NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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7' DESCRIPTION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Nominated to the National Register is a three acre section of the original 18 acres purchased by Luther Burbank in 1885 for use as his experimental farm. It is located one mile west of the center of Sebastopol on Bodega Avenue (sometimes referred to as Bodega Highway), the major east-west route through the community, and the major route to the coast from central Sonoma County. Unlike the rest of the farm, this section has remained relatively undisturbed since 1936.

The use of the remainder of the farm has undergone several changes. The original 18 acres had been reduced in 1923 by Burbank to 14.96 acres through his sale of approximately three acres of the North West section to a cemetary association.¹ After Burbank's death in 1926, it was operated by Stark Bros. Nurseries from 1927 until 1936. Mrs. Burbank then developed the farm, with the exception of the nominated site, as an apple ranch. The farm was purchased from Mrs. Burbank in 1973 by Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation and developed for senior citizens' housing. (See Exhibit A, Environmental Impact Analysis.) The nominated three acre site is part of the 14.96 acre parcel owned by Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation.

The nominated site contains one structure, a cottage (date of construction unknown) It contains vegetation in a neglected state, some of it remaining from Burbank's first hand experiments.

Structures which were on the farm during the time of Burbank's experimental work were described by Richard Keil and John Bregger during interviews. These were identified as cottage, barn and office. 2,3 Refer to Photograph #1 for cottage and barn.

The original cottage can be described as wood frame, having outside wall dimensions of 20'x20', with a hip roof with flared eaves. Two small porches with stairs were placed at the entrance to the living room on the north and at the entrance to the bedroom on the east. These porches were separately roofed by a hip roof of matching style, and supported at the outside by posts. Brackets were placed A porch under the main roofline. at the post-header connection. along the back, (south) appears in part profile in Photograph #1. A single double hung window was placed on each side of the aforementioned entrances, halfway between the edge of the door and outside corner of the structure. A vine which appears to be Parthenocissus tricuspidata (Boston ivy) grew to cover much of the north and east sides. This can be seen in Photograph #1 as newly set out plants along the foundation, and, later in Photograph #2 after it matured. A room was added at the back, (south) by the Keils during their residence there between 1931 and 1936. 4 This room addition is seen in Photograph Exhibit C. The difference in window style of the room on the left identifies this addition. The original appearance of the west and south elevations do not appear in available photographs.

The barn was 20 feet by 20 feet with a lean-to shed on it. It had a loft where Burbank sometimes slept. (Presumably before the cottage was built.). There were four horse stalls with sliding doors. ⁵ There was a building where the tools were kept and tables for laying out fruit to photograph. "That building is gone". ⁶ Richard Keil referred to this building as Burbank's office.

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PAGE TWO

Statement of Description (Continued)

The appearance of the experimental farm as developed by Burbank was, of course, a changing thing. Burbank described the land when he purchased it in 1885 as "....undulating in contour, and its chief slopes face east. The soil is sandy, no doubt part of one of many great sand dunes piled up by waves of the Pacific Ocean and the winds in past ages. There are a great variety of soils and degrees of moisture. Some parts are so moist that the water seeps up to the surface throughout the season, and the remainder is so loose and friable that moisture may be found all through the summer, even six months after rain has fallen upon it." ⁷ Information is available on its appearance during and immediately after Burbank's development from Photographs #3 - #14 (authenticated by John Bregger) and from interviews with Bregger and Richard Keil.

The entrance to the farm was at the North border on Bodega Highway just outside of Sebastopol. See Photograph #3. Along this side was a wood fence with a wood gate across the entrance. A dirt road led into the property. The cottage was visible from this point ahead and to the right. A gentle slope leads up to an orchard on the crest of the hill. A flower garden appears on the right (west) side of the driveway. On this side there was also a row of Trifoliate Orange. Along the left (east) side of driveway was a row of dwarf bamboo. Further to the east was an area that was Mrs. Burbank's own garden.

Some of the characteristics of Burbank's experimental farm which made it unique were related during the interview with the Keils. Trees were planted very close, sometimes only one foot apart, in beds. These trees bore experimental grafts. Nearly all trees bore more than one variety of fruit. There was a cherry tree which bore 550 varieties of cherries. This is referred to as a nurse tree. A number of nurse apple trees bore 20 or 30 varieties, ripening from June to almost Christmas. According to Richard Keil, "fruit fell off by the ton". There were 2,000 varieties of plums, 200 apples, 500 peaches, and 100 pears. ⁹ A complete record of the farm, row by row, was compiled in 1931 for Stark Brothers Nurseries by Joseph Keil. A copy is in the possession of Keil.

There was no well on the farm. A cistern collected water for domestic use until it was cracked in the 1906 earthquake. According to Keil, "The cistern is covered over now, but, I know where it is." Water for domestic use was hauled in after that. No irrigation of plants took place.

The three acre area of Burbank Experimental Farm that has not been developed by the Sebastopol Area Housing Corporation is shaped roughly like a triangle with the base lying at the Bodega Highway to its north. (Refer to Exhibit G) From this base, it rises up the side of a hill and is bordered on the west by the Sebastopol Cemetary and on the east by the Burbank Heights Apartments. Along the



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PAGE Three

Statement of Description (Continued)

Bodega Highway it is fenced with a locked gate and a No Trespassing sign that blocks the original road to the cottage. What is left of this road is lined on one side with dwarf bamboo and on the other side with trifolliate orange - all from Burbank's time. One can enter the property form the driveway of the apartment complex. Near this driveway is the cottage and it is in a sad state of disrepair. Apparently it was painted a beige color. It is approximately 20 x 30 feet, single story, having a hip roof with asphalt shingles. The outer walls are covered with 10-inch horizontal lap board, probably redwood. It appears from old pictures (Photograph #1) that a porch has been removed from one side and one can see the mark left on the wall where a small shelter roof over the front (north) door and the steps have been removed. The doors and windows have been boarded up and there is a large sheet of plastic on the east side of the roof. These measures have been taken, reportedly by volunteer city officials, to protect the interior of the building as much as possible. On the west side is a brick fireplace and chimney, and there is also a metal stove pipe protruding from the roof near the chimney. Enclosed are photographs of the cottage and grounds as they now look. (Photographs #15 through #22) Wild and overgrown, the condition of the grounds makes it difficult to see what the planting was, but 58 trees and shrubs are still extant. (Identified in E.I.R. Map of Woody Plants, Exhibit A). Looking from the north entrance to the cottage one can see trees and shrubs placed to outline a circular area, possibly a turn-around at one time. On the south-west corner of the house there is a Royal walnut tree (cross between Black walnut and English walnut) that is a local landmark. It, and a white birch also near the house are trees that Luther Burbank planted. In the taped interview made with John Bregger 11 he mentions these trees, and, also that a small stand of lilacs that remain and were the last of Burbank's projects.

The barn and office no longer exist. The barn survived until 1972 when it was destroyed by fire.

It is possible to restore and maintain the site close to its original state. The trees, shrubs and plants placed there by Burbank have been carefully identified, catalogued and preserved by Dr. James Neilson, Horticulturist of Napa, California, and he has developed a master plan for the grounds. (See Exhibit B, attached).

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Statement of Description (Continued)

Page 16, number 2 states:

"It is of considerable importance to restore the house on the property as soon as possible. Delay will result in considerable damage to the floor and its supports which may in turn further damage sills and wall studs. An architect should be engaged to supervise the restoration. However, we strongly urge that the original architecture, or a possible improvement, using the style common to the turn of the century or its first two decades, be utilized in this and any other structure constructed for the farm."

"This building should be used initially for staff headquarters and as a public service center for the Farm. Its interior should be adapted for future use as a Burbank Museum and to house some of his memorabilia....."

<u>NOTE</u>: It is significant that the above mentioned <u>EXHIBIT B</u>, <u>BURBANK'S</u> <u>EXPERIMENTAL FARM</u>, <u>Master Plan for Rehabilitation</u>, was financed in part by a grant of \$5,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (#A40-42-82B) in 1974.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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_X1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	OTHER (SPECIFY)
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1600-1699	ARCHITECTURE	-AEDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1500-1599	AGRICULTURE	_Xeconomics	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1400-1499	ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	LAW	SCIENCE
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of 'The Burbank Experimental Farm', that is the approximately three acres of the original 18 which is left relatively undisturbed, comes entirely from its use by Luther Burbank between the years 1885 and 1926. Mr. Burbank's contribution to agriculture at this site, through the development of more productive varieties of fruits and nuts, his advancement of the nursery trade, through his improved or novel ornamental varieties, and the light of attention he brought to bear on the whole subject of plants -- their breeding, usefulness and beauty -- by virtue of his experiments at Sebastopol (and other places) justify amply the significance of his farm in the areas of "Agriculture" and "Economics". Also, because of at least two reasons, dealt with below, Mr. Burbank and his farm had a significant impact on "Education".

In his time, Luther Burbank was as famous as his friends Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. His "Santa Rosa" Plum was to the previous fresh eating and shipping plums what Edison's light bulb was to the kerosene lamp; his "Shasta" daisy was as new to the world, and as successful, as Ford's Model T. The development of the Shasta Daisy was very important because Burbank had created a completely new species of flowering plant; both of these plants were developed at the Burbank property. Indeed, most of Burbank's fruit and nut experiments, as well as a significant number of ornamental trials, were carried on. at this place, ¹² where the press and public (at least at first) could not disturb him, and where he had room to raise, for example, five hundred varieties of peach alone, as well as "many rows of Shasta Daisy seedlings, each 700 ft. long." 13 The number of experiments that Burbank started on the property was indeed so great that the Stark Bros. Nursery Horticulturist, John Bregger, who was sent to the farm after Burbank's death, spent nearly two years merely cataloguing, photographing and shipping samples back to Missouri. Four years before his death, Luther Burbank had worried, in a newspaper article, about his failing health and the vast numbers of experiments (at Sebastopol) that might be wholly lost; five years after his death, his fears were vindicated, when JB Keil, last manager of the property for Stark Bros., wrote: "The depression made necessary an abandonment of the actual plant breeding work with the Burbank fruits." 14

Between the years 1936 and 1941, Burbank's widow, Elizabeth, had most of the experimental trees cleared and apple orchards put in. The little house, which Burbank had used as sleeping quarters, and which had been the home successively of Mr. Bregger and Mr. Keil of Stark Bros. fell out of use and into disrepair, ultimately to be vandalized.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPI	HICAL REFER	ENCES		
Bregger, John. Interview Ecoview Environmental Cons	. June 1, 1977. sultants. <u>Envir</u>	onmental Impac	t Analysis Ca. 1973	
Ecoview Environmental Cons Burbank's Experimental Far Hall, Wilbur, ed. and tran D. Appleton-Century Co., 1	rm. Napa, Ca nscriber. Burba	Plan for Rehal	bilitation of Lut	
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Western Sonoma	County Historic	al Society	March 20,	1978
STREET & NUMBER Post Office Box	816		TELEPHONE (707) 823-	7146
CITY OR TOWN Sebastopol			state California	95472
12 STATE HISTORIC PRI THE EVALUATE	ESERVATION			J
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Statement of Significance (Continued) Footnotes

- 1. Phyllis Theibaut Keeney, <u>History of the Site of Luther Burbank Experiment</u> Farm, (Unpublished manuscript, dated May 16, 1973).
- 2. Interview with Richard Keil, son, and Gertrude Keil widow, of Joseph B. Keil, who was Horticulturiest with Stark Bros. Nurseries which had acquired in 1927 "the right to grow, propagate and market any and all of Mr. Burbank's last developments....". (As quoted from a public announcement by Burbank's widow, Elizabeth and related by Keeney.) See Photograph #13 Joseph worked on the Farm on behalf of Stark Bros. from 1931 to 1936, during which time the family resided in the cottage. Interview: July 27, 1977.
- 3. Interview with John Bregger, former Horticulturist with Stark Bros. Research Staff, who was sent for two years (May 1927 to August 1929) to catalog, photograph and ship samples of Burbank's experiments to Stark Bros. in Missouri. June 1, 1977.
- 4. Ibid, Keil.
- 5. Ibid, Keil.
- 6. Ibid, Bregger.
- 7. Luther Burbank, His Methods and Discoveries and Their Practical Application, Edited by Henry Smith Williams, (New York and London: Luther Burbank Press, Vol. XII, 1915).
- 8. Ibid, Keil.
- 9. Ibid, Keil.
- 10. Ibid, Keil.
- 11. Ibid, Bregger.
- 12. <u>Luther Burbank</u>, <u>Partner of Nature</u>, Ed. and transcribed by Wilbur Hall, (D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc. New York, 1939).
- 13. Ibid, Keeney.
- 14. Ibid, Keeney.

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Statement of Significance (Continued)

The City of Sebastopol tried unsuccessfully in the 1960's to get the property recognized as an historical site, and to obtain City, County or State funds to purchase the property. After failing, largely due to the existence of a memorial "Burbank Garden", next to his main home in Santa Rosa, the City of Sebastopol consented to its planned use for apartments, only on condition that about three acres be set aside as a 'Quasi-Park', to be called 'The Burbank Experimental Farm', or 'Grove', with the understanding that "A detailed proposal for the preservation and restoration of the farm and house be submitted within three years." (Sebastopol Planning Commission, 6/1/73). Indeed, by December, 1975, such a proposal -- 'The Master Plan for Rehabilitation of the Burbank Experimental Farm' - was submitted and published, with the aid of a \$5,000 grant from the National Endowment of the Arts. (A40-42-82B)

Eminent consultants on the development of the Master Plan were, Dr. James A. Neilson and Dr. W. James Barry, Ecoview Environmental Consultants, Mr. Robert Cowan, noted nurseryman and horticulturiest of Walnut Creek and Mr. John Bregger. The only remaining person alive who had any management contact with Burbank or the original farm is Mr. Bregger who pays regular visits to the Farm each year, and in February 1976 and again in February 1977 met with the other consultants and the City Manager for professional planning, evaluation and review of the Master Plan.

Part I of the Master Plan states:

"Burbank's own work should be emphasized in the theme of the "Farm." To reflect this theme, the Farm could, if fully developed, be used as: (1) a repository for the perpetuation of plant materials developed by Burbank, (2) a public display of Burbank's plant materials, an illustration of his techniques, and a demonstration of selected important concepts in modern plant breeding and biology, (3) a center for local horticultural activities, and (4) an educational and service center for selected or special purposes.

"The Farm should be a functional and productive unit, operated at least on a partially self-sustaining basis. It should reflect Burbank and his contributions. The special use areas conceived in the land use plan should reincarnate, at least in a small way, the rows of cultivars that characterized the original appearance of the Farm. Some of these could perhaps be sold to the public as mementos, as part of the self-sustaining effort."

From the above, it is obvious that the farm could in the future have a definite educational significance; the question remains as to the educational influence of

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Statement of Significance (Continued)

the Burbank property at the time of its use by Burbank. This influence is amply demonstrated by at least two well-documented aspects of Luther Burbank's life:

- His plantbreeding experiments were the subject of extensive scientific scrutiny, as well as pseudo-scientific and popular accounts. So many ordinary citizens (as well as the famous, such as the botanist Hugo De Vries)came to visit Burbank and see his experiments that in later years he was forced to sell tickets (Apologetically) at the astronomical price of ten dollars per person per hour, to discourage time-consuming interruptions at his Sebastopol farm. (Ticket on file: Western Sonoma County Historical Society)
- 2. Burbank's work was almost wholly based upon the writings of the one he called 'The Master', Charles Darwin, and did much to give credence and substance to Darwin's theories of natural selection, when those theories were the most controversial educational issues of the time.

Burbank lectured and wrote frequently on the subject of eduction, itself. His experiments, he cautioned, showed the value of individual differences; "Children (however) are treated as if they were all cast in the same mold." "The greatest teacher of childhood should be nature." If such opinions were true, then Burbank's farm would be a veritable university.

For forty-one years of his life, Burbank traveled almost daily between his home in Santa Rosa and his Gold Ridge Farm and cottage in Sebastopol. In the light of assembly concurrent resolution No. 228 (Exhibit E) and the recent dedication of a portion of State Highway 12 between Santa Rosa and Sebastopol as "Luther Burbank Memorial Highway." Recognition of the site of Burbank's work at the Sebastopol end of the highway is more than appropriate, and perhaps overdue.

Other Significant Facts:

1. Luther Burbank was elected to the Hall of Fame for Great Americans in Nov, 1976. (Eshibit H)

2. The Burbank papers - descriptions of his methods, field notes, extensive scrapbooks, and miscellaneous unpublished articles are being sought by the Library of Congress.

3. Burbank's horticultural library was obtained from Mrs. Burbank by the Henry Ford Museum at Dearborn, Michigan, in 1967.

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Statement of Major Bibliographical References (Continued)

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Keil, Richard and Gertrude. Interview. July 27, 1977.

Williams, Henry Smith, ed. Burbank, Luther. <u>His Methods and Discoveries and Their Practical Application</u>. New York and London: Luther Burbank Press, Vol. XII, 1915.

