

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
CPED PLANNING DIVISION
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT
BZH-26363**

FILE NAME: 636 Elwood Avenue North – Rappaport Residence

APPLICANT: Mark A. Bell, 612-345-6646

DATE APPLICATION COMPLETE: March 24, 2010

PUBLICATION OF STAFF REPORT: April 13, 2010

DATE OF HEARING: April 20, 2010

APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION: April 30, 2010

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: John Smoley, Ph.D., 612-673-2830

CLASSIFICATION: Nomination for Consideration for Designation as a Local Historic Landmark

A. SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

District/Area information	
Historic District	N/A
Neighborhood	Near North

Historic Property information	
Current name	Bell Residence
Historic Name	Rappaport Residence
Current Address	636 Elwood Avenue North
Historic Address	636 Elwood Avenue North
Original Construction Date	1912
Original Contractor	Andrew A. Lofstrom
Original Architect	none
Historic Use	Residence
Current Use	Residence
Proposed Use	Residence
Other Historical Designations	N/A



636 Elwood Avenue North, 2010, photo submitted by Applicant

The Rappaport Residence is a two-story house designed in a vernacular style with Colonial Revival and Craftsman influences. Andrew A. Lofstrom constructed the house for Abraham S. Oleisky in 1912 for an estimated cost of \$3,000.¹ A side-gabled roof clad in composition shingles is punctured by a brick chimney on the north (rear) side and a shed dormer on the south (front) side. A two story enclosed porch with a shed roof extends off the west side of the residence. A flat-roofed, enclosed entryway serves as the main entrance into the building. Stucco clads the exterior walls with notable exceptions being the shed dormer on the roof and a rear, two-story addition, both of which are clad in narrow horizontal siding. Fenestration consists of a variety of wood framed and leaded glass windows, the majority being 4/1 double hung, all covered by aluminum storm windows. A two-car garage at the rear of the lot is the only other building onsite.

¹ City of Minneapolis Building Permit #B99434, 636 Elwood Avenue North.

On March 24, 2010, the property owner, Mark A. Bell, submitted a complete application to nominate the property for designation as a landmark, after over a decade of owning and restoring the property with his wife, Gloria.

In a 2002 reconnaissance survey of North Minneapolis the evaluators, Mead and Hunt, did not recommend further study of the property to determine whether it was eligible for local and/or national designation as a historic property.²

B. CONSIDERATION FOR NOMINATION

Per section 599.230 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations, the Heritage Preservation Commission shall review all complete nomination applications. If the Heritage Preservation Commission determines that a nominated property or property appears to meet at least one of the local designation criteria the commission may direct the planning director to commence a designation study of the property.

SIGNIFICANCE

The subject property appears eligible for designation as an individual landmark under criterion 2.

Criteria 2 The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.

For nearly a quarter century, the residence at 636 Elwood Avenue North was the home of the Edward Rappaport and his family: Gusty, his wife, and their children James, Max, Claire, Mary, and Fred. Edward Rappaport's dramatic rise from poverty to prosperity is significant within the context of immigrant, Jewish, and corporate history in Minneapolis.

Overcoming hardships independently was a quality Edward Rappaport developed at a very early age. Edward Rappaport was born in 1881 in Romania. His father died when Edward was only three years old. His mother, Eva Rappaport, remarried a man named Moritz Schwartz, who would only accept one of her children from her previous marriage. Edward's baby sister, Jenny, remained with their mother while Edward became an orphan.³

At roughly age eighteen, Edward immigrated to the United States. The ship's passage to North America took an unusually long time, and food supplies ran out. Even when aided by a passing ship, provisions remained scarce enough to evoke abhorrent behavior. Rappaport observed a man steal a food ration from a woman and her child. Rappaport chased and confronted the man. A scuffle ensued and Edward lost. Rather than simply leaving with the food, the thief took the time to carve a crucifix into Rappaport's chest with a blade. Edward was let off the ship in Canada to receive treatment for his wounds at a Catholic hospital.⁴

² Mead & Hunt, "North Minneapolis Historic Resources Inventory: Bryn Mawr and Near North Neighborhoods (South Area)," Reconnaissance Survey Files, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN.

³ *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.

⁴ *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.

From Canada, Edward made his way to New York, where he was reunited with his mother and where he met his seven new siblings. Edward was taken in by an aunt but did not get along well with her. Hearing that there were a lot of Romanian Jews in Detroit, Edward headed west, allegedly on foot. Detroit met his expectations. When inquiring about a room and work with Romanian Jew there, the man asked about the ship Rappaport emigrated upon, and, subsequently, about the young man who was carved with a knife. Edward indicated that he was that man, and found the stranger insisted upon sharing his home with the newcomer. While residing there, Edward became smitten with the man's daughter. Although she was engaged to be married at the time, Gusty Schwartz fell in love with Edward. Ignoring Victorian mores, the couple eloped in Windsor, Ontario.⁵

Following their marriage, Edward found work in Cleveland, and it was there that their first child, James, was born in 1906. Edward had learned tinsmithing in Romania. The 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco provided an opportunity for home building and repair work. This young family packed up and headed west via train, only to stop in Salt Lake City when Gusty experienced labor pains. Their second son, Max, was born there in 1908.⁶

By then, Gusty's family lived in Minneapolis, and it was there that the Rappaports settled and had three more children: Claire, Mary, and Fred. In an age when Jews experienced substantial discrimination, success for a young Jewish man generally meant working for another Jew or self-employment. Edward initially found work through others, allegedly working upon the copper of the Basilica of St. Mary. Edward then parlayed his experience into a business working as a junk peddler, buying and selling his wares via horse and wagon beginning in 1918. The advent of the automobile led this metal smith to purchase autos damaged in wrecks, break them into parts in his backyard at 620 Girard Avenue North, and resell the parts. By 1923, the Minneapolis City Directory listed Rappaport as running an auto supply business at 310 Plymouth Avenue. By 1924, the directory listed his business by name, Northwestern Auto Parts. With a motto, "For that hard to get part," the Northwestern Auto Parts Company served the retail market for the burgeoning automobile industry in Minneapolis. At that point, Rappaport's business was successful enough to enable the family to move into a new home at 636 Elwood Avenue North, where they remained for nearly twenty-five years. By the time they left Elwood Avenue after World War II, the company had begun manufacturing its own parts and rebuilding vehicles, employing seventy-five people.⁷

Family and work went hand in hand for Edward Rappaport. A major motivation for Edward's self-run enterprise was ensuring that his children never had to knock on a door asking for work. As time progressed, Edward Rappaport brought his three sons into the business to

⁵ *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.

⁶ *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.

⁷ "Junk' Hits Million Dollar Bracket," *Minneapolis Star*, 16 May 1948; Minneapolis City Directory, 1916-1917, 1919, 1923, 1924; "Edward Rappaport, 74," *Minneapolis Star*, 10 September 1955, 3; "Current Fiscally Sponsored Projects," IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, [<http://www.ifpnorth.org/projects3.html>], Accessed 2 April 2010; "NAPCO: Company History," NAPCO International LLC, [http://www.napcointl.com/en/home/who_we_are/company_history.html], Accessed 2 April 2010.

manage various aspects of the growing operation. His wife, Gusty, served as the bookkeeper for the firm.⁸

In 1926 Rappaport constructed what was to be the first of many buildings in Northwestern's complex at 7th Street and Lyndale Avenue North.⁹ The company grew at a remarkable rate. From its construction in 1926 until 1963 the company's headquarters expanded seventeen times.¹⁰ In 1933 the company's stock was listed on the Midwest Exchange. In 1958 it began to be listed on the American Stock Exchange.¹¹ By 1948 Northwestern had twenty seven thousand square feet of office and shop space along with over one hundred fifty thousand square feet of yard space at its headquarters at 834 7th Street North. In 1955 NAPCO added to its mushrooming complex by purchasing an adjacent one hundred eleven thousand square foot manufacturing facility at 5th Street and 10th Avenue North.¹²

The success of this family business is especially significant in the context of Minneapolis' immigrant and economic history. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Jews, especially recent immigrants, found employment in Minneapolis difficult. Anti-Semitism prevented entry into numerous occupations, driving many workers like Rappaport to form businesses of their own and to employ their children. Yet by the 1930s Minneapolis' 20,000 Jews had, like the Rappaports, pulled themselves up from poverty to middle-class respectability, typically through self-employment. Like the Rappaports, most Jews settled in North Minneapolis, where housing discrimination concentrated the city's Jewish population.¹³ Family ties and social necessity kept Jewish families tight knit. In the Rappaport's case, their adult children lived at home until their marriage. The family remained at 636 Elwood until 1948. By then all of their sons had married and moved into places of their own. Edward and his wife Gusty followed suit, moving to 1300 Washburn Avenue North and then to St. Louis Park.¹⁴

On September 10, 1955, Edward Rappaport passed away at the age of seventy four. A very short obituary in the *Minneapolis Star* reflected upon the man's family, business, and Jewish heritage: three highly intertwined, defining characteristics of this man. The Rappaport home at 636 Elwood Avenue North reflects the history of Jewish immigrants and entrepreneurs in Minneapolis in the first half of the twentieth century.

The subject property may also be eligible for designation as an individual landmark under criterion 4.

Criteria 4 The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.

⁸ *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.; Minneapolis City Directory, 1916-1917, 1919, 1923, 1924.

⁹ City of Minneapolis Building Permit Index Card, 812-34 7th Street North.

¹⁰ City of Minneapolis Building Permit Index Card, 812-34 7th Street North.

¹¹ "Stock of NAPCO Industries, Inc.," *Minneapolis Star*, 17 January 1958.

¹² "NAPCO Expands," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 12 June 1955.

¹³ Herbert Samuel Rutman, *Defense and Development: A History of Minneapolis Jewry, 1930-1950*. Ph.D. dissertation (University of Minnesota, 1970) 10, 12, 34, 36, 142, 143.

¹⁴ Minneapolis City Directory, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1950.

The Rappaport Residence is a two-story house designed in a vernacular style with Colonial Revival and Craftsman influences. The building permit lists no architect of record. Andrew A. Lofstrom constructed the house in 1912.¹⁵ A side-gabled, 45 degree roof; two and one half story massed plan; flat roofed entryway; and general symmetry give the building the feeling of a Colonial Revival residence. The exposed rafter tails, relatively wide eaves, shed dormers, 4/1 windows, stucco wall cladding, and generally asymmetrical fenestration pattern lend a Craftsman air to the residence. The City does not appear to have designated another building reflecting this architectural transition. Further research, through the designation study process, is warranted, to determine the place of this property among other examples of this architectural transition.

The subject property may also be eligible for designation as a landmark under the other five designation criteria. Such an analysis would be conducted as part of a designation study.

B. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Staff has received no comment letters on the proposal as of the publication of this staff report.

C. APPLICABLE ORDINANCES

Chapter 599. Heritage Preservation Regulation

ARTICLE V. DESIGNATION

599.210. Designation criteria. The following criteria shall be considered in determining whether a property is worthy of designation as a landmark or historic district because of its historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance:

- (1) The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.
- (2) The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.
- (3) The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity.
- (4) The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.
- (5) The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.
- (6) The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.

¹⁵ City of Minneapolis Building Permit #B99434, 636 Elwood Avenue North.

- (7) The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

599.230. Commission decision on nomination. The commission shall review all complete nomination applications. If the commission determines that a nominated property appears to meet at least one of the criteria for designation contained in section 599.210, the commission may direct the planning director to prepare or cause to be prepared a designation study of the property. In cases where an application for demolition is initiated by the property owner, the planning director may determine that the property owner bears the full financial responsibility of conducting the designation study. In all cases, the planning director shall define the scope of services for a designation study, review qualifications of agent conducting study and make a determination of what constitutes a final submission upon completion.

599.240. Interim protection. (a) Purpose. Interim protection is established to protect a nominated property from destruction or inappropriate alteration during the designation process.

(b) *Effective date.* Interim protection shall be in effect from the date of the commission's decision to commence a designation study of a nominated property until the city council makes a decision regarding the designation of the property, or for twelve (12) months, whichever comes first. Interim protection may be extended for such additional periods as the commission may deem appropriate and necessary to protect the designation process, not exceeding a total additional period of eighteen (18) months. The commission shall hold a public hearing on a proposed extension of interim protection as provided in section 599.170.

(c) *Scope of restrictions.* During the interim protection period, no alteration or minor alteration of a nominated property shall be allowed except where authorized by a certificate of appropriateness or a certificate of no change, as provided in this chapter. (2001-Or-029, § 1, 3-2-01)

D. FINDINGS

1. The nominated property appears to meet at least one of the criteria for designation contained in section 599.210 (criteria 2 and 4).
2. The property may meet additional criteria of significance. A full review will be undertaken during the designation study.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

CPED recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** staff findings and **approve** the nomination of 636 Elwood Avenue North as a landmark; **establish** interim protection; and **direct** the Planning Director to prepare or cause to be prepared a designation study.

Attachments:

- A. Materials submitted by CPED – A1-A2
 - a. Location map – A1
 - b. 350' map – A2
- B. Materials submitted by Applicant – B1-B10
 - a. Application – B1-B10