-family development are fairly uniform. This explains why in some neighborhoods new construction fits in while in other areas it appears incompatible. Tailoring development standards to a neighborhood area will address the disparity.

Options for Addressing Mansionization and Demolition

The preferred approach to modifying development standards is to conduct comprehensive outreach and input from the residents and design community. This type of process can take over a year to complete. Recognizing that neighborhood character may further erode during this time, short-term solutions are available while the longer-term process is underway. The following options assume a two-part solution, the adoption of short-term controls and initiation of a more in depth process to develop permanent standards. An interim ordinance could be in effect for up to two years while the permanent standards are being developed.

Should the Committee find that existing zoning standards result in incompatible development in some neighborhoods, there are several options available to address the issue.

1. Interim Options

- a. Moratorium on all new single-family homes, additions, and demolitions – A full moratorium would prevent all additions, new

homes, and single-family demolitions. This is a substantial limitation to the development rights of private property owners.

- b. Reduction of current development rights – A less severe restriction would be to modify the present development standards such as increasing setbacks and step-backs, reducing FAR, increasing lot coverage and altering the definition of a demolition.
 - c. Require discretionary review of remodels, demolitions, and new single-family homes – Discretionary review is a time intensive process that would require staff and/or a board or commission to evaluate proposed projects against criteria to be determined. To adequately provide this review, additional staffing would be required. For demolitions of buildings over 45 years of age, review could require the preparation of a historic assessment survey, either by the applicant or staff, as well as reviewing whether demolition of the structure would diminish the character of the neighborhood. This option would result in additional time and cost for single-family construction.
2. Under a medium term scenario, zoning and demolition standards would remain as they are until new standards are adopted. Following a study of the issue and public outreach, including stakeholder focus groups, amendments to the zoning ordinance and the historic preservation ordinance could be considered by the Planning Commission and recommended to the City Council. Fully developed amendments could include a wider variety of regulatory mechanisms. This option would take one to two years to complete.
3. A third option includes incorporating neighborhood character stabilization strategies and assessment of demolitions into the update of the General Plan, Long Beach 2030. The anticipated timeline for the adoption of the 2030 Plan is 18-24 months. With the Long Beach 2030 option, neighborhood character stabilization strategies could be fully integrating into the resulting in revisions to the zoning code. The demolition of structures greater than 45 years in age would be addressed through the Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan, which may include a citywide survey to assess structures for historic significance.

Conclusion

While many neighborhoods in Long Beach are experiencing increased construction activity, it appears Belmont Heights is experiencing incompatible development. Of the options presented, staff is in favor of modifying the existing development standards on an interim basis for Belmont Heights, while a more comprehensive process is undertaken to develop permanent standards.

July 17, 2007

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Attachment A – Map



Attachment B – Photographs

SF:AR:SM

City of Long Beach

Major Remodels and New Construction in R-1 and R-2 Zones 2004-2007

Permits Issued by Year				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
Building Permit Valuation \$150,000+	112	127	164	71
Demolition Permit Issued	34	68	94	23

- Building Permit Valuation \$150,000+
- ★ Demolition Permit Issued
-  Historic District
-  Neighborhood Focus Areas

Lakewood Village Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 1,816
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 90%
Median FAR: 0.22
Median House Size (SF): 1,678
Median Lot Size (SF): 7,818
Avg. Year Built: 1945

Los Cerritos Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 1,047
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 79%
Median FAR: 0.26
Median House Size (SF): 2,262
Median Lot Size (SF): 7,635
Avg. Year Built: 1949

Los Altos/Park Estates Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 4,314
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 97%
Median FAR: 0.23
Median House Size (SF): 1,530
Median Lot Size (SF): 6,355
Avg. Year Built: 1952

The Ranchos Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 826
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 100%
Median FAR: 0.24
Median House Size (SF): 1,383
Median Lot Size (SF): 5,458
Avg. Year Built: 1954

Alamitos Heights Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 699
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 96%
Median FAR: 0.32
Median House Size (SF): 2,000
Median Lot Size (SF): 6,450
Avg. Year Built: 1952

Naples Focus Area Characteristics

of Single-Family Properties: 1,192
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 86%
Median FAR: 0.66
Median House Size (SF): 1,964
Median Lot Size (SF): 3,034
Avg. Year Built: 1950

Peninsula Focus Area Characteristics

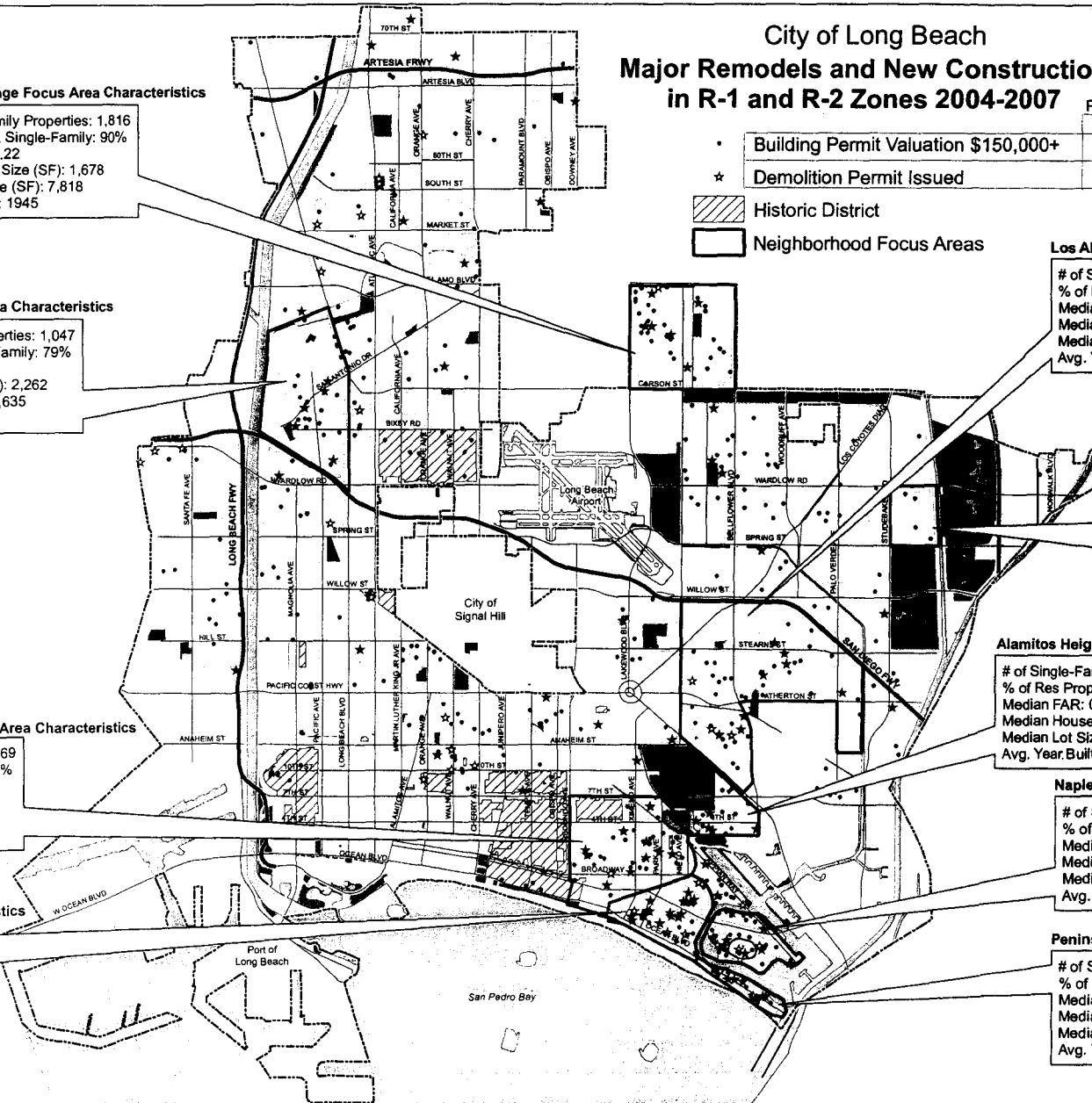
of Single-Family Properties: 224
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 48%
Median FAR: 0.79
Median House Size (SF): 2,106
Median Lot Size (SF): 2,404
Avg. Year Built: 1948

Greater Belmont Heights Focus Area Characteristics

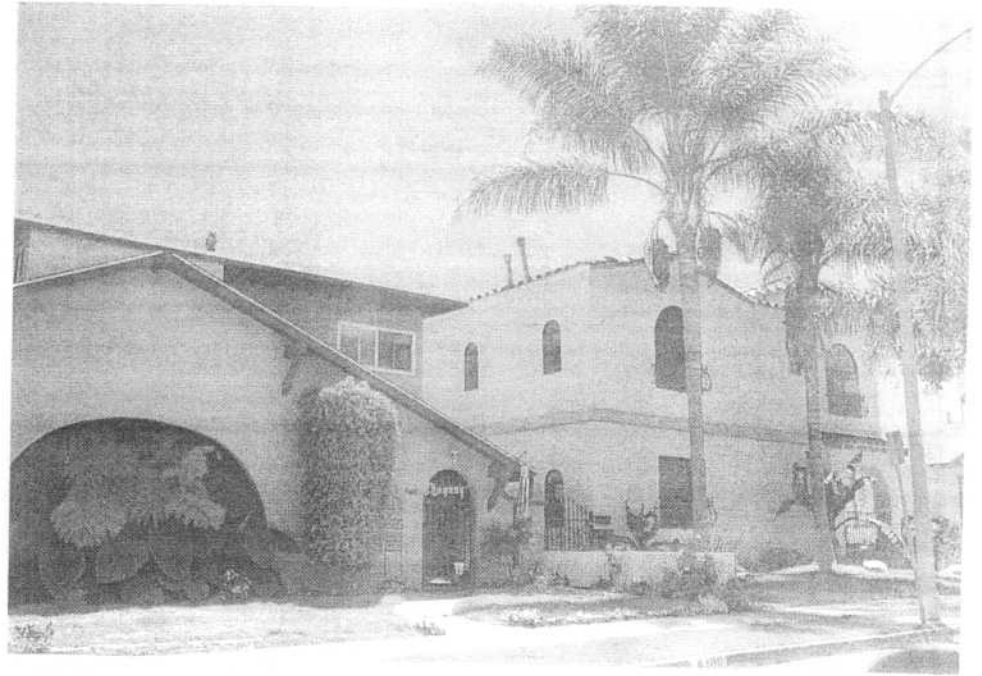
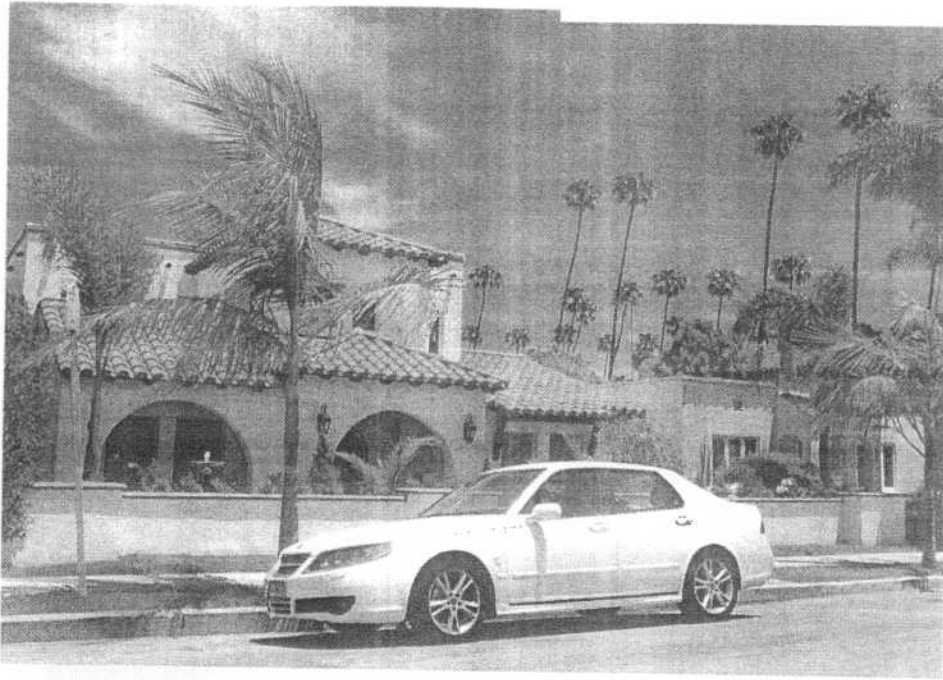
of Single-Family Properties: 1,669
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 56%
Median FAR: 0.31
Median House Size (SF): 1,516
Median Lot Size (SF): 5,578
Avg. Year Built: 1928

Belmont Shore Focus Area Characteristics

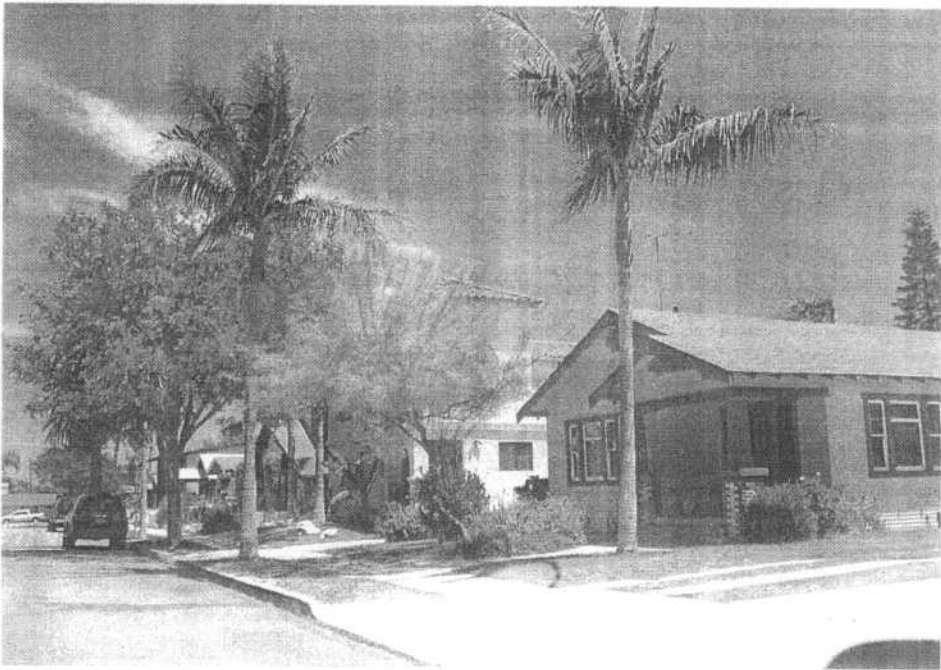
of Single-Family Properties: 1,087
% of Res Prop. Single-Family: 54%
Median FAR: 0.45
Median House Size (SF): 1,292
Median Lot Size (SF): 2,669
Avg. Year Built: 1932



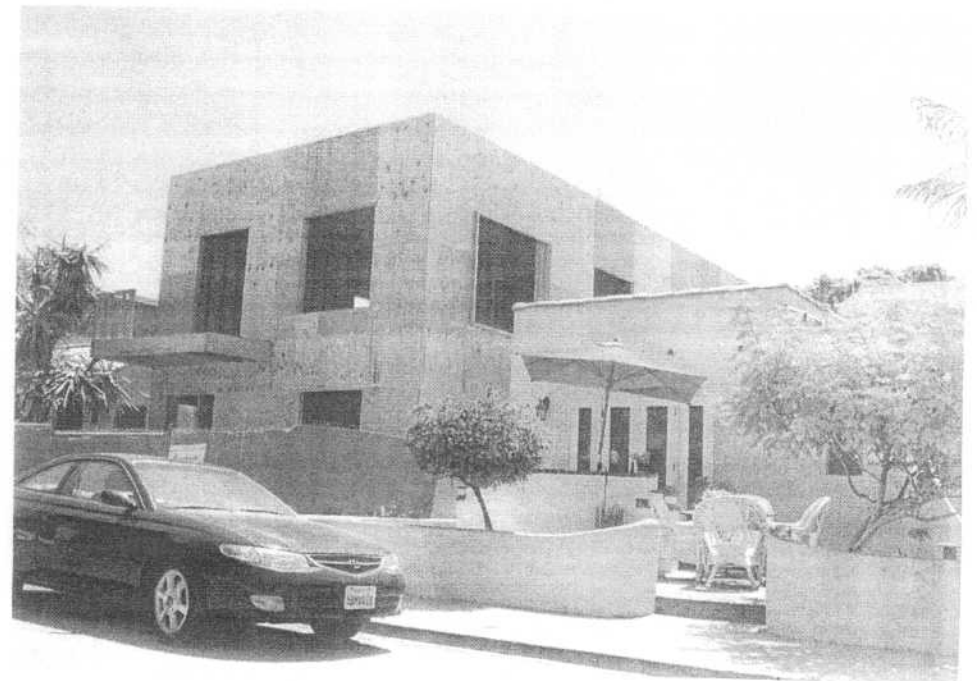
BELMONT HEIGHTS



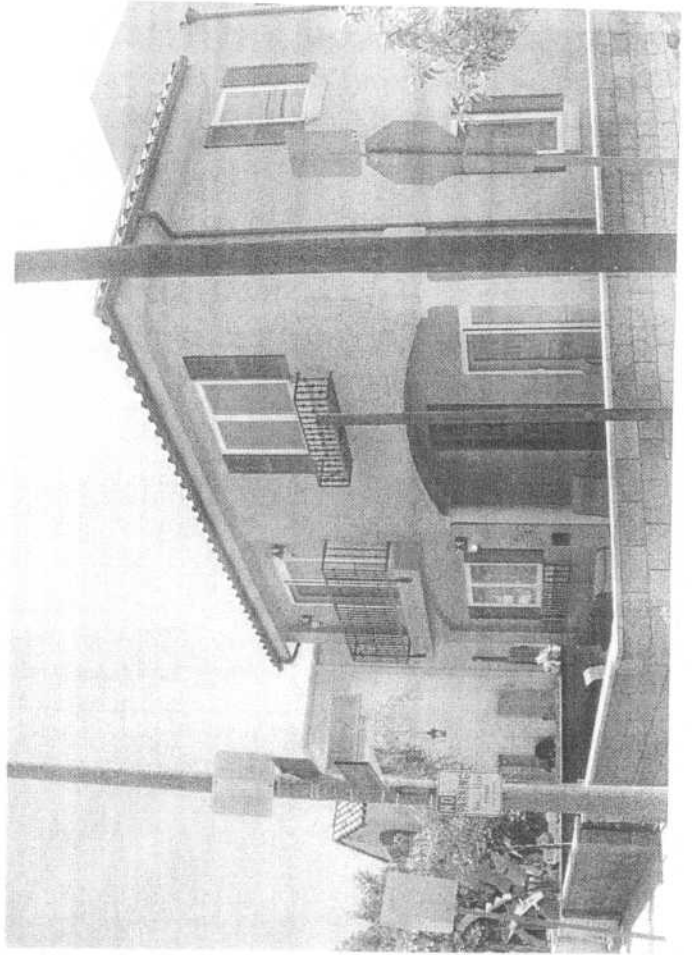
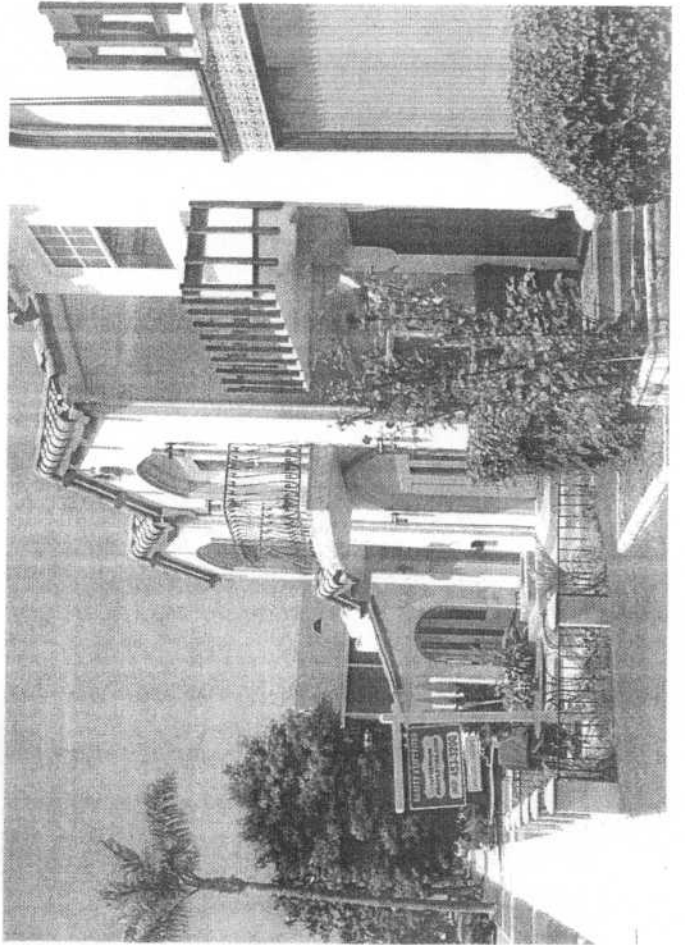
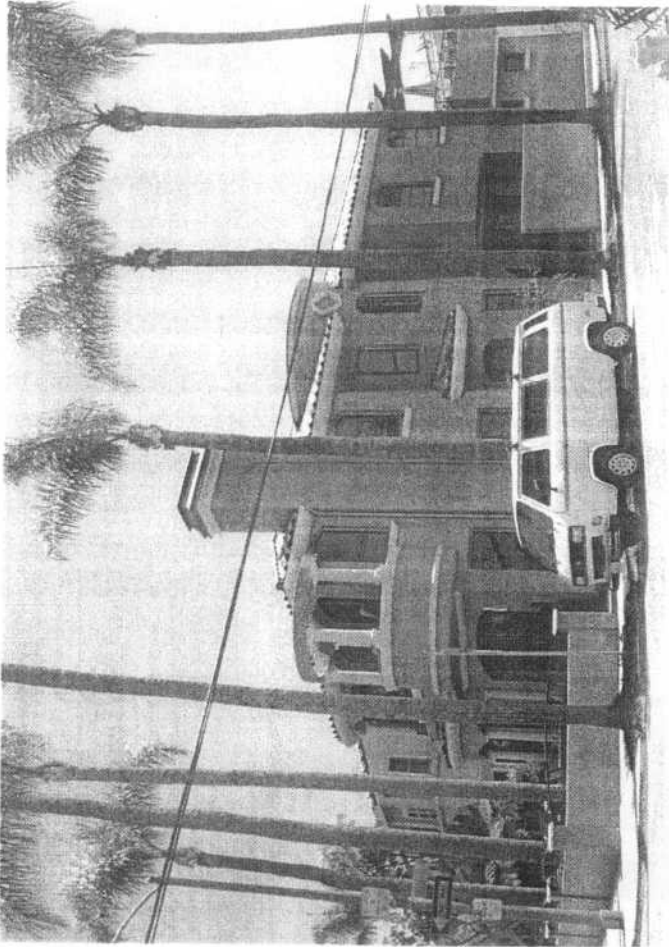
BELMONT HEIGHTS



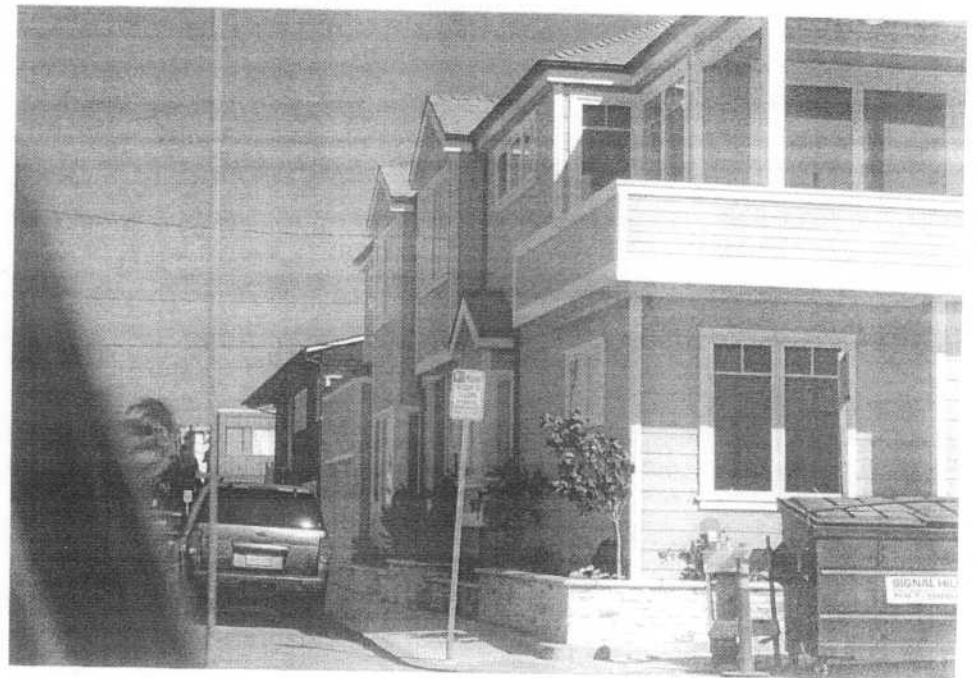
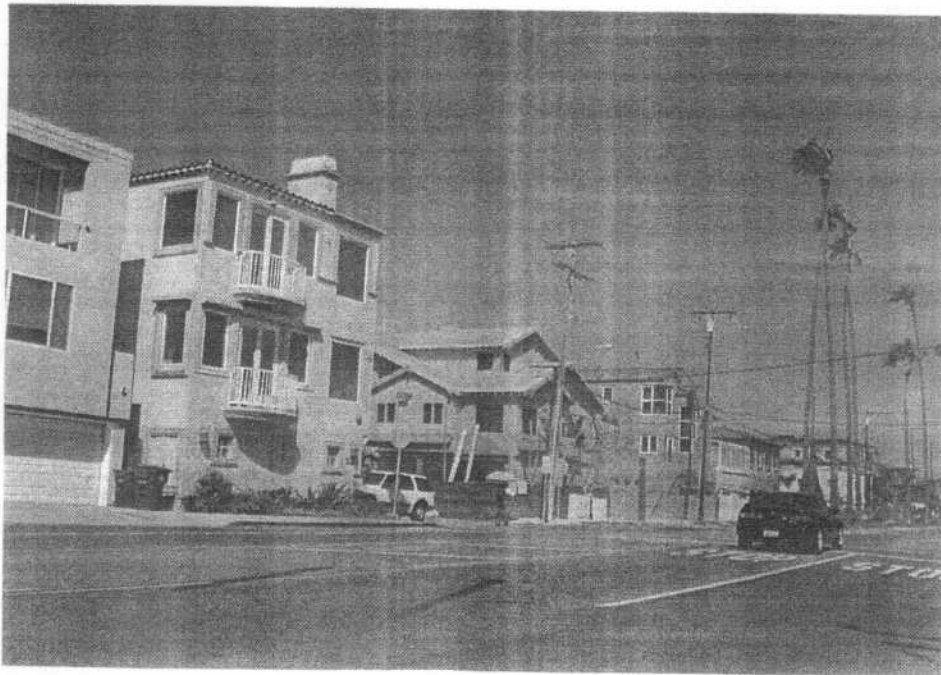
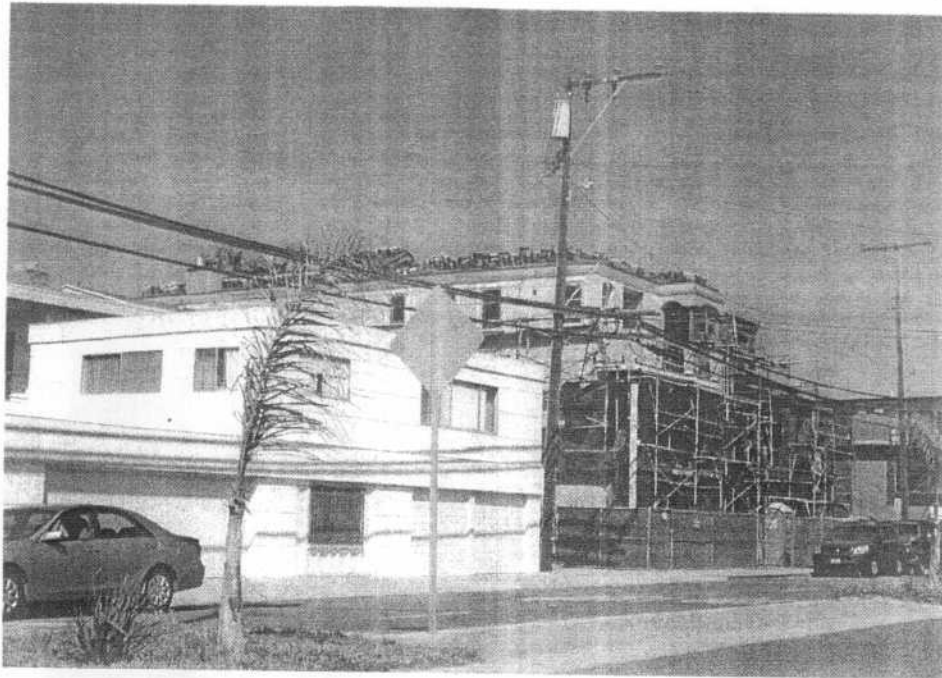
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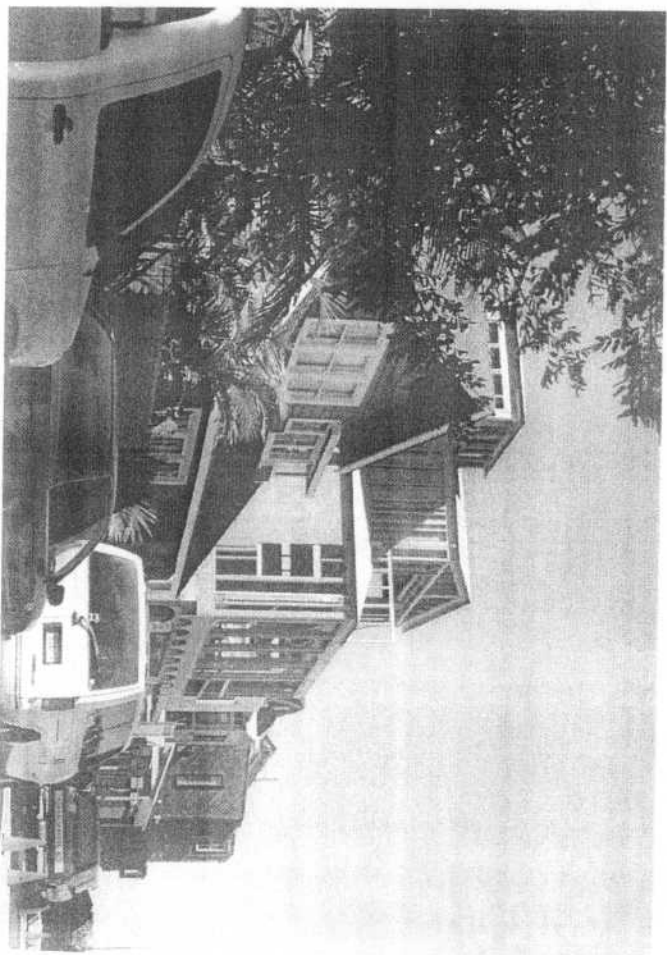
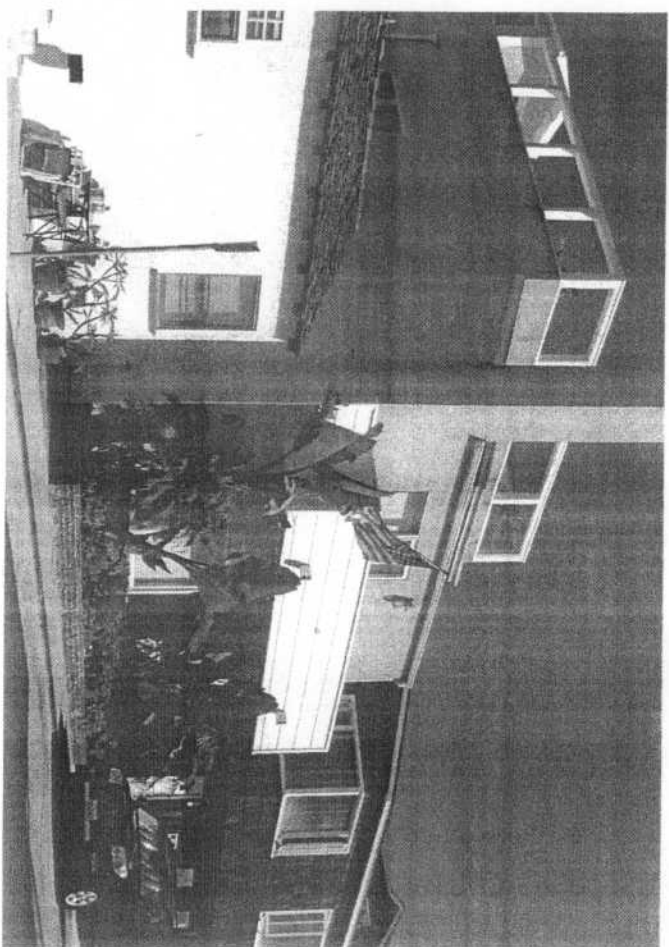
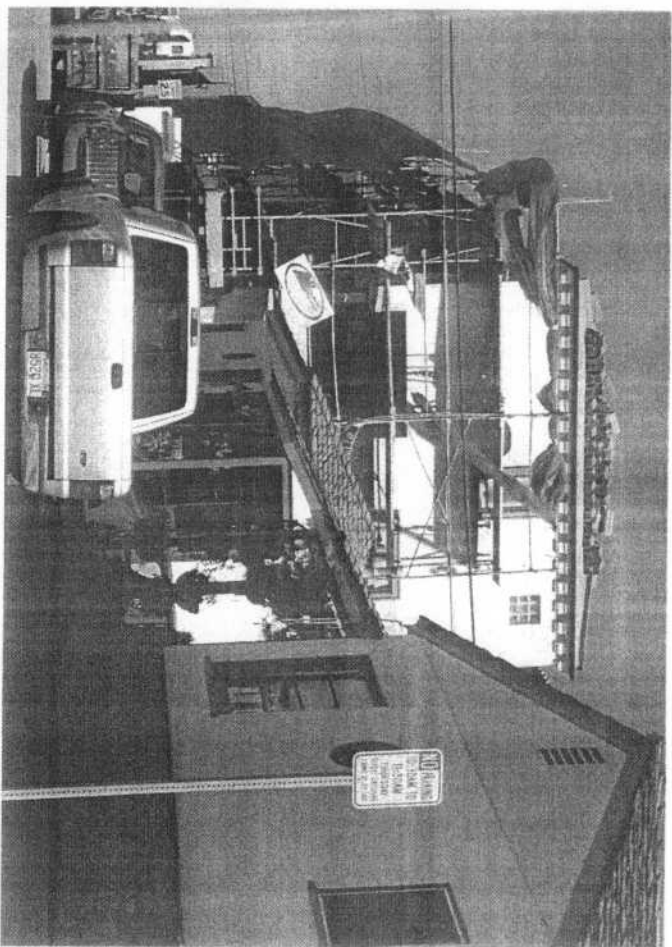
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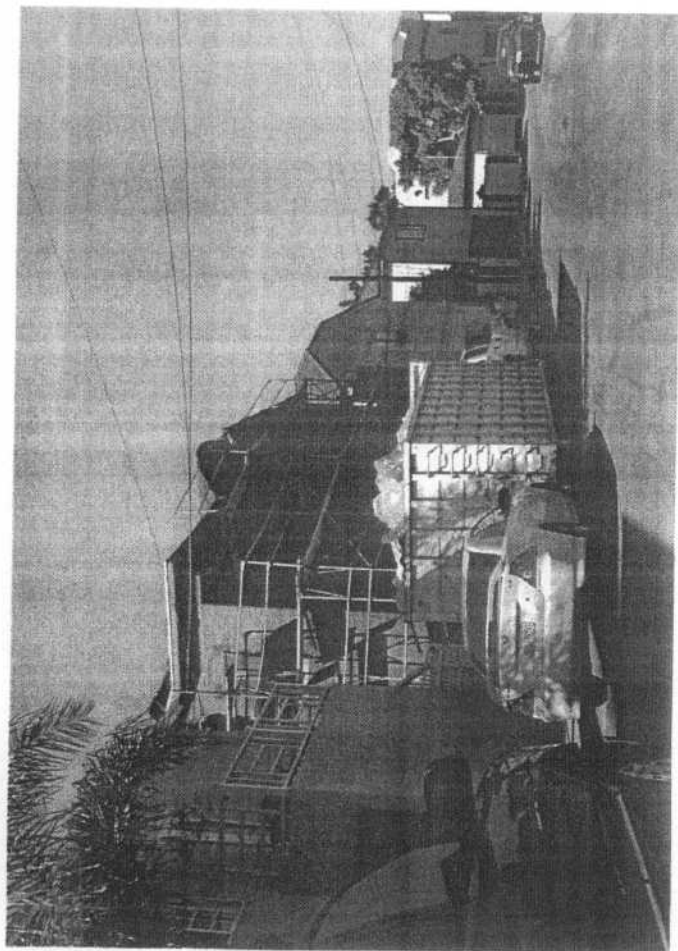
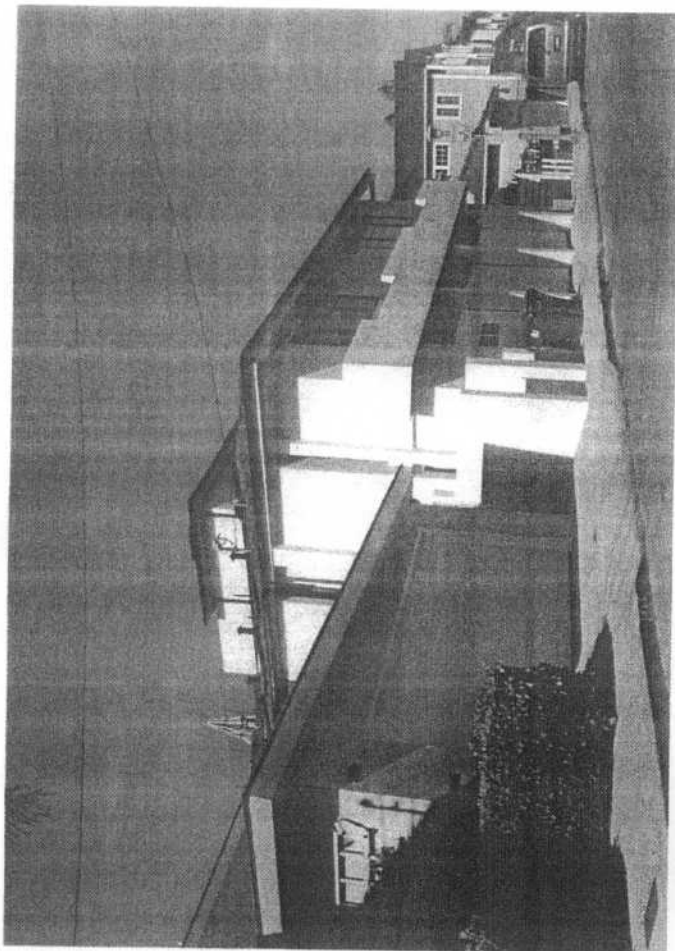
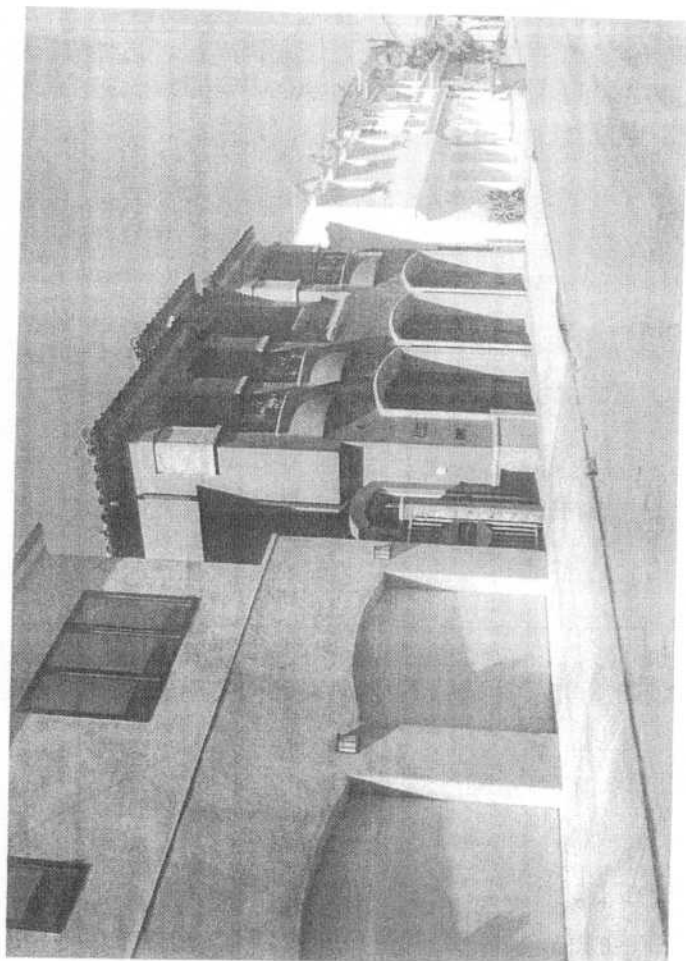
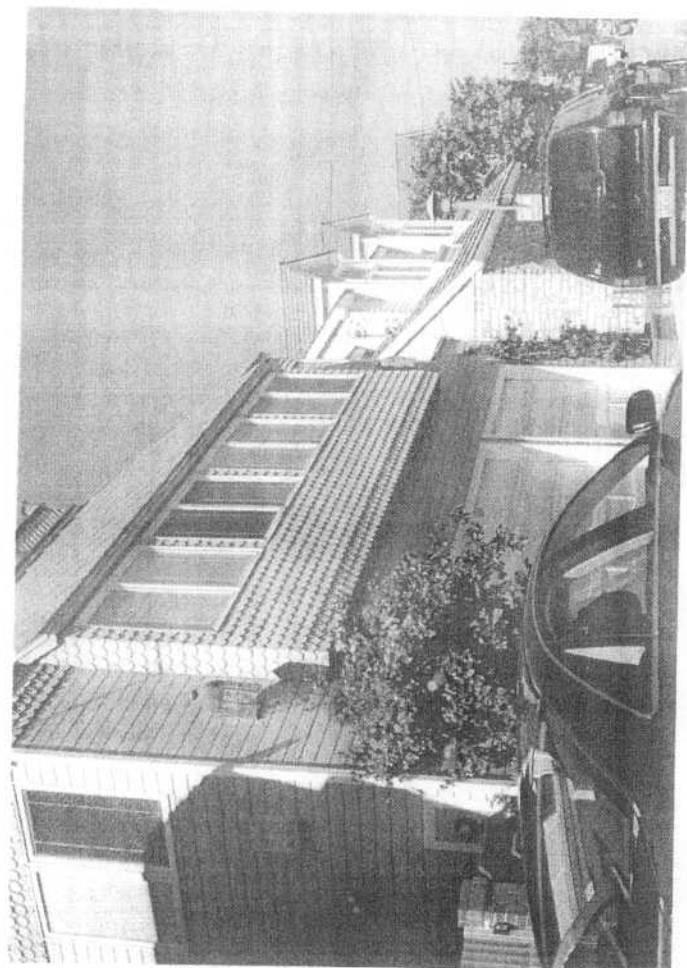
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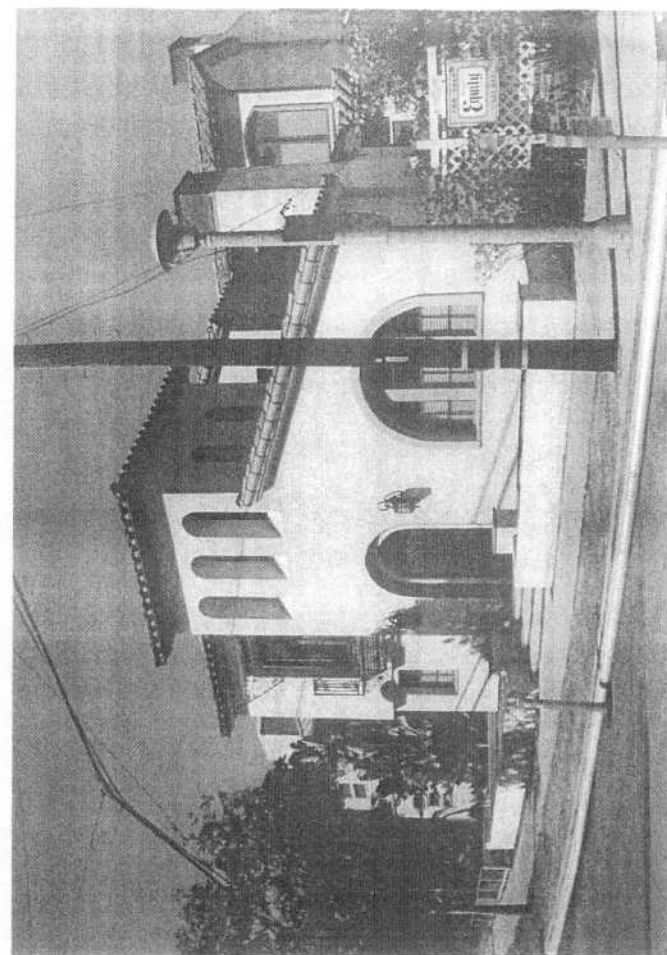
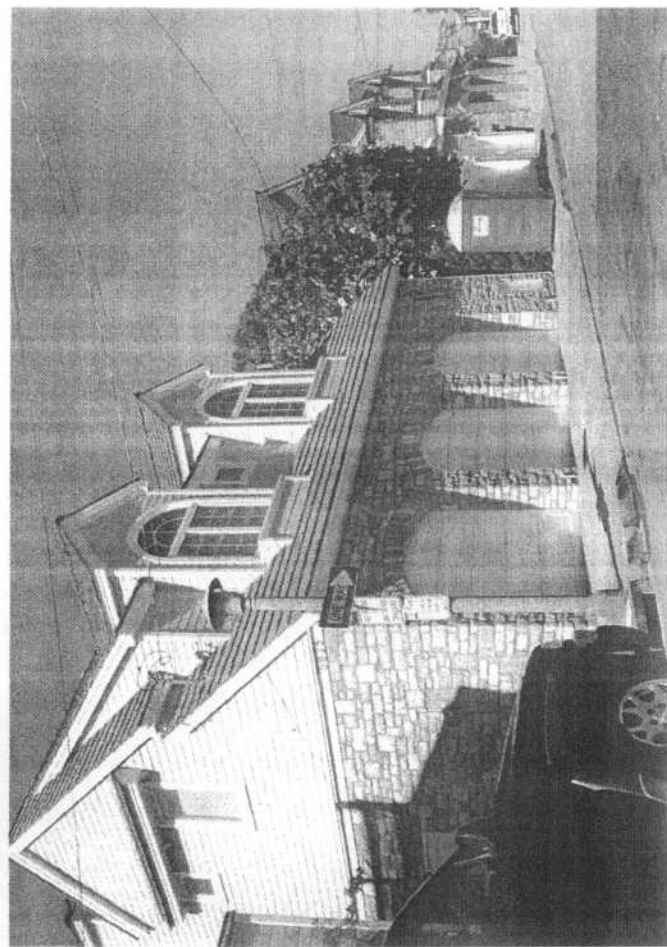
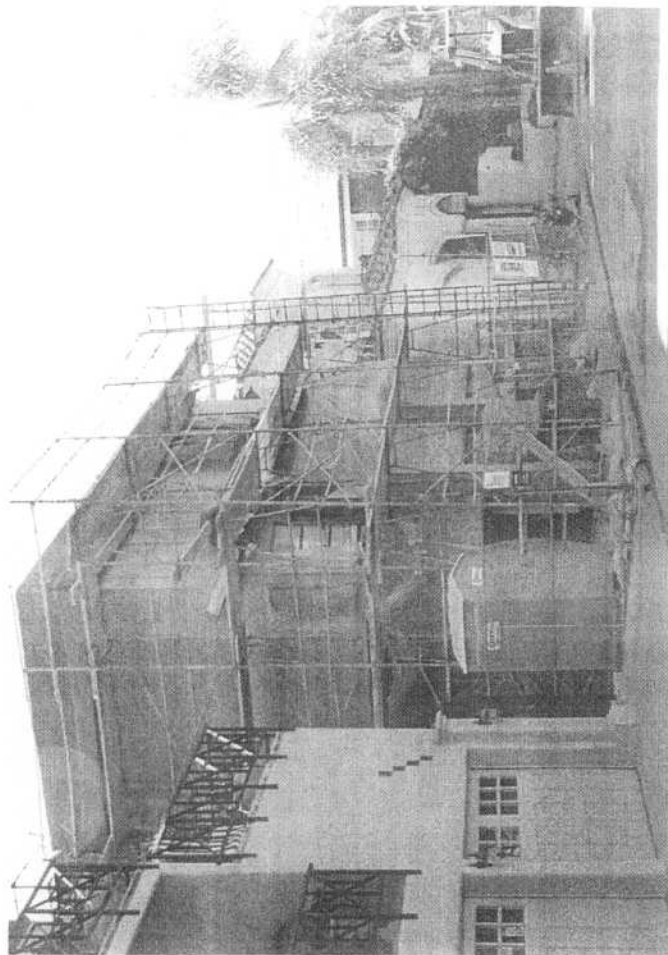
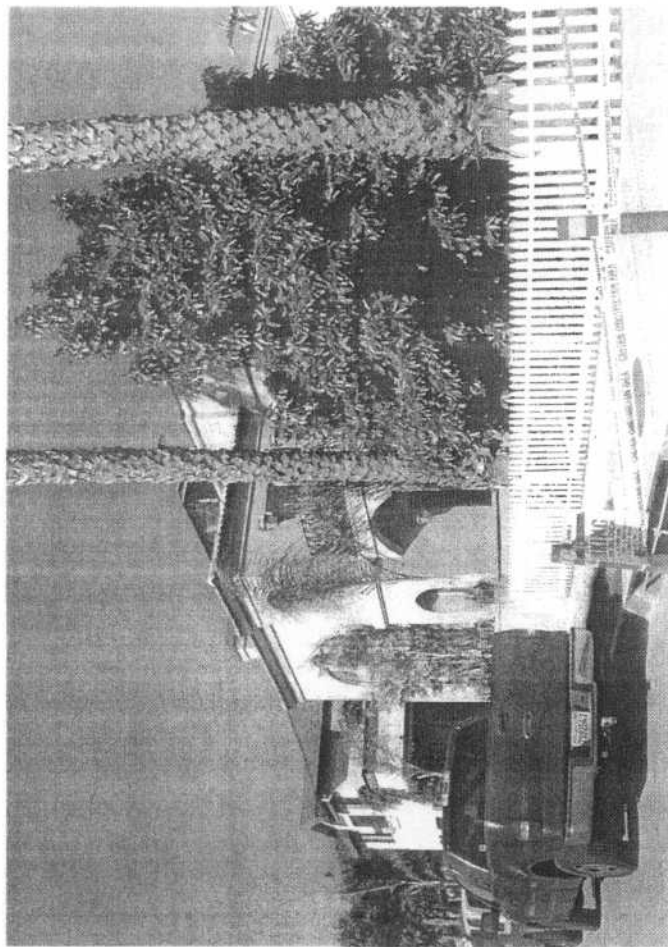
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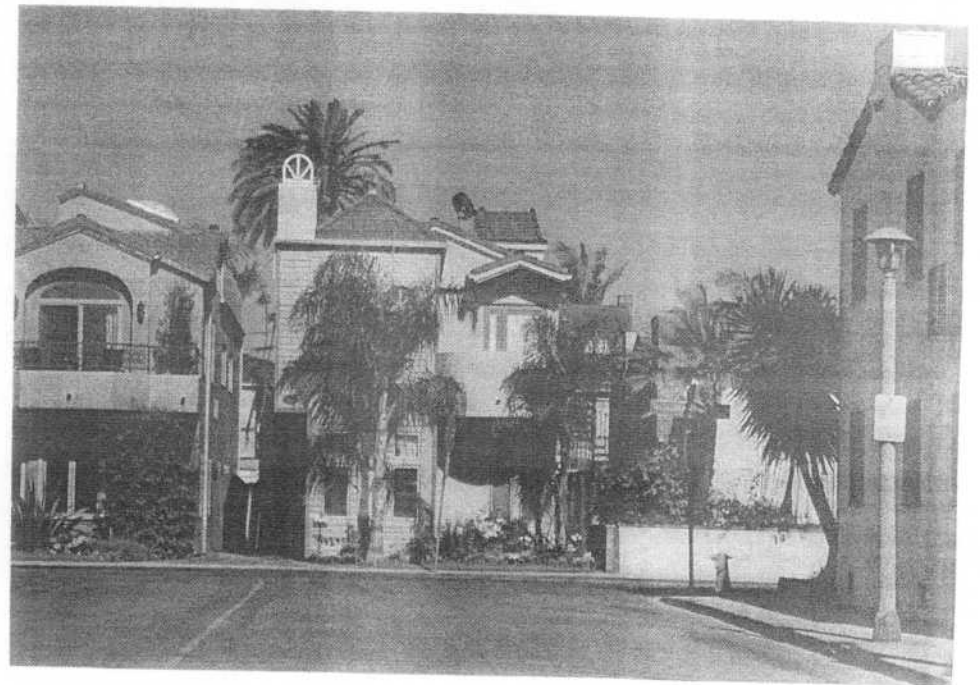
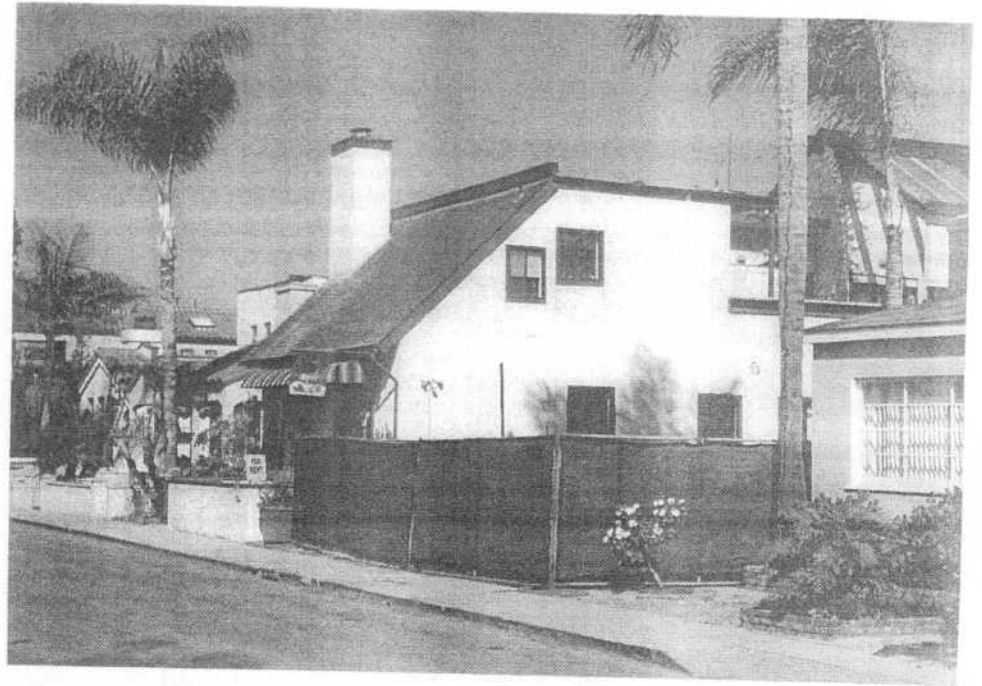
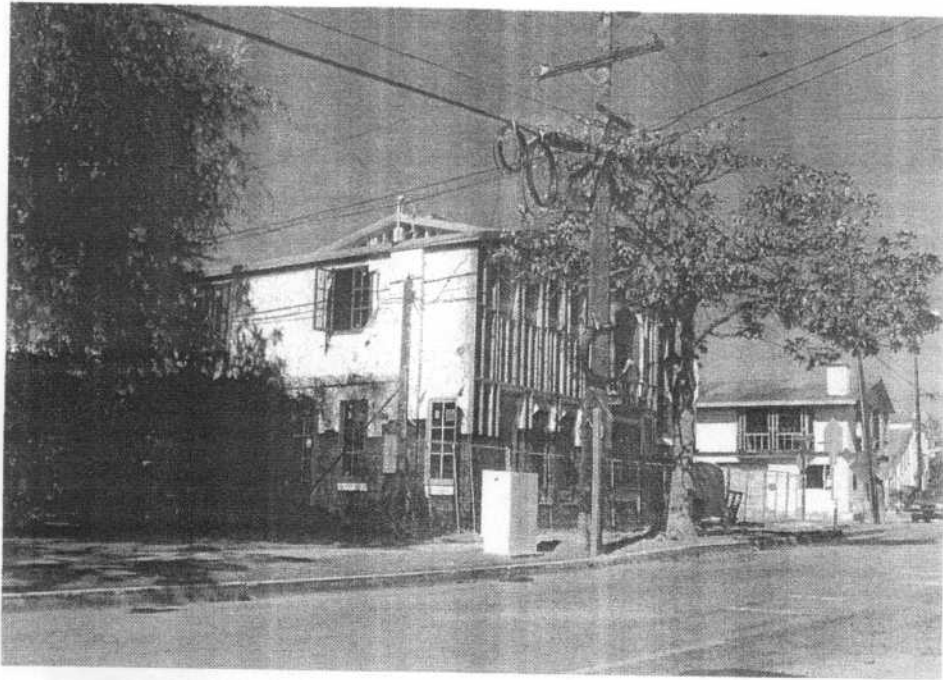
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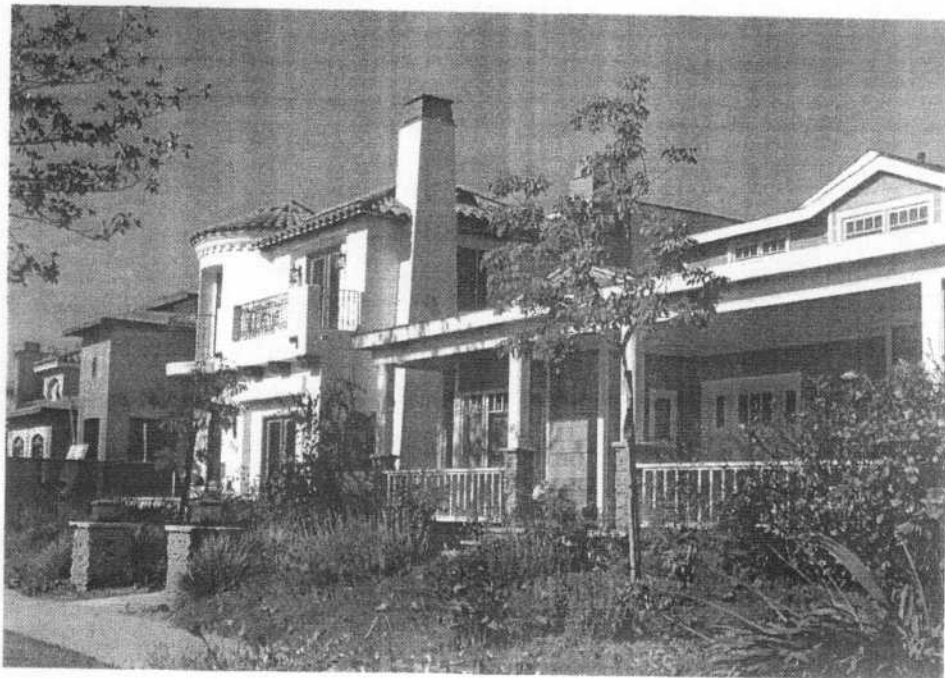
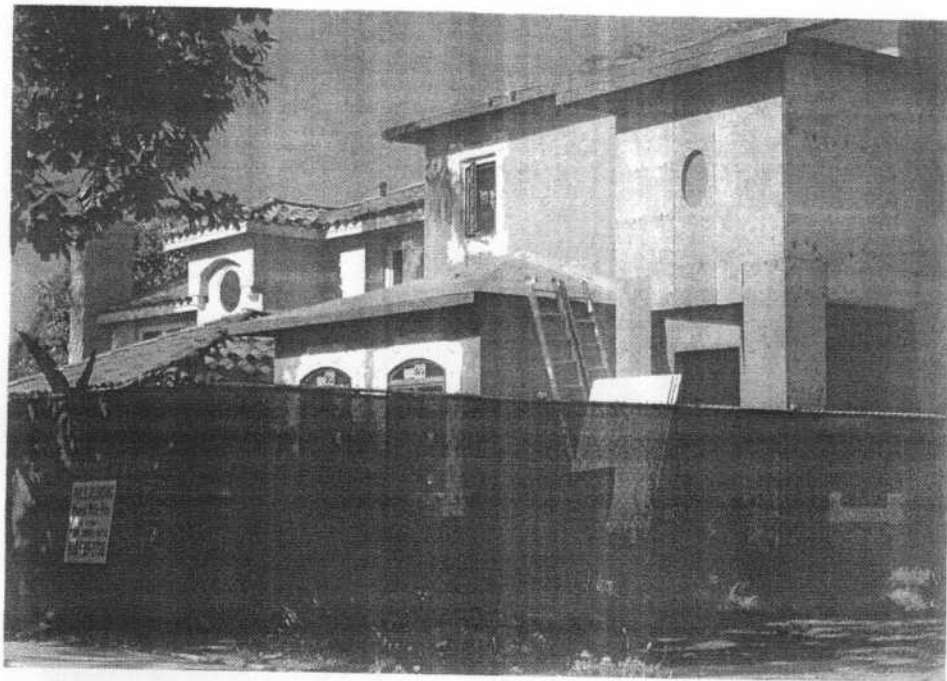
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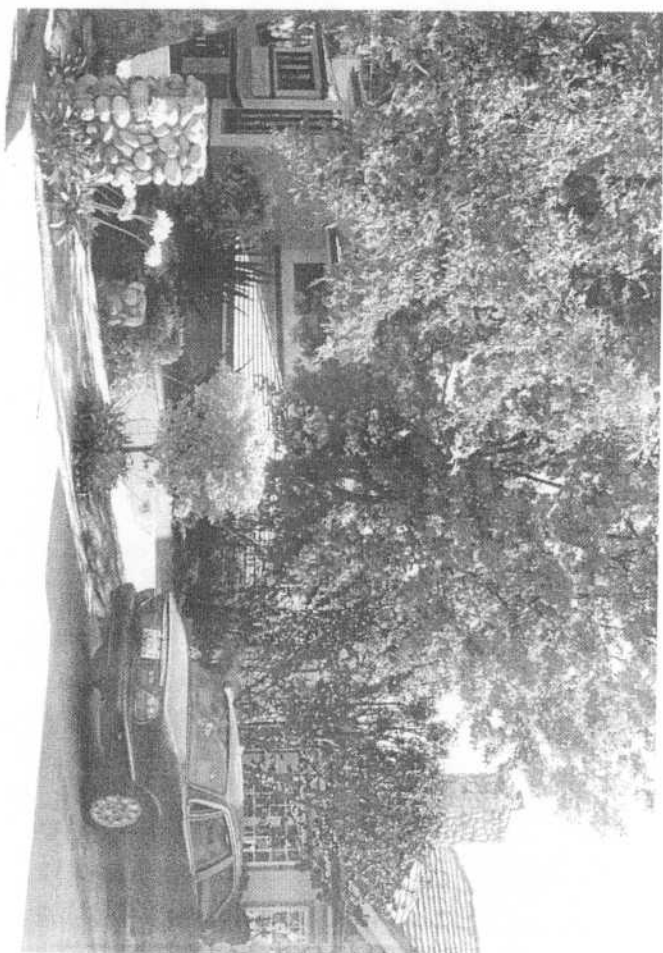
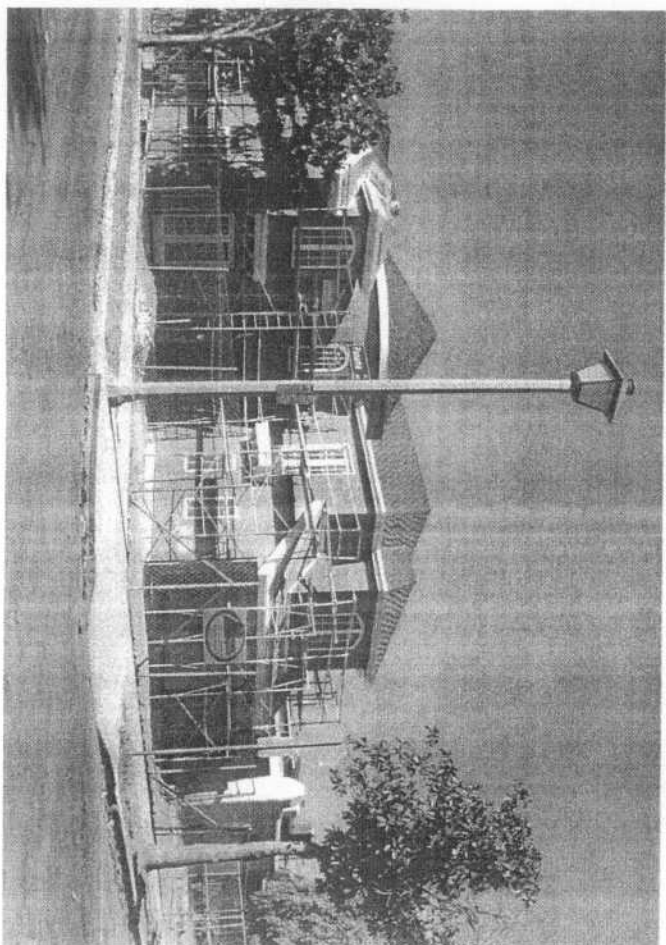
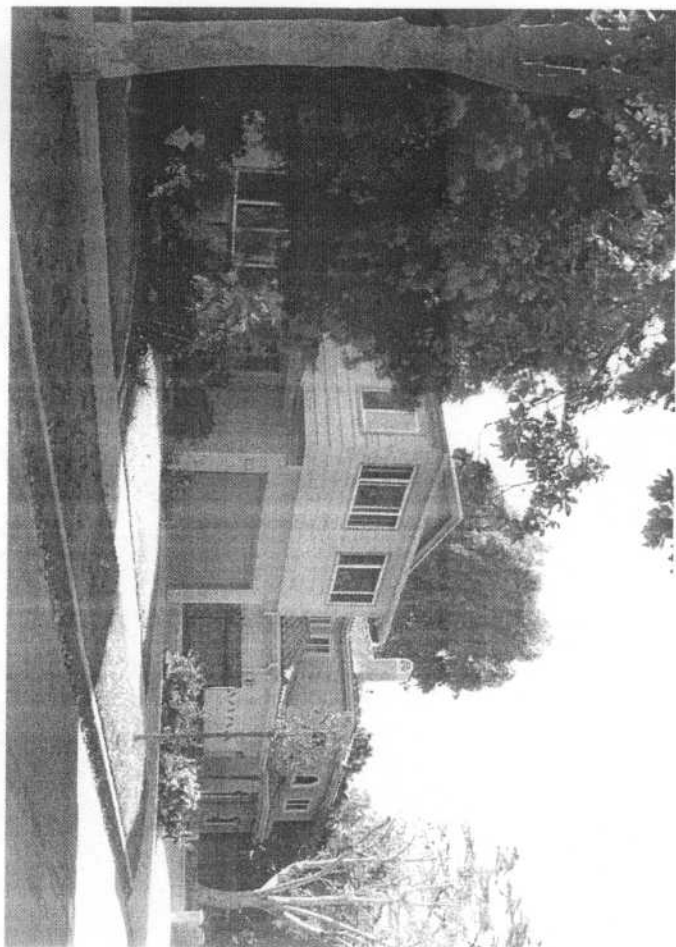
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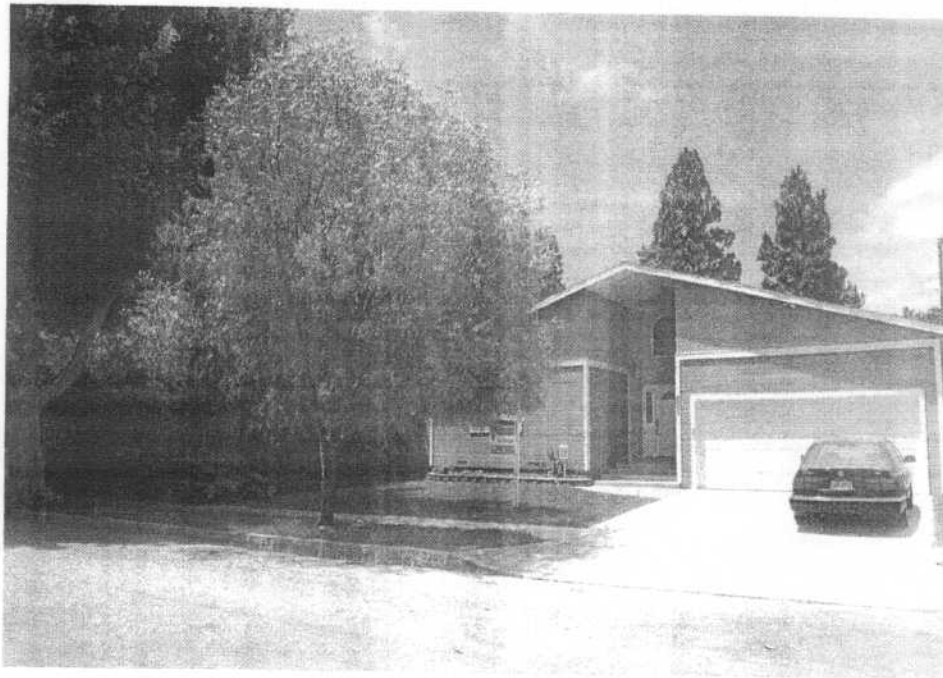
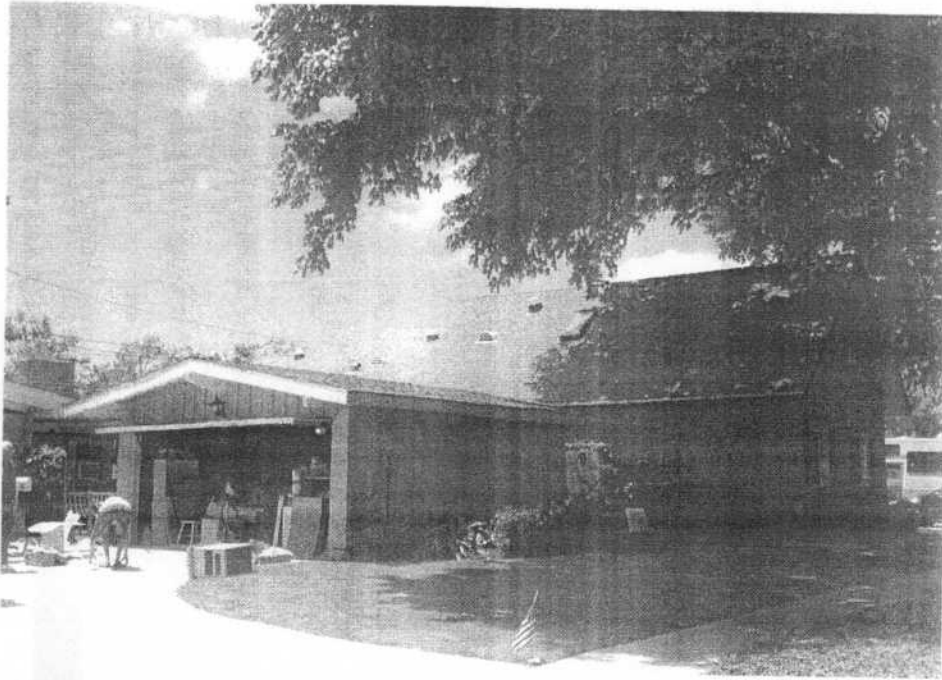
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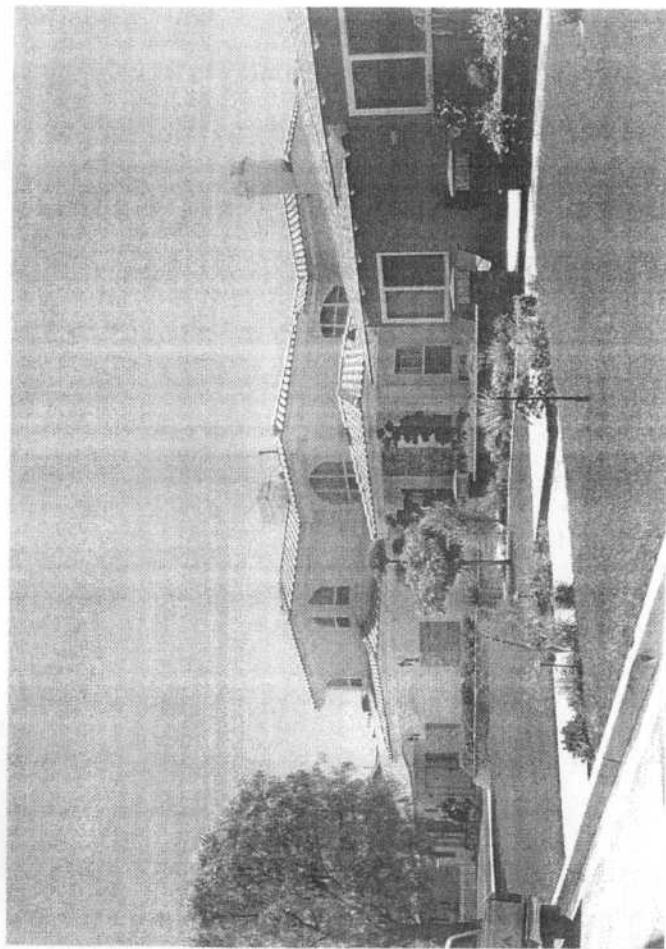
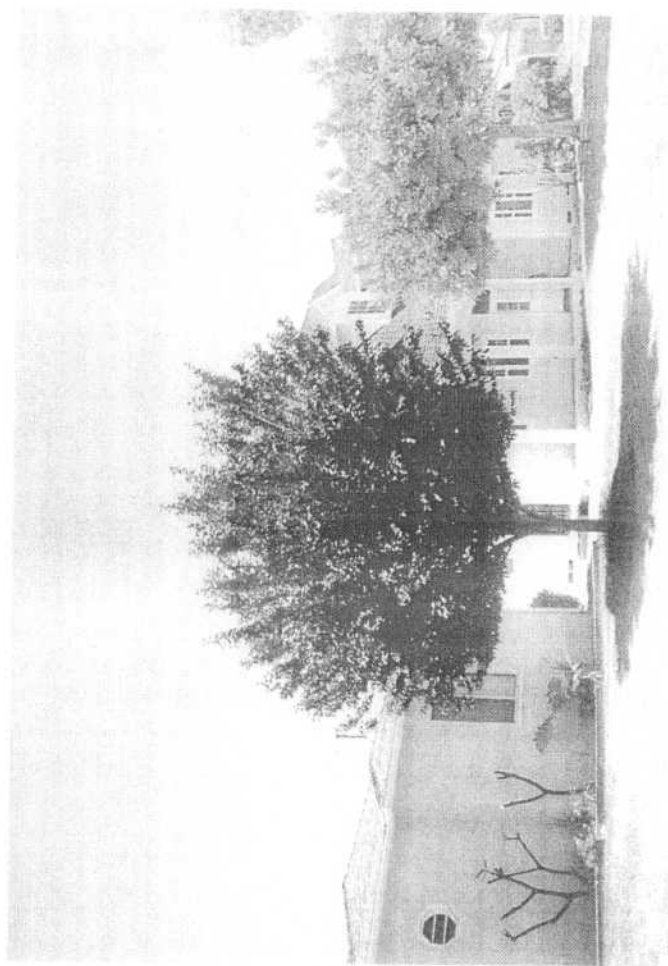
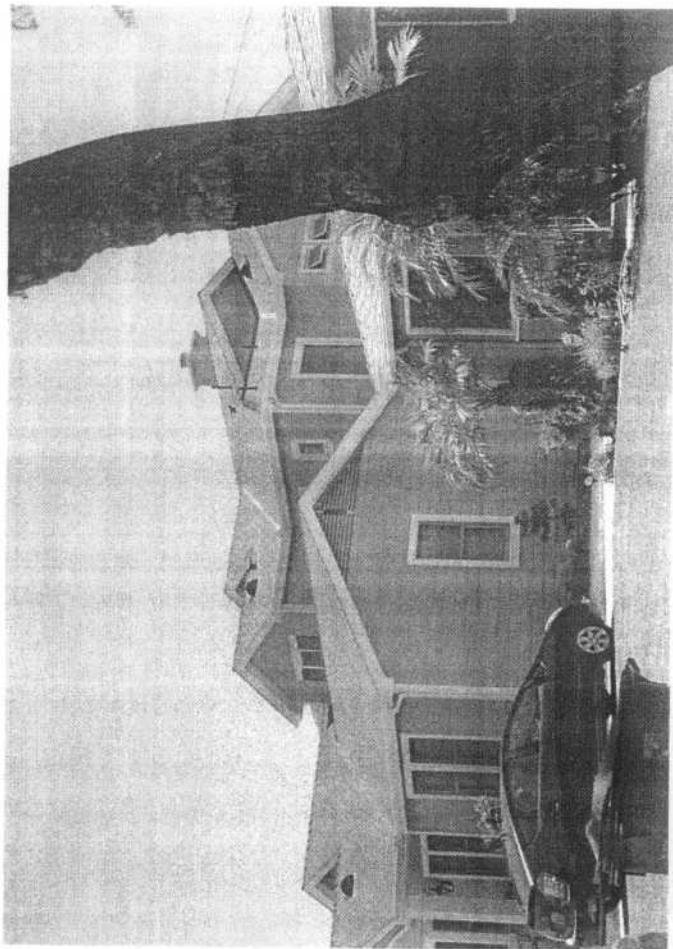
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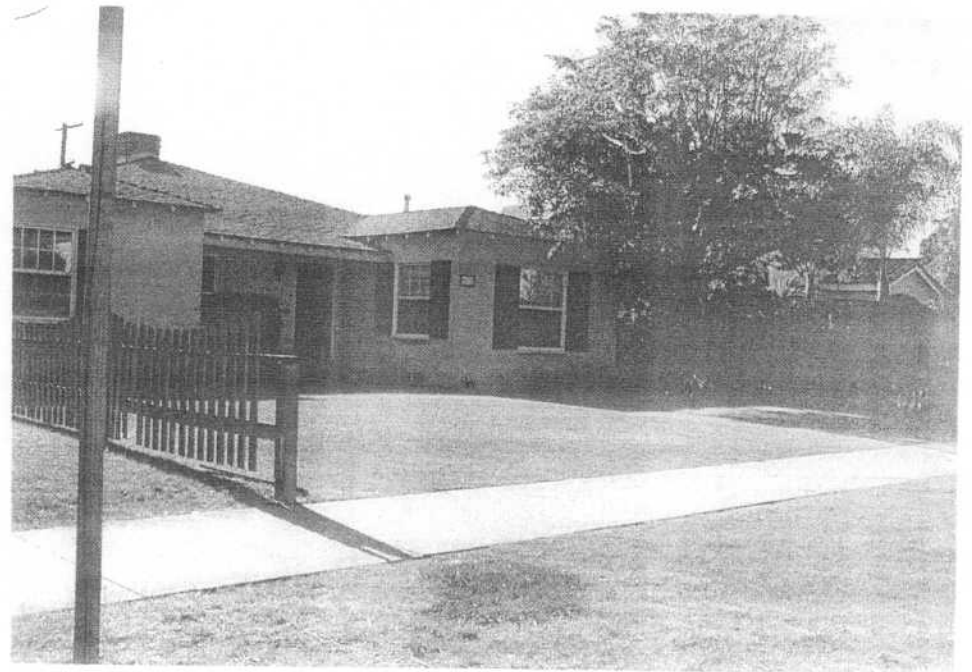
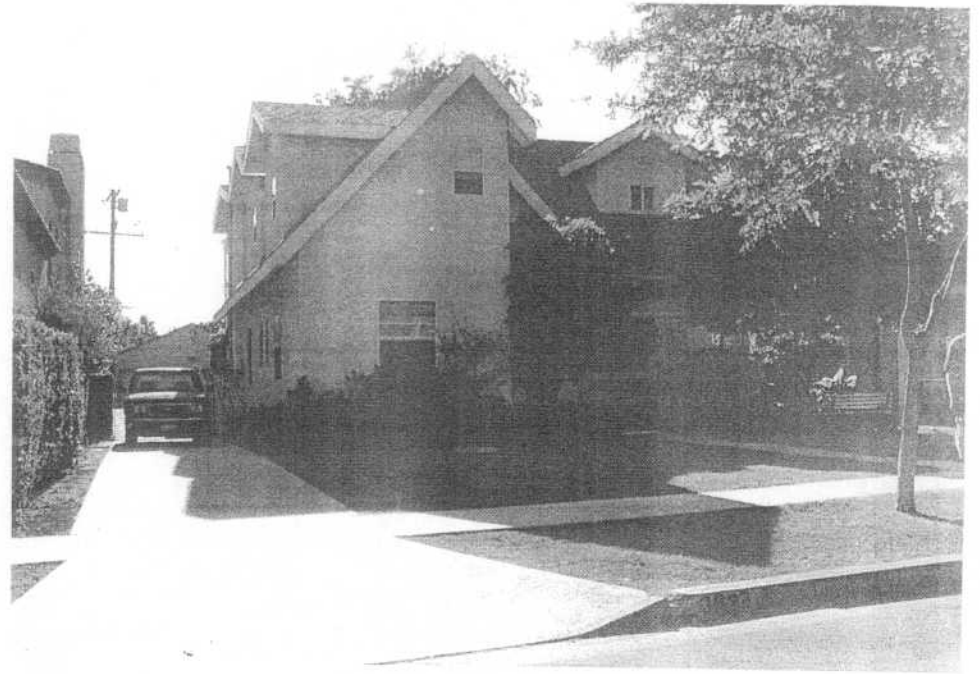
LAKEWOOD VILLAGE



LAKEWOOD VILLAGE



LOS CERRITOS



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