

State of California & The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
HRI #
Trinomial
NRHP Status Code

Other
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Listings

Page 1 of 11 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) The Elia Home

P1. Other Identifier: _____

*P2. Location: ☐ Not for Publication ☐ Unrestricted

- *a. County Fresno and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)
*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Fresno South, CA Date _____ T ____; R ____; ____ of ____ of Sec ____; ____ B.M.
c. Address 634-640 Van Ness Avenue City Fresno Zip 93721
d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone __, __ mE/ __ mN
e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, decimal degrees, etc., as appropriate)
APN 468-261-12

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The property located at 634-640 Van Ness Avenue, the Elia Home, is located mid-block on the east side of Van Ness Avenue between Mono and Ventura streets. The subject property consists of a two-story duplex, or multiple-family residential building (634-636), a one-story storefront commercial building (640), and three one-story ancillary buildings.

The two-story residential building takes up about one-third of its parcel, centered within the front portion, with its primary elevation facing west towards Van Ness Avenue. The duplex residence was constructed in 1915 of wood frame with top and bottom units and with elements of the Folk Victorian and Colonial Revival architectural styles. It has a rectangular plan. The roof is hipped and has open, overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails. The exterior is clad in wood clapboard siding. (See Continuation Sheet)

*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP3 Multiple family property; HP6 1-3 story commercial building

P5a. Photograph or Drawing (Photograph required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



*P4. Resources Present: ☒ Building
☐ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐
Element of District ☐ Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession #) March 5, 2018

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ☒ Historic ☐ Prehistoric
☐ Both

1915, Fresno County Assessor (residence); 1935, Original Building Permit Record (storefront)

*P7. Owner and Address:

Ashakka LLC
7959 W Herndon Avenue
Fresno, CA 93723

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address) Laura Groves van Onna
Historic Preservation Specialist
City of Fresno

*P9. Date Recorded: March 5, 2018

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
Intensive

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

Evaluation of 634-640 Van Ness Avenue for the City of Fresno Local Register of Historic Resources

*Attachments: ☐ NONE ☐ Location Map ☒ Continuation Sheet ☒ Building, Structure, and Object Record
☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record
☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List): _____

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) The Elia Home *NRHP Status Code 5S3
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B1. Historic Name: The Elia Home

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: Residential/Commercial B4. Present Use: Vacant

*B5. Architectural Style: Elements of Folk Victorian, Colonial Revival, and Art Deco

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

There is no original building permit on file for the residential building, but according to the Fresno County Assessor, it was constructed in 1915. According to the building permit record for the commercial building, it was constructed in 1935. The construction date of the ancillary buildings within the rear portion of the property is yet to be determined.

*B7. Moved? ☒ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

*B8. Related Features: _____

B9a. Architect: Unknown b. Builder: Unknown

*B10. Significance: Theme Fresno's Ethnic History / Early 20th Century Live/Work Development Area Armenian Town

Period of Significance 1915-2001 Property Type Live/Work Applicable Criteria Local Register Criteria i and iii

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

This property is located on lots 24-25 (12), Block 98 (262) in the neighborhood of Armenian Town in Downtown Fresno, which was part of Fresno's original settlement and platted prior to Fresno's incorporation as a city in 1885. There is no original building permit on file for the two-story duplex residence, but according to the Fresno County Assessor, it was constructed in 1915. According to the building permit record for the one-story storefront commercial building, it was constructed in 1935. The construction date of the ancillary buildings within the rear portion of the property is yet to be determined. The subject property located at 634-640 Van Ness Avenue was owned and occupied by the Elia family, an Armenian immigrant family, beginning in 1910 until the death of Ann Elia in 2001.

Armenian Immigration and Settlement in Fresno

The first Armenian settlers, the Seropian Brothers, arrived in Fresno in 1881. Subsequent waves of Armenian immigration would create one of the strongest and most successful ethnic communities in Fresno. Due in part to restrictive covenants that precluded settlement in other parts of Fresno, Armenians settled in an area located between the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific tracks which became known as "Armenian Town" - roughly bounded by Kern Street, Los Angeles Street, Broadway, and O Street. (See Continuation Sheet)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) _____

*B12. References: _____

Armenian National Institute website <http://armenian-genocide.org>

Berge Bulbulian, *The Fresno Armenians*, 2000

Building Permit Records

City and County Directories

(See Continuation Sheet)

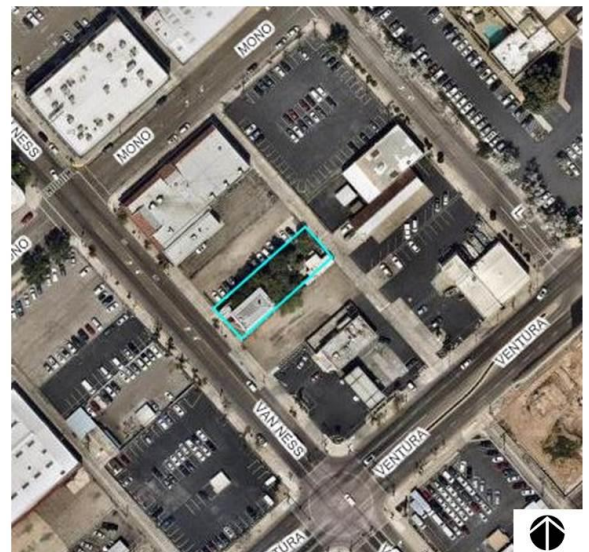
B13. Remarks: _____

*B14. Evaluator: Laura Groves van Onna
Historic Preservation Specialist, City of Fresno

*Date of Evaluation: April 9, 2018

(This space reserved for official comments.)

(Sketch Map with north arrow required.)



CONTINUATION SHEET

Property Name: The Elia Home

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***P3a. Description Continued:** The articulation of the porches on the primary elevation is symmetrical, but fenestration is not. All visible windows are wood-framed and consist of double-hung wood windows with single pane glass; however, some windows are boarded up or protected by sheets of plexi-glass.

The primary (west) elevation of the residential building consists of matching symmetrical porches on the first story and second story which span the full width of the elevation. Each porch is supported by four evenly-spaced Doric columns, with a simple wood railing running between them. Both porches are fully enclosed by the wood railing except for the central portion on the first story which provides access to the main entries and is accessed by concrete steps with a metal railing. The entries to each unit are located on the first story on the south side of the elevation and consist of wood paneled doors covered by metal security doors. The entry to the second-story unit (634) is on the south end, and the entry to the first-story unit (636) is adjacent to it. Windows on the first story are located on the north side of the elevation and consist of a set of two large windows. The second story consists of a wood paneled door with a single light on top that provides access to the second story porch and is centered between two large windows. The primary elevation is topped by a hipped dormer which consists of two panels of horizontally-oriented vents and has open, overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails like the main roof.

Extant original interior features include wood flooring, patterned carpet, plaster walls with wood picture frame moldings, wainscoting, wood-framed doorways and windows, wood paneled doors, wood closet shelving, the wood stairway landing, and some light fixtures. Original built-in furniture such as the dining cabinet with drawers, shelving, and Doric column decorative element also remain. An additional original feature is the door opening mechanism for the main entry at the top of the stairway in the second-story unit (634).

The one-story commercial building takes up a small but prominent portion of its parcel, tucked within the northwest corner, between the front and side property lines and the northwest corner of the residence. Its primary elevation faces west towards Van Ness Avenue. The storefront commercial building was constructed in 1935 of brick with elements of the Art Deco architectural style. It has a square plan. The roof is flat with a low surrounding parapet. The exterior is clad in plaster on the primary (west) and side (south) elevations. The primary (west) elevation of the commercial building consists of a wood-framed, floor-to-ceiling glass storefront, topped by a panel with molded with stylized geometric motifs including chevrons and triangles and framed by columns that display similar decorative elements. The storefront consists of the main entry on the north end that has a wood-framed glass door with transom window; the windows adjacent to the main entry have been covered by an advertisement. There is an original window opening on the west side of the side (south) elevation which has a replacement window and is also covered by an advertisement.

The three ancillary buildings within the rear portion of the property are shed-like structures clad in wood board-and-batten, vertical wood paneling, and corrugated metal paneling, respectively; the building clad in corrugated metal paneling has a metal framed patio extension. Rear landscaping includes lawn as well as concrete tiling and mature fruit trees and palm-like plantings. Front and side (south) landscaping includes a fixed smooth rock design with planting immediately surrounding the residence.

***B10. Significance Continued:** It consisted of residences, bakeries, schools, and churches, including the home of one of Fresno's community figures, award-winning writer William Saroyan. In early years, Armenians preferred to live on lettered streets, between I and O streets as well as on Los Angeles and Monterey streets, as these were paved and relatively free from dust in summer and mud in winter.

Fresno's Armenian population peaked as a result of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) by the Ottoman Empire that occurred in Turkey and Armenia, forcing the emigration of many Armenian refugees.

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Property Name: The Elia Home

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***B10. Significance Continued:** Beginning in the first decades of the 20th century, Fresno's Armenian Town was one of the largest Armenian communities in the Western United States, and Armenians became the largest minority population in Fresno County. The Armenian community living in Armenian Town began to disintegrate after World War II when younger families started to move out of the area. By the 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood had lost its cohesive and distinct ethnic identity. The area was further changed when the urban stretch of State Route 41 plowed through the center of the neighborhood; it was upgraded to freeway standards during the 1980s.

The Armenian Town neighborhood consists of several buildings that are individually listed in the Local Register of Historic Resources that include The Mink Home located at 344 N Street (HP #56, constructed in 1907) and The Neverman Home located at 309 M Street (HP #97, constructed in 1912) as well as the following buildings associated with local Armenian history from the time of their construction: Sham's Rio Grande Service Station located at 205 Fulton Street (HP #249, constructed in 1938) and the J.M. Menend/Murray Ice Cream Company Building located at 175 Fulton Street (HP #249, constructed in 1924). Additionally, The Armenian Town Historic District, a discontinuous (thematic) district which straddles State Route 41 and includes 11 parcels with a total of 19 resources within the original 60 plus-block of Armenian Town was approved for designation by the Historic Preservation Commission as a Local Historic District in 2017. It is currently pending City Council approval. The boundary includes the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church (listed in the National Register of Historic Places, constructed in 1914) and nearby extant resources as well as several cottages further south along M Street and Van Ness Avenue.

The Armenian Town neighborhood contains only fragments of Fresno's original Armenian community. What remains of Armenian Town northwest of State Route 41 appears to be far more scattered, with only a few extant residences and other miscellaneous property types. Armenian Town initially developed as a mixed use neighborhood, primarily with residential use but naturally developed into a mixed use neighborhood with diminishing pockets of residential use and growing patches of commercial use, especially along Van Ness Avenue. The Elia Home located at 634-640 Van Ness Avenue represents this early development of Armenian Town. And, preservation of this resource works toward honoring a rich segment of Fresno's early ethnic history.

The Elia Home History and the Live/Work Property Type

The first appearance of the address 636 Van Ness Avenue in city and county directories is in 1920 as home to Samuel Elia (Sam), a painter. Samuel was born into an Armenian family in Mardin, Turkey in 1880. He arrived in the United States by 1898 at the age of 18 and lived in New York City for two years before settling in Fresno, California. He married his wife, Aroosiag Morning Ruth Ohannesian (Ruth) at the age of 25 in 1905; Ruth was 17 years old. Ruth was also born in Turkey in 1888 and arrived in the United States by 1903. They raised three children: Ohanes John (John) born in 1906, Joe Samuel (Joe) born in 1907, and Annie Anna (Ann) born in 1917.

Sam and Ruth owned and occupied the property currently known as 634-640 Van Ness Avenue beginning in 1910. At that time, the property was referred to as 632 K Street. According to the 1906 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, the property consisted of a one-story dwelling centered within the front portion of the parcel, taking up no more than one-quarter of the parcel, with a square plan and porch that spanned the width of the primary elevation as well as two small ancillary buildings. City and county directories revealed that K Street began being referred to as Van Ness Avenue in 1917, and 632 was updated to 636 in 1920. Available Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps display the two-story duplex residence (634-636) by 1919 in addition to a one-story dwelling with a porch that spanned the width of the facade and a single-car garage within the rear portion of the property; this dwelling is referred to as 636-1/2 and was demolished by 1970. The one-story storefront commercial building (640) is displayed by 1948.

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***B10. Significance Continued:** Dennis Elia, grandson of Sam and son of Joe, confirmed that Sam and Ruth constructed the duplex residence with the intention of occupying the first-story unit (636) and providing housing for the children in the second-story unit (634), after which it would be rented out. City and county directories reveal that the second-story unit was vacant until 1935 when it became occupied by John Elia. John resided at 634 Van Ness Avenue until 1941, at which point the Sam and Ruth began renting out the unit. 634 was occupied by various residents in the years to follow.

Sam worked as a painter with both of his sons until 1934, at which point John began teaching in Fresno schools. As one of the first Armenian Americans in Fresno to have a lengthy teaching tenure, he started by teaching at Longfellow Junior High School and later served as Chairman of the Industrial Arts Department at Fresno High School. John was honored by the Lion's Club, an organization dedicated to community and humanitarian service, in 1965 as teacher of the year.

Joe continued to work with his father. By 1935, Sam had partnered with Joe in a painting contracting firm called "Sam Elia & Son" and were operating out of the newly-constructed, storefront commercial building at 640 Van Ness Avenue, located off the northwest corner of their family residence at 634-636 Van Ness Avenue. Sam retired in 1951, at which point "Aram's Watch & Clock Shop" began renting and operating out of the storefront commercial building (640) and continued to until 1969, when the building was vacated and the business relocated to 5038 N Maroa Avenue and changed its name to "Jewels By Aram."

According to Dennis Elia, award-winning writer and Fresno native William Saroyan (Bill) was a contemporary and friend of his father Joe Elia. Bill and Joe attended Emerson School together, located on Santa Clara Street between Van Ness Avenue and L Street (now demolished). The Saroyan Home was located on the block just east of the school across L Street on Santa Clara Street (now demolished), and the Elia Home was located a block and a half north of the school on Van Ness Avenue. Both families also attended the First Armenian Presbyterian Church located on the northwest corner of Fulton and Santa Clara streets (constructed in 1905, now demolished). During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Bill would frequent the Elia Home on walks through Downtown Fresno, specifically the Armenian Town neighborhood and notably between "Paul's Cleaners" located on the east side of Van Ness Avenue, mid-block between Inyo and Mono streets (now demolished), and the grocery located on the northeast corner of L and Santa Clara streets (now demolished).

Ruth Elia died in 1955, the same year Sam and Ruth had celebrated their 50th anniversary. Sam Elia died in 1964. Their daughter Ann took over ownership and residence of 636 Van Ness Avenue following the deaths of her parents. And, she resided there until her death in 2001.

The Elia Home, consisting of a two-story duplex residence (1915) and one-story storefront commercial building (1935) retains distinction as a Live/Work property type in Fresno, specifically a residence with a storefront commercial addition, also referred to as a commercial bump-out. The construction of storefront commercial additions to residential properties was not an uncommon trend during the early to mid-20th century in the United States, especially for residential properties that abutted a major thoroughfare or a streetcar line. Typical character-defining features of this property type include a commercial addition directly abutting the original residence; an addition to the facade and/or side elevation; the majority of the residence retaining its physical integrity; and a commercial space that is accessed by its own entry. There are only a few other examples of the Live/Work property type in Fresno that were constructed during the early to mid-20th century, none of which are designated historic resources. As yet, the most comparable example is the property located at 252 N Fulton Street in the Lowell neighborhood which currently functions as law offices.

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***B10. Significance Continued:** The subject property located at 634-640 Van Ness Avenue attains further distinction as a Live/Work property type because the residence exhibits elements of the Folk Victorian and Colonial Revival architectural styles which include the hipped roof, the symmetrical facade, the porches that span the full width of the facade, and the Doric columns that support the porches. In addition, the storefront commercial building exhibits elements of the Art Deco architectural style which include the smooth wall surface, the uses of chevrons and other stylized and geometric motifs as decorative elements on the facade, and projections which provide a vertical emphasis.

The current property owner intends to rehabilitate the property while retaining and restoring the historic character of the duplex residence and storefront commercial building, with the assistance of the California Historical Building Code and economic incentive programs for qualified historic properties.

Eligibility

The Elia Home located at 634-640 Van Ness Avenue is eligible for listing in the City of Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources. The property is greater than 50 years of age and possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (FMC 12-1607). Additionally, it is significant under Local Register Criterion i because it is associated with the early development of the Armenian Town neighborhood and Criterion iii because it has distinction as a Live/Work property type.

***B12. References Continued:**

The Fresno Bee

Fresno County Assessor

Fresno County Recorder

Historic Resources Group, *Downtown Fresno (Fulton Corridor) Historic Resources Survey Report*, December 2011 (Revised April 2014)

Karana Hattersley-Drayton, *Historic Architecture Survey Report for Plan Amendment A-08-007 and Rezone A-08-034*, City of Fresno, July 2009

Karana Hattersley-Drayton and Architecture+History, *South Van Ness Industrial District Historic Survey, Fresno, California*, September 1, 2015

The Los Angeles Times

Meeting with Dennis Elia (son of Joe Elia), April 2, 2018

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

U.S. Census Records

Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 2014

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