

GEORGE H. LARSEN HOUSE  
486 North Poplar Avenue  
Fresno  
Fresno County  
California

HABS No. CA-2875

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
Pacific West Region  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94102

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

### GEORGE H. LARSEN HOUSE

HABS No. CA-2875

- Location:** 486 North Poplar Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93701
- Present Owner:** State of California, Department of Transportation  
(Caltrans), in 1992
- Present Use:** Residence
- Significance:** The George H. Larsen House is associated with the life of prominent Danish blacksmith and Fresno citizen George H. Larsen; the house embodies distinctive characteristics of a transition between the late Queen Anne and the emerging Colonial Revival styles of architecture.
- Historians:** Margo Nayyar, Cultural Studies 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 October 2011.
- Project Information:** The Larsen House recordation was completed as one of the mitigation measures for the 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 Larsen House was determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places on July 8, 1991 under Criterion C for its late Queen Anne and early Colonial Revival architecture. It is also listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.

## **Part I. Historical Information**

### **A. Physical History**

- 1. Date of erection:** ca. 1907
- 2. Architect:** George H. Larsen

It is possible that George H. Larsen designed and constructed his house at 486 North Poplar himself. His 1905 biography noted that he built his two-story workshop and “a comfortable residence at No. 1407 Fresno Street”<sup>1</sup> (his first Fresno house).

- 3. Original owner:**<sup>2</sup> George H. Larsen

George H. Larsen was born in Horsholm, Denmark in 1866 as the youngest of six children. Larsen received limited public schooling and began working at age eight as a farm laborer. As a child he learned the butcher trade and at seventeen he apprenticed to become a blacksmith in Copenhagen. He worked there for three years while traveling in Denmark and Germany. He settled to work in a large Danish iron works for two-and-a-half years, but immigrated to the United States following his two brothers. Larsen arrived in Fresno in 1892 and like other immigrants, worked at a vineyard in the outlying colonies.<sup>3</sup>

The 1890s were economically depressed for the Fresno area after the nationwide depression of 1893 (Panic of 1893). Nonetheless, in 1896 Larsen built a blacksmithing and iron works shop in Fresno, listed as “Larsen & Krog.” J.J. Krog was his partner. By 1905, Larsen was well known as a manufacturer of “plows, wagons, carriages, etc., being especially well-known for the quality of the plows.”<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1920s, Larsen & Krog had adapted and expanded to the needs of the automobile industry. Business advertising included blacksmithing and automotive body and wheel work. They offered services including trimming tires (auto and truck), as well as springs.<sup>5</sup>

Larsen married Marie Jensen and raised five boys. By 1890, Larsen and Jensen were prominent names in the Fresno area’s Danish community, Washington Irrigated Colony. Located south of Fresno, the colony was primarily a Danish

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Guinn, *History of the State of California and Biographical Record of the San Joaquin Valley, California* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1905), 1360.

<sup>2</sup> All information pulled from John Snyder, “Larsen 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.

<sup>3</sup> Guinn, *History of the State of California*, 1360.

<sup>4</sup> Guinn, *History of the State of California*, 1360.

<sup>5</sup> Fresno City Directory, 1920.

agricultural enterprise, with active Danish immigration until about 1910. A man named Peter Larsen owned a twenty-acre farmstead at the turn of the century, and one of the colony's early blacksmiths was a member of the Jensen family. Between 1885 and 1890 the Jensens and Larsens were neighbors in the vicinity of today's Elm, Jefferson and Cherry Avenues in the Washington Irrigated Colony.<sup>6</sup>

Larsen served as president of the Danish Brotherhood and the Dania Society of California. He also belonged to the Ancient Order of United Workmen and the Modern Woodmen of America. He was a Democrat.<sup>7</sup>

4. **Builder, contractor:** Possibly George H. Larsen.
5. **Original plans and construction:** The Larsen House appears to have been built in ca. 1907, with the exception of a filled wraparound porch.
6. **Alterations and additions:** The original open wraparound porch has been converted to a screened sitting porch at the northeast corner of the house. A low wall made of inset wood panels was built in between the porch columns on the north façade, and a wall with a door was added on the west façade.

The sleeping porch at the northeast corner of the house has been re-clad from the original three-lap drop siding to vertically laid channel wood boards.

The east façade of the workshop at the rear of the property has been re-clad with horizontally-laid lapped wood boards from vertically-laid board-and-batten wood siding.

The two-car garage at the northeast corner of the lot has a corrugated steel roof that was most likely originally wood shingles.

## B. Historical Context<sup>8</sup>

Fresno incorporated as a city in 1885 and quickly expanded north of its city limits. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, Fresno's upper- and upper-middle class residents lived in a multi-block downtown area roughly bounded by Divisadero, Blackstone, Stanislaus and Broadway. Today this area is called the L Street historic district. However, after the turn of the twentieth century, middle- and upper-middle class families moved from downtown to the newly fashionable suburbs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Fresno City Directories, 1890-1920; Guinn, *History of the State of California*, 1360.

<sup>7</sup> Guinn, *History of the State of California*, 1360.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, "Larsen House," rough draft.

<sup>9</sup> Paul E. Vandor, *History of Fresno County, California*, v.2, Los Angeles: Historic Record Col., 1919; L.A. Winchell, *History of Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley*, (Fresno: Fresno County Recorder's Office, 1933); "A Lot of Building," *Fresno Republican*, v.21:65, August 14, 1901, 7.

The suburbs were not exclusively for the wealthy; in fact, the first neighborhoods were designed for the working class starting in 1880. The Griffith's Addition (1880) and Griffith's Second Addition (1884) were the first two neighborhoods. They were platted in dense, narrow lots meant for modest working-class houses. Following the platting of the Griffith's Additions were the Park, Forthcamp, Elm Grove, Central and Kroeger's Additions. All of the additions, except for the Park Addition, were laid out in dense, narrow lots, intended for modest dwellings. The Park Addition (1885), north of the Elm Grove Addition, is the earliest with lots intended for large country estates. The lots measured 171 x 250 feet.<sup>10</sup>

The George H. Larsen House is located at the northwest corner of the Yosemite Addition (1888), east of the Park Addition. Several large additions were platted in the immediate vicinity during the late nineteenth century: Altamont Addition (1888) to the east, the Terry Tract (1884) to the west, and the Belmont Addition to the northeast (1887). Each of these neighborhoods developed as a working-class enclave, north of the downtown Fresno.<sup>11</sup>

The Belmont Addition's development as a mixed commercial and residential neighborhood had a profound effect on the Yosemite Addition neighborhood. Belmont's substantial infill during the late 1890s and early twentieth century was platted between 1903 and 1913, and was comprised of nine modest-to-tiny sized tracts. Bungalow construction continued in the area north of Belmont Avenue through 1918. The entire greater neighborhood remained strongly working-class; in the late nineteenth century, Belmont Avenue was developed as an east-west corridor with a residential and commercial complexion. Businesses included stables, grain and feed houses, and blacksmithing, and likely attracted the Larsen's blacksmith family.<sup>12</sup>

The business and house construction that took place along Belmont Avenue created the neighborhood environment within which the Larsen House was built. The Yosemite Addition, south of Belmont Avenue, saw continued commercial and residential construction along the Belmont and Poplar Avenues. In the 1920s, Belmont and Poplar had automobile repair and spray paint shops, and the Fresno Veterinary Hospital was established on Poplar (facing Belmont) to the near west of the Larsen House.<sup>13</sup> Presently the Larsen House is mixed with residential houses and

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<sup>10</sup> Andrea Galvin, "City of Fresno North Park Survey: Historic Context & Survey," (Galvin Preservation Associates Inc., Redondo Beach, California, November 2008), 1-115; Bole's North Park, County of Fresno, RS Book 2, Map 51, February 1903 (accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office); Forthcamp's Addition No. 2, County of Fresno, December 1908 (accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office); North Park, RS Book 2, County of Fresno, Map 14, January 18, 1902 (accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office); North Park Extension, County of Fresno, Plat Book 2, Map 26, June 19, 1902 (accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office).

<sup>11</sup> Terry Tract (1884/87); Park Addition (1885/88); Belmont Addition (1887); Yosemite Addition (1888); and, Altamont Addition (1888): County of Fresno, accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office.

<sup>12</sup> Terry Tract (1884/87); Park Addition (1885/88); Belmont Addition (1887); Yosemite Addition (1888); and, Altamont Addition (1888): County of Fresno, accessed at Fresno County Recorder's Office; Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno maps, 1900-1920.

<sup>13</sup> Sanborn Insurance Company, Fresno maps, 1948.

commercial business, and much of the surrounding land was cleared for construction of the California State Route 180 freeway corridor.

## **Part II. Architectural Information**

### **A. General Statement**

- 1. Architectural Character:** The George H. Larsen House is a classic example of a modest transitional Queen Anne-Colonial Revival residence, typical of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century homes in California's Central Valley in general and of Fresno in particular. It retains most of its distinctive late Queen Anne and early Colonial Revival architectural details.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** Although in a deteriorated condition, the Larsen House maintains a good degree of integrity with few exterior alterations to the house and minimal alterations to the workshop.

### **B. Description of Exterior**

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The Larsen House has a simple rectangular wood-frame house that is two units wide and three units deep. The house is asymmetrical with one-and-a-half stories.
- 2. Foundation:** The house has a vented pier-and-beam foundation with a high brick sill, wide wood vertical-board cladding, and a wide wood horizontal-board water table.
- 3. Walls:** The east, west, and south façades are clad in three-lap drop siding. The north façade has a low wall made of inset horizontal wood panels along the northwest corner sleeping porch. There is three-lap drop siding along the walls of the bay window, and wood vertical channel-board siding along the northeast corner sleeping porch (extending to the east façade). There are wide endboards and wide simple frieze around the entire house.

There are bay windows in the same location on the north and south façades. The north bay has a projecting jigsaw drop pendant and scrolled brackets in the bay's east corner.

- 4. Structural system, framing:** The house is has a wood frame.
- 5. Porches:** On the primary (west) facade there is a shallow-pitched hipped-roof wrap-around Colonial Revival porch. The roof is clad in wood shingles with patches of corrugated metal. There are concrete steps with concrete side piers leading to the porch. The porch is composed of flush, tongue-and-groove joint, horizontally laid, wood boards. There are eight symmetrically placed wood Tuscan columns: unfluted shafts on small simple wood bases with simple capitals.

These columns support the porch's roof. The porch ceiling is made of vertically laid channel wood boards, and has thin molding throughout. There is no railing.

Part of the wraparound porch at the northwest corner of the house has been filled with a low wall made of horizontal inset wood panels and screens between the columns creating a sleeping porch. There is a second screened-in sleeping porch at the northeast (rear) corner of the house.

6. **Chimneys:** There are two interior corbelled brick chimneys located on the west end of the north slope of the roof, and on the north end of the west slope of the roof.

## 7. Openings

- a. **Doorways and doors:** The primary entrance is centered on the west façade. The wood door is surrounded by sidelight panels and a full transom light. The door, sidelights, and transom light have plain wood frames and surrounds. A second door is located at the north end of the west façade leading to the screened sitting porch; it is made of wood and screen and has a plain wood frame and surround. The door is boarded shut. The east (rear) façade has a centered door. Characteristics were indistinguishable at the time of this survey.
- b. **Windows:** The west (primary) façade has a window on either side of the door. They are large one-over-one-light, double-hung windows that have plain wood frames, surrounds, and decorative wood sills and are covered by screens.

There are three windows on the north façade; one larger window in the bay and two smaller windows. All windows are one-over-one-light, double-hung with plain wood frames, surrounds, and decorative wood sills. They are covered by screens.

There are two windows on the east façade, both of which are of the one-over-one-light, double-hung type, with plain wood frames, surrounds, and decorative wood sills. They are covered by screens, and one is boarded shut.

The south façade has six windows. Five windows are one-over-one-light, double-hung, with plain wood frames, surrounds, and decorative wood sills. They are covered by screens, and have metal lattice security bars. A smaller square window is located on the west side of the south elevation. It is a single-pane, fixed-sash window with a plain wood frame, surround and decorative wood sill.

## 8. Roof

- a. **Shape, covering:** The roof is a moderately to steeply pitched hipped roof with gabled roof dormers centered on the north and south façades over the bay windows, and a hipped-roof dormer centered above the main entrance on the west façade. The roof and dormers are covered by wood shingles, with corrugated steel patches in some areas. There are four semicircular metal vents on the roof's south slope, and two on the east (rear) slope.
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** The house has moderately overhanging boxed eaves with a thin decorative cornice, thin fascia, thin cornice mold, and wide frieze. The soffit is composed of narrow, horizontally laid, channeled wood boards.
- c. **Dormers:** Centered on the roof's west slope is a hipped dormer with boxed eaves and a thin decorative cornice, thin fascia, thin cornice mold, and wide frieze. The soffit is sheathed in wide, horizontally laid, wood boards. The dormer walls have three-lap drop siding and there are three semicircular-arch louvered vents with a button motif in the west wall.

The north façade roof dormer has a projecting skirted, decorative entablature, three-lap-drop siding, and a semicircular-arch louvered vent with a button motif. The gable skirt has asphalt shingles cut in a fish scale design. The south façade roof dormer is the same but has a wood-shingle skirt instead of fish-scale wood shingles.

## C. Description of Interior

No interior information could be gathered at the time of this survey.

## D. Site

1. **Historic Landscape design:** The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of residential and commercial properties, with small businesses predominant along Belmont Avenue. Property boundaries include the outbuildings, concrete block curbing and mature landscaping, including tall over-story trees and a variety of citrus, fig, and oleander plants.
2. **Outbuildings:** Outbuildings for the property are distinctive and intact. A double-vehicle garage sits at the northeastern corner of the lot. The garage is built from concrete blocks matching the concrete block curbing on the north side of the house. The garage has a "gabled roof" with the gable along the center roof ridge, and is clad in corrugated steel, but most likely originally had wood shingles matching the main house. There are moderately overhanging boxed eaves with a thin decorative cornice, thin fascia, thin cornice mold, and wide frieze. The soffit is sheathed in narrow, horizontally laid, channeled wood boards. The garage has

sliding wood-framed doors with diagonally laid channel wood boards. This garage likely dates to ca. 1910-12.

A wood-framed workshop sits to the south of the garage along the edge of the alley between San Pablo and Poplar Avenues. It has a gabled roof made of corrugated steel, and has moderate eave overhang. There are no decorative eave entablatures, and no windows. The workshop is clad in board-and-batten siding except on the east façade, which has been re-clad with horizontally laid lapped wood boards. A wood-framed screen door is located on the west façade of the workshop. The workshop likely dates to the 1920s, and appears on the 1929 update of the 1918 Sanborn map. The garage/workshop configuration is the same on the 1944 Sanborn.

### Part III. Sources

“A Lot of Building,” *Fresno Republican*, v.21:65, August 14, 1901.

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