

## 20. THE RALPH BROWN RESIDENCE 309 Magnolia Avenue (1923)



**Landmark Preservation Commission Resolution:** November 15, 1993  
**Designated by City Council:** March 22, 1994

**Description:** The Ralph Brown house is in the California bungalow style. It is a two-story structure with steep gables on either end of the roof and a cross gable in front. The roof has double gabled dormers. The cross gables form a broad, arched front porch supported by square concrete corner pillars.

**Historic Significance:** The house was built in 1922 for Mr. and Mrs. William James Brown who moved to Modesto in 1909. In 1918, Brown was elected District Attorney for Stanislaus County. When the home was built, the Wisecarver Addition was just being developed. Mr. and Mrs. Brown lived in this house for the rest of their lives.

Their son, Ralph, also became an attorney. In 1933, he joined his father's firm and in 1942 was elected to the California Assembly. In 1959, he was unanimously elected Speaker of the Assembly. He is most well-known for his contribution to good government in the form of anti-secrecy laws known as the Brown Act. He served in the California Legislature as a member of the Assembly for 19 years — nine consecutive terms. In 1961 Brown stepped down as Speaker and accepted an appointment to the newly established Fifth District Court of Appeals in Fresno. He worked as a judge until his death in 1966.