

LAMB TOWNHOUSE
254 North Roosevelt Avenue
Fresno
Fresno County
California

HABS CA-2874
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
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U.S. Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

LAMB TOWNHOUSE

HABS No. CA-2874

- Location:** 254 North Roosevelt Avenue
Fresno, CA 93701
- Present Owner:** State of California, Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in 1992
- Present Use:** Apartment complex
- Significance:** The Italianate style Lamb Townhouse is highly unusual in the Fresno area. The detailing and proportions are more common for the San Francisco Bay Area. The Lamb townhouse is one of two late nineteenth-century two-story, wood-frame dwellings remaining today in Fresno's historic 1888 Kroeger's Addition. Although it was moved to its present location in 1947, the Lamb Townhouse is Fresno's only remaining example vernacular housing with Italianate influences.
- Historians:** Margo Nayyar, Cultural Studies Office Research Associate, Division of Environmental Analysis, California Department of Transportation; John Snyder, Historical Architectural Specialty Branch Chief, Cultural Studies Office, Division of Environmental Analysis, California Department of Transportation. Completed July 2011.
- Project Information:** The Lamb House recordation was completed as one of the mitigation measures for the State Route 180 Freeway Extension project (Caltrans #06-Fre-180-R56.2/R58.4), and was prepared as stipulated in the Memorandum of Agreement submitted to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Photographs were taken by Don Tateishi in March 1992. The Lamb House was determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places on July 8, 1991 under Criterion C for its Italianate architecture. It is also listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: ca. 1884.

Maria Lamb purchased the land for the original site at 1034 N Street in January 1884, and the original deed was filed in April 1884. The house first appears on the Sanborn Map Company (Sanborn Map) Fresno, California map in 1888.

2. Architect: Unknown.

3. Original owner: Isaac and Maria Lamb.

Isaac Lamb emigrated from Sussex County, England to San Francisco in 1867. He became a clerk at a retail dry goods business for Benno Galland, located in the Third Street dry goods commercial district of San Francisco. In 1871 he was promoted to salesman for Galland, but in 1872 he started his own business, "Fancy Goods." Fancy Goods" was located in the same Third Street district and specialized in women's and children's high-end millinery, corsets and underwear. The business continued through 1875, but between 1876 and 1879 Lamb disappears from both commercial and residential city directory listings for San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, and Sacramento. Most likely the national financial crash of 1873 adversely affected Lamb's business. In 1880 Lamb reappeared in San Francisco as a salesman for S. Mosgrove & Brothers, importers of foreign dry goods. The company was also located in the Third Street commercial district. Lamb restarted his millinery business in 1882 but left San Francisco for Fresno in December 1883. He continued the business in Fresno with wife, Maria.

Isaac is listed with his spouse, Maria, for the first time in Fresno's City Directories in 1883. On December 1, 1883, the Lambs bought land downtown for their dry goods store, "Isaac Lamb & Co." The Lambs dry goods store opened in 1884, and in the *7-County Directory of Stanislaus, Merced, Fresno, Kern, Tulare, San Bernardino, and Inyo Counties of 1884-85* "Isaac Lamb & Co." ran a bold-faced commercial listing and a half-page advertisement as "The Fashionable Millinery and Corset House of Fresno." They claimed to have "the Best Assorted Stock of Ladies', Children's and Infants' Eastern Made Underwear out of San Francisco," with "Infants' Outfits a Specialty on the Shortest Notice." The Lamb's second land purchase was in January 1884 when they bought more land downtown to build two townhouses, which were located at 1026 and 1034 N Street.

The Lambs, like many others, invested in land in Fresno and its outlying colonies. The two, duplex townhouses built by the Lambs, served as their residence and as income rental properties. By 1887, the Lambs had amassed a sizeable net worth and returned to the San Francisco Bay Area. They retired as "capitalists" in Oakland, but continued to buy and sell land in Fresno and the Bay Area.

The economic “Panic of 1893” affected the Lambs’ success and they were forced to re-enter business as proprietors for the Brunswick Hotel on Washington Street in Oakland. Furthermore, they sold and traded land in Fresno. Isaac Lamb died a couple years after the panic ended on July 10, 1899. He was nearly 66 years old and was described by the Oakland Tribune as “one of California’s early settlers.” Maria Lamb sold the remaining Fresno properties, including the townhouses, in the early 1900s. She left Oakland, but her whereabouts in the early twentieth century are unknown.

In the 1892-96 Fresno City Directories it appears that several individuals lived in each of the townhouses and that occupancy changed rapidly. In 1894, three individuals were living at 1034 N Street: Frank E. Williams, an attorney; Robert Kennedy, a farmer; and, L. Chittenden.

The 1890s depression altered Fresno’s neighborhoods. N Street was originally comprised of one and two-story houses designed for apartment use, but the neighborhood was neglected throughout the twentieth century. The Lamb townhouses were vacant during the latter years of the depression until 1908. By 1910, the 1034 N Street townhouse was listed as a boarding house run, and likely owned, by Mrs. Elizabeth Albright (a widow). Earlier, Albright had operated a boarding house at 1940 Kern Street immediately before acquiring the N Street property. She named the Lamb townhouse, “The White House,” presumably because of an all-white paint scheme that had she implemented. The White House continued as a boarding house into the teens.

The Lamb townhouses at 1034 N Street appears to have been built as a duplex in ca. 1884, and was converted to a six-unit apartment building ca. 1918. It was a boarding house into the 1920s and is currently used as an apartment complex. By 1918-19, the Sanborn maps illustrated the two townhouses as identical six-unit apartments, but today the surviving 1034 property is a five unit building.¹

4. Builder, contractor: Unknown.

5. Original plans and construction: The original address of this townhouse was 1234 N Street until it was changed to 1034 N Street in ca. 1906. It was located on lots 23, 24, and 25 on block 127, along with its companion townhouse at 1026 N Street.² The three lots were combined to make a larger street front for the townhouses. Both townhouses were duplexes until ca. 1918 when they were converted to six-unit apartment buildings. The Lamb Townhouse, originally located at 1034 N Street, was moved approximately two miles to its present location at 254 North Roosevelt Avenue in ca. 1947, and remained a multi-person flat with six apartments. As of 1992 however, there are only five apartments.³

¹ All information pulled from John Snyder’s, “Lamb House,” rough draft. In the original essay form of this report Snyder had not included footnotes stating his sources. Sources used are in the bibliography.

² The original address for the companion townhouse at 1026 N Street was changed from 1226 N Street to 1021 N Street ca. 1906. It was changed again to 1026 N Street ca. 1918.

³ Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno map, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918/19, 1948.

The original appearance of the townhouse is primarily intact. The Italianate architectural features appear the same as they were ca. 1884 including its two-story, square frame and two-story projecting bay window on the main façade. It also has a simple low-pitched hipped roof with a projecting cornice, wide fascia and evenly-spaced wood decorative curved brackets. Also typical of Italianate houses, the siding is rustic wood channel siding with narrow endboards. Most of the windows are tall one-over-one-light double-hung sash in plain surrounds with lintel caps, either as single windows or in pairs.

- 6. Alterations and additions:** The Lamb Townhouse was moved from its original location on block 127 in downtown Fresno when land clearance for the Fresno County Public Library was underway. The relocation likely occurred ca. 1947; the townhouse is sited at its current location in the 1948 Sanborn Insurance Map, but it is first listed as a six-tenant apartment building in the 1947 Fresno City Directory. The fate of the other townhouse the Lambs built at 1026 N Street remains unknown. Originally, a communal, paired walkway led to both houses and extended to the rear; this landscaping no longer exists.⁴

The 1888 Sanborn maps for downtown Fresno show the 1034 N Street townhouse (at the time identified as lots 23, 24, and 25) with a two-story carpenter's shop on the rear premises of the unit. Also, at the rear of the three lots were four small, one-story wood-frame outbuildings. Several of these outbuildings, including the substantial "carpentry" shop, may have existed on the land at the time of purchase in 1883. The deed does note title to "tenements" and the "remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof" for the property, although this language is most likely legal boilerplate for the deed, rather than actual proof of structures pre-existing on the land. These structures no longer exist; they were demolished sporadically between ca. 1888 and ca. 1918. In ca. 1918 the outbuildings were replaced with two garages, one for each townhouse.⁵

Many other changes occurred ca. 1918. The identical staircases leading to the main entryway on the main façade (added ca. 1898) were either demolished or incorporated within a full-width, one-story porch. The original footprint was altered; the small, one-story rear room was renovated to a large, two-story addition which extended wider than the original footprint. Furthermore, a rear two-story porch was added to the addition.⁶

After the move from 1034 N Street to 245 North Roosevelt Street in ca. 1947 more changes occurred. The front porch addition and stairs were not relocated with the property, neither was the two-story rear porch or garage. Furthermore, the large two-story back addition was either demolished, or renovated a second time, again changing the footprint of the house. The rear room was renovated from two-stories to one-story with the same footprint as the main house. The rear room has a wood framed, hipped roof, composed of composite shingles; it has moderate eave overhangs with boxed rafters. There are no decorative brackets. In addition, a small, one-story rear room addition was added, and a large multi-vehicle garage was added at the east boundary of the property at

⁴ Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno map, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918/19, 1948; Snyder, "Lamb House," rough draft.

⁵ Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno map, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918/19, 1948.

⁶ Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno map, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918/19, 1948.

the alleyway between Roosevelt Avenue and Echo Street. The garage has a gabled roof with narrow overhanging eaves with exposed rafters.⁷

The original foundation was likely pier and beam with brick sill, and is now pier and beam with a concrete sill.

The partial-width front porch now present was added at some point after the relocation ca. 1950. The front porch has a half-gabled roof with a small eave overhang and exposed rafters. The roof is composed of composite shingles. The railing is made of very plain wood planks common to mid-twentieth century houses. The stairs and porch are built of concrete. The porch addition altered the first-story bay decorative features by hiding a pilaster and coffered wood panel. There are two additional entry porches for three separate apartments on the south elevation. They were built in the same fashion as the primary porch; therefore, they were most likely added at the same point after the relocation ca. 1950. The two porches have half-gabled roofs with narrow eave overhangs and exposed rafters. They have composite shingles and, instead of an entablature, they have narrow wood planks laid horizontally. They have simple wood plank railings and concrete stairs.

A second story window on the primary (west) façade was replaced with a one-over-one-light sliding, aluminum cased window. It was most likely replaced in the 1950-60s. While the original window's lintel cap was left in place, channel siding used to fill in the remaining space below the new window is mismatched. The window is much smaller than the original and the outline of the original fenestration is easily noticeable.

B. Historical Context

On January 14, 1884, Maria Lamb purchased lots 23, 24 and 25 of block 127 in central Fresno from Frank W. Walker of Butte County for 300 dollars in gold coin. The transaction and initial deed filing occurred in Butte County, a ranching and farming region north of Sacramento in the Sacramento Valley. The deed was then filed in Fresno County on April 16, 1884, at the request of Isaac Lamb. The Lambs first bought property in Fresno on December 1, 1883 in block 75 for their dry goods business. Maria and Isaac Lamb continued to heavily buy and sell both city and agricultural land in Fresno and Fresno County into the late 1890s.

The Lambs' prosperity is not unusual for Fresno residents: wealth grew as the city grew. Fresno was a small, young town, which had been established as a station on the Central Pacific Railroad in 1872. The growth of agriculture and husbandry in the 1870s propelled Fresno's business boom in the 1880s, and real estate development became a common business venture.

Before the mid-1870s, the area surrounding Fresno had primarily supported large acreage wheat farms and ranches for raising livestock. Beginning in 1875 substantial agricultural

⁷Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno map, 1918/19, 1948.

colonies were laid out around Fresno (particularly south of the town) with water supplied via open earthen-work canals channeled from the Kings River to the east. Although the first years of the colonies witnessed setbacks, business boomed by the mid 1880s. High-value raisin vineyards and fruit orchards funneled income into Fresno, and, undoubtedly business to the Lambs' dry goods store. The City of Fresno was incorporated in 1885.

The Lambs' immediate neighbor to the north, S.H. Cole, had bought three lots, numbers 26, 27 and 28, in block 127 in approximately 1887. Cole appears to have been British and part of a speculative real estate group whose members were British: Chittenden, Cole, Sharp & Gordon. The group was prominent in Fresno in the late 1880s until 1900.

By the 1940s, block 127 in central Fresno was in a state of disrepair, and was slated for Fresno's Civic Center Master Plan. Block 127, bound by Mariposa, O, Tulare and N Streets, was included in the thirteen-block renewal plan that included absolute land clearance for the project. An auditorium, city hall, city and county school administration buildings, and a post office existed prior to the project, and in 1951 plans were made for an expansion of the city hall, and new construction for a county library, State building, veterans' center, music hall, art center, health and education buildings, all of which needed significant adjacent parking lots. In August 1951, Fresno County acquired approximately half the property needed, with the remainder intended for acquisition.

The Lamb townhouses at 1026 and 1034 N Street were noted in a version of the 1918-19 Sanborn maps currently held at the Map Room of the California State University at Fresno. One map contains a penciled notation for "6 apartments" and a new address of "254" across lots 38 and 39 of Kroeger's Addition. This particular Sanborn map was likely used by the city or county at the time of the large-scale civic planning for downtown Fresno. (Block 127 also was pasted over unofficially and noted as "New County Library" even though no structures were yet built.) The Lamb townhouse originally sited at 1034 N Street moved to its present 254 North Roosevelt Avenue location in ca. 1947 as the downtown block was being cleared for the library. At the same time a ca. 1922-24 Craftsman builder bungalow (also in use as a six-unit apartment) was moved to the immediate north at 264 North Roosevelt Avenue (original location for the bungalow is not known). The fate of the original Lamb twin townhouse at 1026 N Street remains unknown.

At the time of the move (ca. 1947) the original N Street neighborhood was primarily comprised of one and two-story wood-frame dwellings that were almost all built for apartment use. At the Lamb Townhouse's current location, 254 North Roosevelt Avenue, all the surrounding dwellings were worker housing of one-story wood-frame type, with the exception of the other two-story Craftsman bungalow moved to lot immediately to the north of the Lamb Townhouse. Two other two-story wood-frame dwellings did exist in the lower block of Roosevelt Avenue near the H Street and Divisadero intersection. One of these was the O'Brien house of ca.1892. Today only the Lamb Townhouse and the O'Brien House (HABS No. CA-2882) remain as representative examples of Fresno's early residential history. The Lamb townhouse appears to be the sole remaining example of its Italianate type extant today in Fresno, and, furthermore,

appears to have been very rare in its original late-nineteenth-century context. Most of the land between the Lamb and O'Brien houses has been cleared for the Route 180 freeway.⁸

Part II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement

- 1. Architectural Character:** The Lamb house is representative of the vernacular residences with Italianate influences, ca. 1884. Originally one of two identical structures, its proportions and detailing are of a type most often associated with the San Francisco Bay Area, and are highly unusual in Fresno. The Lamb townhouse is one of two late-nineteenth-century two-story, wood-frame dwellings remaining today in the historic Kroeger's Addition of 1888. The O'Brien house (HABS No. CA-2882) ca. 1892 was the first house built in the Kroeger's Addition, and the Lamb Townhouse (ca. 1884) was moved from downtown Fresno to its current location within the Kroeger Addition in ca. 1947. Interestingly, the O'Brien house was built for laborers, and the Lamb house was built as a more sophisticated urban dwelling, evocative of the nineteenth-century middle-class neighborhoods of downtown Fresno. The relocation of the Lamb Townhouse in ca. 1947 is symbolic of Fresno's changing socioeconomic geography.

The two-story rectangular bay that is offset on the primary façade is a key Italianate stylistic feature and is readily identifiable on the Sanborn maps. Only one other building in Fresno in 1888 included this type of bay treatment, a two-story wood-frame dwelling facing O Street to the immediate southeast of the Lamb townhouses. The O Street residence entered tax records as that of E.P. Tyree in 1887 (on block 127, lots 11 and 12). Sanborn maps after 1918-19 show no other rectangular bay Italianate schematic forms for all of Fresno, and after the full clearance of block 127 in the 1950s it is presumed that the Lamb House became the only Italianate structure in Fresno. The low-pitched hipped roof with a wide bracketed cornice and the tall, narrow windows with decorative surrounds are other key Italianate features found on this townhouse.

Although compromised by major window, foundation, porch and room alterations, the integrity of the key Italianate characteristics for the structure remains intact. The house has been in its present location for over sixty years. Significant character-defining features of the property are comprised entirely of its massing, use of materials and Italianate embellishments and not its association with its original location. The Lamb townhouse is a rare and unusual Italianate residence in Fresno that evokes the city's early architectural heritage.

- 2. Condition of fabric:** The condition of the Lamb House is fair. The architectural integrity of the house is good; however, the overall upkeep of the house has been neglected.

⁸ Snyder, "Lamb House," rough draft.

B. Description of Exterior

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Lamb House has a simple rectangular plan. The main house is two units wide and three units deep, and the one-story rear room is two units wide and two units deep. It is an asymmetrical townhouse.
2. **Foundation:** Pier and beam with concrete sill. Original foundation was likely pier and beam with brick sill.
3. **Walls:** The exterior of the house is clad with wide rustic wood channel siding. There are narrow vertical corner endboards. A two-story, rectangular bay window is offset to the north on the primary (west) façade. The bay has a total of eight (four on each story) rectangular, decorative, coffered, wood panels located under the windows. The panels have narrow wood boards laid diagonally, and decorative molding surrounds the panels. The same decorative molding is located above the windows in the corresponding locations of the wood panels. On the first story bay there are four pilasters (two at the wall junction and two at the corners) with decorative entablatures.
4. **Structural system, framing:** Wood-frame
5. **Porches:** The partial-width front porch was added in ca. 1950 after the move to 254 North Roosevelt Avenue. The front porch has a half-hipped roof, composed of composite shingles, with a small eave overhang and exposed rafters. There is a plain frieze. The railing is made of very plain wood planks uncommon to Italianate townhouses, but common to mid-20th century houses. The stairs and porch are built of concrete. The porch addition altered the first-story bay decorative features; a pilaster and coffered wood panel are hidden. There are two additional entry porches for three separate apartments on the south elevation. They were built in the same fashion as the primary porch; therefore, they were most likely added ca. 1950 after the ca. 1947 relocation. The two porches have half-gabled roofs with narrow eave overhang and exposed rafters. They have composite shingles and, instead of an entablature, they have narrow wood planks laid horizontally. They have simple wood plank railings and concrete stairs.
6. **Chimney:** No chimney can be identified.
7. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doors:** There are six identified doors; two on the primary (west) façade, three on the south façade, and one on the east façade. Only one door, on the façade elevation was distinguishable during this survey. It is a wood door with a coffered panel on its bottom half. A fixed-sash, single pane window is located on the top half of the door. The door has a dead bolt lock. This door is not the original, and was replaced at an unknown date. The door surround is made of simple wood panels.

- b. Windows:** On the west façade, in the two-story bay, there are eight tall, narrow, one-over-one-light double-hung windows. The windows have no decorative moldings. One smaller, rectangular window is located on the second story. It replaced the original, larger window that matched window size throughout the rest of the house. The smaller window is a single-pane, aluminum sliding-glass window. The original decorative entablature is present, and the window surround is simple wood panel casing. The ghost of the original window is noticeable. On the first-story there is a small, rectangular, one-over-one-light, double-hung window located between the two doors. The window has a simple wood surround.

On the first-story of the north façade there is one tall, narrow one-over-one-light, double-hung window at the west end of the façade. In the middle, there are two smaller, one-over-one-light, double-hung windows. On the east end, there are paired tall, narrow one-over-one-light, double-hung windows. The second story has the same window fenestration as the first story. All the windows have the same decorative entablatures. The entablature is missing from one of the first-story, smaller windows.

The windows on the north, east, and south façades of the rear room addition were indistinguishable at the time of this survey.

On the south façade there are two single, and a set of paired tall, narrow one-over-one-light, double-hung windows at the east end of the façade. The first-story also has paired tall, narrow one-over-one-light, double-hung windows directly below the second story. All windows had the same decorative entablatures as the west and north façades.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering:** The main house has a low-pitched, wood framed, hipped roof with composite shingles. The one story rear addition has a wood framed, hipped roof, composed of composite shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves:** The two-story house has projecting cornices and wide eave overhangs with scroll brackets evenly placed along the roofline. The one-story addition has moderate eave overhang with boxed rafters. There are no decorative brackets on the addition.
- c. Dormers, towers, cupolas:** There are no dormers, towers or cupolas located on the Lamb Townhouse.

C. Description of Interior

No interior information could be gathered for the Lamb House.

1. **Floor Plans:** The townhouse was a duplex from 1884 to ca. 1918 when it was converted to a six-unit apartment complex. Currently the complex has five apartments.

D. Site

1. **Historic Landscape design:** No historic landscaping or street furniture is associated with the primary structure at its current (ca. 1947) location.
2. **Outbuildings:** At its current (ca. 1947) location, a multi-vehicle garage was built at the rear of the property. The garage is a non-contributing feature of the property, and does not possess any architectural significance. It has a gabled roof with narrow overhanging eaves with exposed rafters.

Part III. Sources

City of Fresno, Plat Book 1, County of Fresno. (Fresno County Recorder's Office.)

Clough, Charles W., and William B. Secrest, Jr., *Fresno County—The Pioneer Years: From the Beginning to 1900*, Fresno: Panorama West Books, 1984.

"Death Calls To Take Isaac Lamb," obituary, *Oakland Tribune*, July 10, 1899, p.3.

"Died," obituary, *Oakland Times*, July 10, 1899, p.1.

Fresno City Directories, 1890-1900, 1907/08, 1910-1914, 1947.

Fresno City Planning Department, "Master Plan: Fresno's Civic Center & Public Lands in Civic Center Area," August 1951.

Kroeger's Addition, Plat Book 1, County of Fresno, Map No.29, January 10, 1888. (Fresno County Recorder's Office.)

Lamb, Isaac and Maria, deed transactions, Official Record Books, County of Fresno, miscellaneous entries between December 1883 and 1900.

Lamb, Maria, from Frank W. Walker, deed recorded in Official Record Book No.37, County of Fresno, January 14, 1884, p.467.

Oakland, Alameda, Berkeley and Sacramento City Directories, 1877- 1879, 1888-1899.

Photograph showing the courthouse with the 1026 N Street Lamb house in the background, 1947. (Fresno Bee photograph morgue, 1626 E Street, Fresno.)

Sanborn Insurance Company. Fresno, 1884, 1888, 1898, 1906, 1918/19, 1948. [The Lamb townhouses do not appear on the 1884 Sanborn map. Two copies of the 1918/19 Sanborn maps exist in the Map Room at the California State University at Fresno: one of these is unusually marked in pencil into the period of the late 1940s or possibly early 1950s. The 1918/19 Sanborn maps are particularly useful as the penciled version relates very clearly to the downtown civic renewal that includes the block 127 properties.]

San Francisco City Directories. 1868-1877, 1881-1884/85.

7-County Directory of Stanislaus, Merced, Fresno, Kern, Tulare, San Bernardino, and Inyo Counties, 1884/85.

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