

Victorian at 1423 Morton Street proposed for demolition—Building is attributed to the Architect of City Hall and is not presently on the Historic Building Study List

A design review application has been filed with the Planning Department for demolition of a Victorian residence at 1423 Morton Street and for its replacement with a duplex.

The property is described in George Gunn's *Documentation of Victorian and Post-Victorian Residential and Commercial Buildings, City of Alameda, 1854-1904* as a Transitional Eastlake Cottage, built in 1883, with design attributed to George W. Percy, one of the architects (as part of the firm Percy and Hamilton) of Alameda's City Hall.

Tax assessment records, contract notices and city directories indicate that the owner and builder was Gershom H. Percy. He was variously described in the directories as a "millman" or "carpenter.." He also owned and built the very fine adjacent residence at 1425 Morton Street, constructed in 1879.

The directories indicate that "George W. Percy, architect" lived on the "west side of Morton Street between Central and Santa Clara", presumably in one of the two homes owned by Gershom H. Percy. The design of both homes has been attributed to George W. Percy because of his obvious relation to Gershom H. and his presumed residence in one or possibly both of the structures.

If 1423 Morton Street were on the City's Historic Building Study List, it could not be demolished without approval by the Historic Advisory Board, with possible appeal to the City Council. Unfortunately the building is not on the study list probably because it has been covered with composition or asbestos shingles. When the study list was created, there appears to have been a policy to exclude from the list buildings with significant alterations. AAPS believes that such a policy is highly inappropriate because these buildings still usually retain most of their architectural integrity. Such alterations are often easily reversed and exclusion from the list disqualifies the building from the State Historical Building Code (SHBC). Ironically, altered historic buildings have more need for the SHBC than the unaltered structures that comprise most of the study list and which are therefore eligible for the SHBC.

AAPS has written a letter to the Planning Department opposing the Design Review application and is awaiting the Department's decision. The decision is appealable to the Planning Board. AAPS has also written a letter to the Historic Advisory Board requesting that the Board place the building on the study list, so that the structure is protected from demolition and becomes eligible for the SHBC. The Board is expected to consider the request at its November 7, 2002 meeting.

This case dramatizes the gaps in the study list. AAPS is therefore developing a proposal for presentation to the Planning Department and Historic Advisory Board for identifying and adding properties to the study list, like 1423 Morton Street, which should have been on the list from the very beginning.