

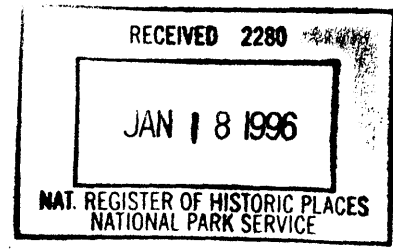
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NPS Form 10-900-a (Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Sebastopol Depot of the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway

other names/site number West County Museum

**2. Location**

street & number 261 South Main Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Sebastopol vicinity N/A  
state California (CA) county Sonoma code 097 zip code 95425

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide X locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 1/4/96  
Signature of certifying official Date

State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the  
National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the  
National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*Harry M. Sapsley 2/16/70*

Entered in the  
National Register

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

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Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>

buildings  
sites  
structures  
objects  
Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

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**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions

Cat: Transportation Sub: Rail-related

Current Functions

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum  
Social Clubhouse

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**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Mission Revival  
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
roof Asphalt  
walls Stucco  
other Stone, Wood

Narrative Description  See Continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations: N/A

Areas of Significance: Transportation

Period of Significance: 1918-1932

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person: N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder : Jones, Brainerd - Architect  
Vogensen, H. P. - Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance: X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**Bibliography**

X See continuation sheet.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repositories: Sonoma County Library, Santa Rosa, California  
West County Museum, Sebastopol, California

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**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property: Less than one acre

**UTM References:**

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	515540	4250100	2	_____

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Boundaries contain a portion of the western part of parcel no. 004-071-028 (Sonoma County Assessor's Office). The boundaries include a rectangular area measuring sixty-eight by sixty-three feet.  See continuation sheet.

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary was drawn to include the Depot and the immediate setting containing integrity.  See continuation sheet.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: John Sharp, M.A. Candidate

Organization: Sonoma State University Date: October 16, 1995

Street & Number: P.O. Box 585 Telephone: (707) 823-8832

City or Town: Cotati State: CA Zip Code: 94931

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**Property Owner**

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name City of Sebastopol  
street & number 7120 Bodega Avenue  
city or town Sebastopol state CA zip code 95472  
telephone (707) 823-7863

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**Additional Documentation**

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See attached:

Continuation Sheets  
Map (USGS 7.5)  
Map (sketch map of nominated property)  
Photo description sheet  
Photos (5)

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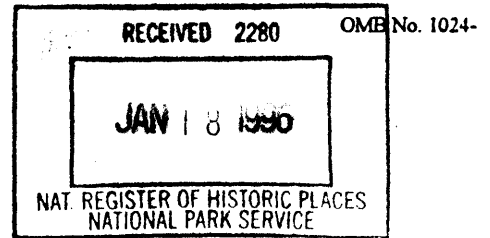
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement**

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This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Sebastopol Depot of the P&SR Railway  
Sonoma County, California

The Sebastopol Depot is a single-story rectangular building measuring approximately twenty feet by forty feet. A separate room measuring approximately ten feet by twenty feet lies to the east side, under an extension of the main building's hipped roof. The building was begun in 1917 and completed in 1918 by the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway for use as a passenger depot, and presently serves as the West County Museum. The architectural style of the building is a cross between Mission Revival and Bungalow/Craftsman: a stuccoed exterior and a wrap-around veranda with arched openings house an interior of redwood wainscoting, plaster ceiling and walls, and terra cotta floor tiles. The building fronts west onto South Main Street, in the heart of downtown Sebastopol. Although alterations were made to the Depot building over the years, renovation efforts in the early 1990s restored the building to its original appearance.

The Sebastopol Depot was built in 1917 and 1918, replacing a smaller wooden depot which was located approximately two hundred feet to the northwest of the present building's location.<sup>1</sup> The building served its intended function as a passenger depot until 1932, the year that the P&SR Railway discontinued passenger service. It is unclear how the building was used immediately after the discontinuation of passenger service (freight service continued), but some time in the 1940s or 1950s the P&SR began leasing the building to a commercial flower shop. It is thought that the Railroad may have continued to use the separate room on the east side of the building for office space and/or storage space. The property was sold to the City of Sebastopol in December of 1980, but the flower shop, Clarmark Florists, continued to lease the building.<sup>2</sup> The Western Sonoma County Historical Society approached the City of Sebastopol in August of 1988 with plans for restoring the building for use as a museum, and was given the lease to the building when Clarmark's lease expired in May of 1990. The restoration effort began on July 4, 1990, and continued sporadically until July 4, 1993, when the West County Museum officially opened. This renovation included restoration of the veranda to its original appearance, as well as cosmetic repairs to the exterior and interior of the building: stripping and repainting walls, windows, doors, and wainscoting, and repairing patches of stucco.<sup>3</sup> Shelving and cabinets were also installed in the small room in the southwest corner of the building so that it could function as a library.

The building rests on a concrete slab, and exhibits the original floor surfaces both inside and out. Terra cotta tiles are present in the interior of both the main depot building and the smaller, separate room (also referred to as the "trainmaster's quarters" or the "baggage room"). The concrete surface of the veranda is approximately five inches lower than that of the interior slab, and is scored into squares approximately 24 inches wide. It has a polished, gray-tinted surface which appears to have been intended to resemble granite.<sup>4</sup>

The exterior walls of both the main building and the trainmaster's quarters are diagonal sheathing over stud framing, and are covered with a rough stucco. The original stucco surface exists on most of the building and was repainted its original gray color during the restoration effort.

The windows in the main depot building are the original six-over-six double-hung wood sash windows; many of the panes appear to be original. The entry door facing west onto South Main Street is the original wood panel door with nine lights above two panels. There is a three-light transom above. An identical door is located in the east wall of the main building. The trainmaster's quarters are separated from the main building by the eight-foot width of the veranda. This single, separate room has double-doors at one end and another side-door. The double doors are replacement flush wood doors set into the original arched opening, which has been filled in around the new door frame. This appears to be the only alteration to the trainmaster's quarters. The side-door is located on the west side of the room, and faces an entry door to the main depot building. The windows in the trainmaster's quarters are three-over-six double-hung wood sash with half-height upper sashes.

The veranda surrounding the main building and connecting the trainmaster's quarters is eight feet wide, with L-shaped double piers at all four corners. The west facade has two single intermediate piers and a pair of double piers which

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**Sebastopol Depot of the P&SR Railway  
Sonoma County, California**

bracket the main entrance. The north and south sides of the veranda each have three single intermediate piers. The east facade, which connects to the trainmaster's quarters, has four single intermediate piers. The bases of the piers are of cut rhyolite from the nearby quarry at Stony Point.<sup>5</sup> They are rectangular in cross-section, measuring approximately 16" by 24," and are four courses high. The upper part of the piers are also rectangular in cross-section, measuring approximately 12" by 21"; they are surfaced with stucco. The archways between the piers are rounded. The ceiling of the veranda is sheathed with 1" by 4" tongue-and-groove matchboard which is mitered at the corners of the veranda. There is evidence in this ceiling of lighting fixtures having been hung at the corners of the building. Although the veranda was enclosed to expand interior space at some point after the railroad's abandonment of the building, the materials associated with this expansion were removed during the Historical Society's recent renovation effort. As a result, the present appearance of the veranda is identical to that of historical photographs and drawings of the building.

The roof is a medium-pitch hipped roof with a smaller hipped extension on the east side. Full-dimensioned 2" by 6" rafter ends are exposed and extend about two feet from the outer face of the veranda. The roof is presently covered with asphalt shingles which were put on in 1984.<sup>6</sup> Historical photographs suggest that the original roofing surface was tar and pebble. Near the center of the roof, on the west side, there is a stucco-encased chimney or flue. It was probably associated with an indoor stove which no longer exists. The railway signs which once rested on the roof are also no longer present. Photographs suggest that the signs were removed some time between 1932 and 1980.

The interior of the main building includes a large room measuring approximately 19' by 29', and three smaller rooms totaling approximately 9' by 19'. Interior walls are the original 5'2" board-and-batten wood wainscoting with lath and plaster above. Ceilings are plaster, with evidence of six ceiling-mounted electric light fixtures in the main room. The most significant changes to the interior have been in the building's floorplan. The northern portion of the main room appears to have been a separate room: the floor surface is discontinuous, and evidence of a wall or other barrier exists. The original function of the three small rooms presently in the southern part of the main building is also unclear, but the wall separating these rooms from the larger main room is original, suggesting that these smaller rooms were part of the original floorplan. Beyond this, it is unclear what the configurations of the smaller rooms (perhaps originally only one or two rooms) themselves were. A drain in the floor of one of these rooms (in the southwest corner) indicates that it was originally a restroom or part of a restroom.

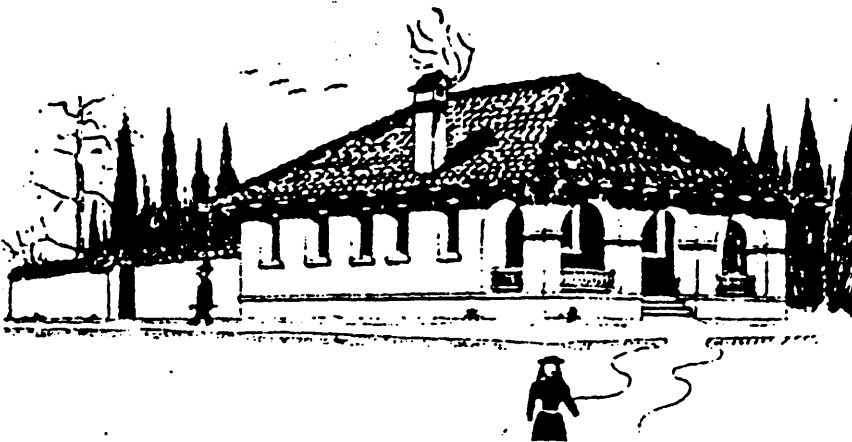
Architecturally, the Sebastopol Depot is a cross between Mission Revival and Bungalow-Craftsman. The Mission Revival movement, which emerged in the 1890s, was widely adopted by the railroads for both large and small depots. Indeed, the nearby P&SR depot in Santa Rosa and the Northwestern Pacific depot in Petaluma were both excellent examples of Mission Revival architecture. While the Sebastopol Depot clearly has some elements of Mission Revival architecture -- the terra cotta tiles, the stucco exterior, and the large, arched veranda -- other essential elements are missing. It never had the tile roof or shaped parapets that characterized the other depots and the style as a whole. Meanwhile, some features of the Sebastopol Depot suggest the influence of the Bungalow or Craftsman movement, which was also popular at the time the Depot was constructed. Most noteworthy are the stone bases of the veranda's stucco piers. Architectural historians Virginia and Lee McAlester cite these "massive" bases, often made of stone, as a trademark of the Craftsman style.<sup>7</sup> The use of local stone in the pier bases and of local wood (redwood) in the interior wainscoting is also suggestive of the Arts and Crafts movement, which "accentuated the individual and the handmade."<sup>8</sup> This stylistic combination, while somewhat unusual, is hardly unheard of. Architectural historian Karen J. Weitze has been able to document the aesthetic link between the Mission Revival and Craftsman movements, and show how the two borrowed from each other. Consider "Sketch for a Mission Cottage" (pictured below), which Weitze characterizes as "a very simple bungalow translated into the idiom of the Mission Revival."<sup>9</sup>



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“Sketch for a Mission Cottage.” The general design of this building strongly resembles the Sebastopol Depot. Jacob Knapp, “Sketch for a Mission Cottage,” in Karen Weitze, *California's Mission Revival* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1984), 81.

While the Depot retains nearly all of its architectural integrity, it is evident from maps and photographs that its physical setting has changed considerably.<sup>10</sup> Most outstanding is the diminished open space around the building – the Depot originally stood as an isolated building surrounded by railroad tracks on the north, south and east sides, and by South Main Street (which also had a track running through it) on the west side. As the different sets of tracks were torn up, commercial buildings and parking lots filled in the empty space. Two reminders of the building's former function still remain, however. The railway's former powerhouse lies approximately 150 feet to the north, and the last P&SR railroad grade (now stripped of rails) lies approximately twenty five feet to the north.

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**Sebastopol Depot of the P&SR Railway  
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### Summary

The Sebastopol Depot stands today as a rare reminder of the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway (the P&SR), the only electric interurban rail line to operate in Sonoma County. While the P&SR had a number of effects on Sonoma County — both economic and cultural — it is explored here primarily as a mode of transport and as the local representative of a national interurban industry. The Sebastopol Depot played a key role in the P&SR from the building's completion in 1918 until the end of passenger service in 1932. It not only served as the "hub" of the railway, but was also the only passenger depot in Sebastopol and an important communications link to the outside world. The Depot's importance to local history has recently been recognized, and has resulted in a successful renovation effort.

### The P&SR: Sonoma County's Electric Interurban

The Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway (P&SR) belonged to a special class of railroads collectively referred to as "electric interurbans." A national phenomenon, the interurban railroad first appeared in the late 1890s, following the development of steam railroads and electric streetcars. The interurban's main contribution was in providing transportation to suburban and rural populations beyond the reach of city streetcars and steam railroads. By filling a vital need for more efficient local transport, the interurban railroads enjoyed rapid growth and prosperity from the turn of the century through World War I. After World War I a slow decline began, and by the middle of the 1930s the interurban had disappeared almost entirely, eclipsed by the increased popularity of the automobile. Sonoma County's only interurban railroad, the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway, illustrates and reflects many of the trends in the national industry.

The interurban railroad arose from the technology of the electric streetcar. Although this technology was gradually developed by several people over a period of fifty years, Frank J. Sprague is recognized as the innovator responsible for the United States' first electric railway.<sup>1</sup> Opened in Richmond, Virginia in 1888, Sprague's railway attracted the attention of municipal officials all over the country, who were desperate for better ways to move urban dwellers back and forth. The electric streetcar, or "trolley," demonstrated several advantages over the three most common modes of urban transportation of that time: horse-drawn cars, steam railroads, and cable cars. It was cleaner and faster than horses or steam engines, cheaper to install than the cable cars, and more reliable than all three previous modes. Sprague was inundated with orders, and by 1902 97 percent of the nation's street railway mileage would be electrically operated, running over more than 15,000 miles of track.<sup>2</sup> Hailed by historians as "one of the most rapidly accepted innovations in the history of technology," the electric railway's effect on American cities was astounding.<sup>3</sup> By shrinking the commuting time of workers, the new trolley cars helped free cities from the constraints on horizontal growth, "causing dramatic changes in population distribution, economic location, and the uses of urban space."<sup>4</sup>

The electric interurban lines, first appearing at the end of the nineteenth century, were an attempt to extend the overwhelming technological and economic success of the urban electric cars to rural and intercity operations. The interurbans' success rested on their ability to fill an economic and geographic niche between the exclusively urban service of electric trolleys and the long-distance service of steam railroads, which typically bypassed small towns. Although the

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line between electric streetcar and interurban railway would remain blurred in densely populated areas such as New England, interurbans generally exhibited unique characteristics which stemmed from their special role in regional transport. They went faster and farther than the urban streetcars, serviced a more rural clientele, and typically offered both passenger and freight connections to long-distance steam railroads and steamers. At the same time, the interurban offered cheaper and more frequent service than steam railroads, and stopped in the small towns and villages which fell between steam-engine routes.

It is in this mold which the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway neatly fits. The P&SR was officially incorporated in June of 1903, the last year of a national boom in interurban construction which had begun in 1900.<sup>5</sup> The rapid expansion of the industry would bring several interurban lines to Northern California, but the P&SR would remain the only one in Sonoma County. The new railway was promoted chiefly by J.A. McNear, a Petaluma grain dealer and leader of the local poultry industry, and the Spreckels group of San Francisco, magnates of California's sugar industry. Three months after incorporation, in September of 1903, the P&SR bought the electric railway franchise in Petaluma (which had yet to be built) and the franchise to all three horse railways operating in Santa Rosa at that time. Although it seems that the P&SR initially intended to convert these Santa Rosa horse-railways to electric lines, only the railway running on Fourth Street would be electrified. It is unclear how long after this acquisition the other Santa Rosa horse cars continued to operate.<sup>6</sup> Three months later the P&SR purchased the paddlewheel steamer *Gold*, which had been traveling daily between Petaluma and San Francisco for years. In the coming years, *Gold* was to be used for both passenger and freight connections to San Francisco.

Although local papers had been buzzing with rumors of the new electric railroad since the beginning of 1903, actual construction didn't begin until April of 1904, when the first spike was driven at the steamer landing in Petaluma. Construction began almost simultaneously at Sebastopol, from which point crews began working both south towards Petaluma and north towards Santa Rosa. Like many interurbans, the P&SR's rails were "mostly laid alongside country roads," in order to lower installation costs by using existing right-of-ways.<sup>7</sup> *The Sebastopol Times* reported that much of the construction work, including grading, bridge construction, fencing, and pole installation, was contracted to local firms, including Charles Pickering, Elmer Tabor, and W.G. Call.<sup>8</sup> W.E. Nichols of Santa Rosa was contracted to build a rock crusher at the Stony Point Quarry to provide ballast for the road bed.<sup>9</sup>

By July 27, 1904, the track from Petaluma to Sebastopol was completed, and a steam-powered construction car (the electricity had yet to be installed) rolled into Sebastopol from Petaluma, attracting a crowd of approximately two hundred people.<sup>10</sup> The line's powerhouse and the original Sebastopol Depot were built by the end of September, as the Sebastopol-Santa Rosa branch neared completion. This early depot would later be replaced by the present building. Meanwhile, construction of the Sebastopol-Forestville branch also began around this time.

The first regular schedule from Petaluma to Santa Rosa went into effect on November 29, 1904, going only as far as the California Northwestern Railroad right-of-way on Sebastopol Avenue in Santa Rosa. Even though a depot area and tracks had been laid on Fourth Street in Santa Rosa, the California Northwestern (CNW) refused to let the competing line cross their tracks.<sup>11</sup> This type of opposition was faced by interurban lines across the country, as steam railroads recognized the interurbans as efficient competitors that would cut into their regional monopolies. Legal and sometimes extra-legal means were used to prevent interurban construction, and railroad opposition "became one of the industry's chronic problems."<sup>12</sup> The conflict which ensued between the P&SR and the CNW, known in local lore as "the Battle of Sebastopol Avenue," would become a famous symbol of the national struggle between these two industries.

The "battle" began quietly enough: the CNW obtained a court injunction to prevent the installation of a crossing, insisting that the P&SR would have to build an expensive overpass at the intersection.<sup>13</sup> The P&SR responded by using horse-drawn cars to re-route passengers, and on at least one occasion used a horse-team to physically drag an electric car

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Sebastopol Depot of the P&SR Railway  
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across planks which had been thrown down on the CNW tracks. A San Francisco court shortly dissolved the injunction, and on March 1, 1905, a P&SR construction crew proceeded to the intersection to cut the CNW track and install a crossing. They found two CNW steam locomotives waiting for them. Fitted with special pipes to spew steam and hot water on the P&SR workers, the CNW trains moved back and forth across the intersection. Hundreds of people gathered to see the excitement, as the two opposing crews did battle for the next five hours. P&SR crews dug furiously to undermine the CNW tracks, while CNW crews on flat cars shoveled dirt into the hole below, spilling some onto the heads and shoulders of the P&SR diggers. Fistfights erupted, an electrified trolley wire fell, and two horse-drawn carriages driven onto the tracks to block the CNW cars were smashed to kindling. The highlight of the chaos came as P&SR Director F.A. Bush threw himself on the tracks in front of an oncoming steam engine. The engine ground to a halt, and CNW crews tried to break his grip on the rails while P&SR crews attempted to keep him there. The Santa Rosa police came at about this time and dragged off a number of CNW people, as they had no legal right to obstruct the crossing installation. The battle continued, however, and at about five o'clock CNW president A.W. Foster arrived with 150 reinforcements. He was promptly given a telegraphed restraining order from San Francisco Superior Court, and shortly called off all of the CNW men. Construction resumed, and the first electric car rolled through the crossing at some time after midnight. The main line was complete.<sup>14</sup>

After the hardships with the CNW, 1905 proved to be a good year for the P&SR. The extension from Sebastopol to Forestville was completed on July 15, and freight warehouses and passenger depots were built in both Green Valley (later Graton) and Forestville. Although passenger statistics for this year are unavailable, hourly trains began running between Santa Rosa and Petaluma, with daily passenger and freight connections to San Francisco via the steamer *Gold*. A number of extensions were proposed to places such as Healdsburg, Tomales, Pedro Point, Sonoma and Napa. Of these, construction had begun only on the Pedro Point-Petaluma branch before the 1906 earthquake hit on April 18. Although the railway wasn't physically

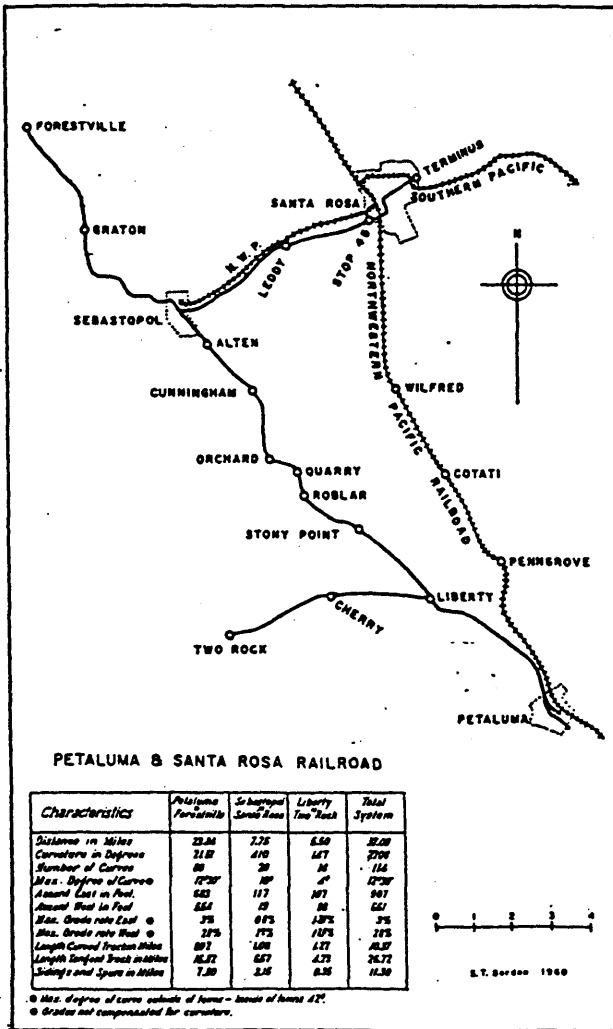


Figure 1. P&SR rail lines at their high point from 1922 to 1925. After Stanley T. Borden, "The P&SR Electric R.R.," *The Western Railroader* 23(4): 9.

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damaged, the local economy was shaken, and the proposed extensions would never be built.<sup>15</sup> The weakened economy and increased steamer and rail competition forced financial reorganization in 1907, despite a steady increase in passenger traffic. By 1910 the company was showing a profit again, and by 1912 two new extensions were proposed: from Santa Rosa to Petaluma via Cotati, and from Liberty to Two Rock. The Two Rock extension was built during 1913, and would be the railway's last significant extension. It was during this period from 1912 through 1914 that the railway's passenger service peaked, with an annual average of 757,000 passengers.<sup>16</sup>

A devastating fire occurred on the steamer *Petaluma* in 1914. The cost of replacing the steamer, combined with a slow drop in passenger revenues after 1914, carried the railway back into the red ink. The P&SR's financial problems mirrored those of the interurban industry as a whole, which was "characterized by moderate profits even in its best years."<sup>17</sup> The company was refinanced by stockholders in 1918 as the "Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railroad" (instead of "Railway"). It was during this second period of financial instability that the present Sebastopol Depot was built. Begun in 1917, the new building replaced the smaller original depot, which could no longer accommodate the increased passenger traffic. The second depot was completed in June of 1918, just months before the railway was officially renamed.

A second steamer fire occurred in November of 1920, this time claiming the steamer *Gold*, as well as the wharf, warehouse, and twelve box cars. Although they were shortly rebuilt, misfortune visited the P&SR again the next year with completion of the county highway which paralleled the rail lines. The number of annual riders dropped by 147,000, with the heaviest losses on the Two Rock branch.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these hardships, a small spur extension in West Petaluma was completed in May of 1922, and renovations and maintenance continued throughout the mid-1920s. The Two Rock branch was closed in 1925, however, and an attempt by P&SR officials to sell the road to the Western Pacific in 1927 marked the beginning of the interurban's final tailspin from passenger service. After complex legal and financial wrangling between the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Anglo-California Trust Company, and several of the region's major railroads, the P&SR was finally bought in 1932 by the Northwest Pacific, the railway's old competitor. By this time the automobile had cut even more deeply into the P&SR passenger and freight traffic: the number of passengers had dropped from a high of 760,000 in 1912 to 162,000 in 1931.<sup>19</sup> It was no surprise when all passenger service was discontinued in June of 1932, the same year that witnessed the national peak of interurban rail abandonment.<sup>20</sup> Although an occasional freight train still rolled along the old P&SR rails, Sonoma County's love affair with the electric interurban had clearly ended.

The electric motors and overhead wires were removed in 1947 and replaced with diesel engines. The steamer *Petaluma*, the last to operate on San Francisco Bay, was retired in 1950 and replaced by tug boats. The Liberty-Two Rock branch was torn up in 1952, the tug service ended in 1959, and a series of track abandonments took place throughout the 1960's and 1970's. The P&SR disappeared entirely in 1984, as the last remaining stretch from Graton to Santa Rosa was abandoned and the company officially folded.<sup>21</sup> Despite local enthusiasm for the creation of a sightseeing train, the P&SR's final parent company, the Southern Pacific Railroad, tore up the remaining stretches of track in 1987. The grade between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa was bought by Sonoma County later that same year, and has since then served as a biking and jogging trail.

The P&SR played a key role in the development of southwestern Sonoma County, and especially the Anay Township, from 1904 through the early 1930s. By providing a freight service vital to agricultural expansion, as well as cheap and frequent passenger service between local communities, the railway brought heavy population and economic growth to the area, as well as significant social changes.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, there are only four architectural reminders of this important era in local transportation: the powerhouse in Sebastopol and the three former depots in Sebastopol, Petaluma and Santa Rosa.<sup>23</sup> The Petaluma Depot has been moved from its original location, and the Santa Rosa Depot has

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been extensively altered for use as a restaurant.<sup>24</sup> Only the Sebastopol Depot and powerhouse retain essential integrity of setting and design.

### **The Sebastopol Depot**

Built in 1917 and 1918 to replace a smaller wooden depot, the Sebastopol Depot played a key role in local transportation until the end of the P&SR's passenger service in 1932. The Depot was unique in the area in serving as the hub of the electric rail system. Located between the railway's four terminal points, hundreds of thousands of passengers and untold tons of local agricultural products passed through the Sebastopol station each year on their way to Santa Rosa and Petaluma. Another facet of the Depot's significance in local transport was its role as an information link to the outside world. Telegraphs, news, mail, packages -- all of these entered small communities through the local depot in the days before long distance telephones and widespread radio networks. In the case of Sebastopol, the P&SR depot became the prime focus of these services in 1917, when the Northwestern Pacific announced that it was abandoning both its passenger service and its Wells Fargo and U.S. Mail service between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa.<sup>25</sup> Both of these markets would be left to the electric railroad, whose competition was cited as the principal reason for the change. Finally, the importance of the building to the local community was clearly evidenced by the media of the day. For example, a cartoon entitled "Sebastopol at a Glance," appearing in *The Sebastopol Times* of February of 1918, offered sketches meant to summarize the community.<sup>26</sup> The P&SR depot is one of only three buildings pictured; the other two are the bank and (ironically) the town's only gas station.

The Sebastopol Depot's central role in the economic and social life of the area gradually declined with the rise of the automobile and other technologies, and ended entirely in 1932 with the discontinuation of passenger service. Although the Depot would be owned by the P&SR until 1980, the building was leased for commercial use in its later years, serving as a flower shop beginning in the 1940s or 1950s. This use continued after 1980, when the building was purchased by its present owner, the City of Sebastopol.<sup>27</sup>

Widespread community interest in the Sebastopol Depot resurfaced in the late 1980s, after the Western Sonoma County Historical Society approached the City of Sebastopol with a proposal to restore the building for use as a local history museum. Restoration efforts began on July 4, 1990, and would continue on and off for the next three years. A groundswell of public and private support accompanied the restoration in the form of volunteer labor, financial donations, grant monies, and well-attended benefit events.<sup>28</sup> Beautifully restored to its original appearance, the former Depot officially opened as the West County Museum on July 4, 1993. The Depot has gone full circle, once again playing a significant role in the life of the community. In addition to offering bi-monthly historical exhibits, it also houses the Western Sonoma County Historical Society and a small historical library.

### **Conclusion**

The Sebastopol Depot is a building of exceptional historical significance to Sebastopol and southwestern Sonoma County. It is one of the last physical reminders of the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway, an interurban rail line which shaped the cultural and economic landscape of the area for more than two decades. While exhibiting the best architectural integrity of the three remaining P&SR depots, the Sebastopol Depot also stands out in terms of historical significance -- it

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served as both the hub of the rail system and as an important communications link to the Sebastopol area. Recent efforts by the West County Historical Society have contributed to its historical stature by restoring not only its physical appearance, but also its place within the life of the community. The Sebastopol Depot stands today as a living symbol of local history.

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**Endnotes**

**Section 7**

<sup>1</sup>Compare *Map of Sebastopol, California* (Sanborn Map Company, 1911), pl. 5 with *Map of Sebastopol, California* (Sanborn Map Company, 1929), pl. 6.

<sup>2</sup>"Grant Deed" (On file at West County Museum, 31 December 1980); records of the property from this date to present can be found in the records of the City of Sebastopol.

<sup>3</sup>Conversations with renovation volunteers; scrapbooks housed in the museum also document this process.

<sup>4</sup>Much of the architectural description of the building is taken from a description prepared in 1992 by Donald Dakan, AIA.

<sup>5</sup>*Sebastopol Times*, 31 August 1917; this is the same stone used as ballast in the railroad bed.

<sup>6</sup>File housed in West County Museum.

<sup>7</sup>Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 454.

<sup>8</sup>Karen Weitze, *California's Mission Revival* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1984), 116.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>10</sup>See *Map of Sebastopol, California* (Sanborn Map Company, 1929), pl. 6.

**Section 8**

<sup>1</sup>"Railway" generally refers to electric-powered streetcar lines; the interurban lines were referred to as both "railways" and "railroads."

<sup>2</sup>George W. Hilton and John F. Due, *The Electric Interurban Railways in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 7.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Raymond A. Muhl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 36.

<sup>5</sup>Hilton and Due, 23.

<sup>6</sup>Stanley T. Borden, "Petaluma and Sant Rosa Electric Railroad," *The Western Railroader* 23(4) (April 1960): 6.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert H. Kneiss, *Redwood Railways* (Berkeley: Howell North, 1956), 126. Hilton and Due explain that this practice gave the interurbans an edge over steam railroads, the installation of which required expensive cut-and-fill work.

<sup>8</sup>*Sebastopol Times*, 2 January 1904.

<sup>9</sup>*Press Democrat*, 6 April 1904.

<sup>10</sup>*Sebastopol Times*, 30 July 1904.

<sup>11</sup>The CNW is alternately referred to as the San Francisco and Northern Pacific Railroad (SF&NPRR), the name of the local subsidiary that the CNW operated in the Santa Rosa area. It would later become the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP).

<sup>12</sup>Hilton and Due, 25. They cite "the Battle of Sebastopol Avenue" as an example.

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<sup>13</sup> Hilton and Due explain that the railroads commonly used these techniques to bankrupt new electric lines with prohibitively high construction costs and legal fees; sometimes they were successful. Even if the electric lines won, the newer line was always responsible for installing and maintaining the crossing.

<sup>14</sup> The "battle" appears in numerous local histories and regional and national railroading books; Kneiss provides one of the more detailed narratives.

<sup>15</sup> The April 21 *Press Democrat* reported that "the electric railroad is already on the scene and is at work;" April 25 *Press Democrat* advertised the usual P&SR route, but with Oakland as the steamer terminus instead of San Francisco.

<sup>16</sup> Borden, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Hilton and Due, 186. They explain that despite the interurban's popularity and prevalence, several aspects of the industry caused them to operate at a very low profit margin.

<sup>18</sup> Borden, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Borden, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Hilton and Due, 215. Nationally, 1,303 miles of passenger rails were abandoned this year.

<sup>21</sup> See Fred Stindt's *The Northwestern Pacific Railroad* (published privately by the author, 1985) for an overview of the P&SR's later years.

<sup>22</sup> See John Sharp, "The Sebastopol Depot: Placing Its Historical Significance in Technological, Economic, and Cultural Contexts" (unpublished manuscript, on file at the Northwest Information Center of the California Historical Resources File System, Sonoma State University, 1995) for a more detailed investigation of the P&SR's effects on Sonoma County.

<sup>23</sup> The former P&SR powerhouse is on the National Register of Historic Places; see Dennis Harris, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway Powerhouse" (on file at the Office of Historic Preservation, Sacramento, California, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> See Adair Heig, *History of Petaluma, a California River Town* (Petaluma, California: Scottwall Associates, 1982), 140, for information on the Petaluma Depot; other former depot was visited by author.

<sup>25</sup> *Sebastopol Times*, 16 November 1917.

<sup>26</sup> *Sebastopol Times*, 8 February 1917.

<sup>27</sup> "Grant Deed" (31 December 1980), on file at West County Museum.

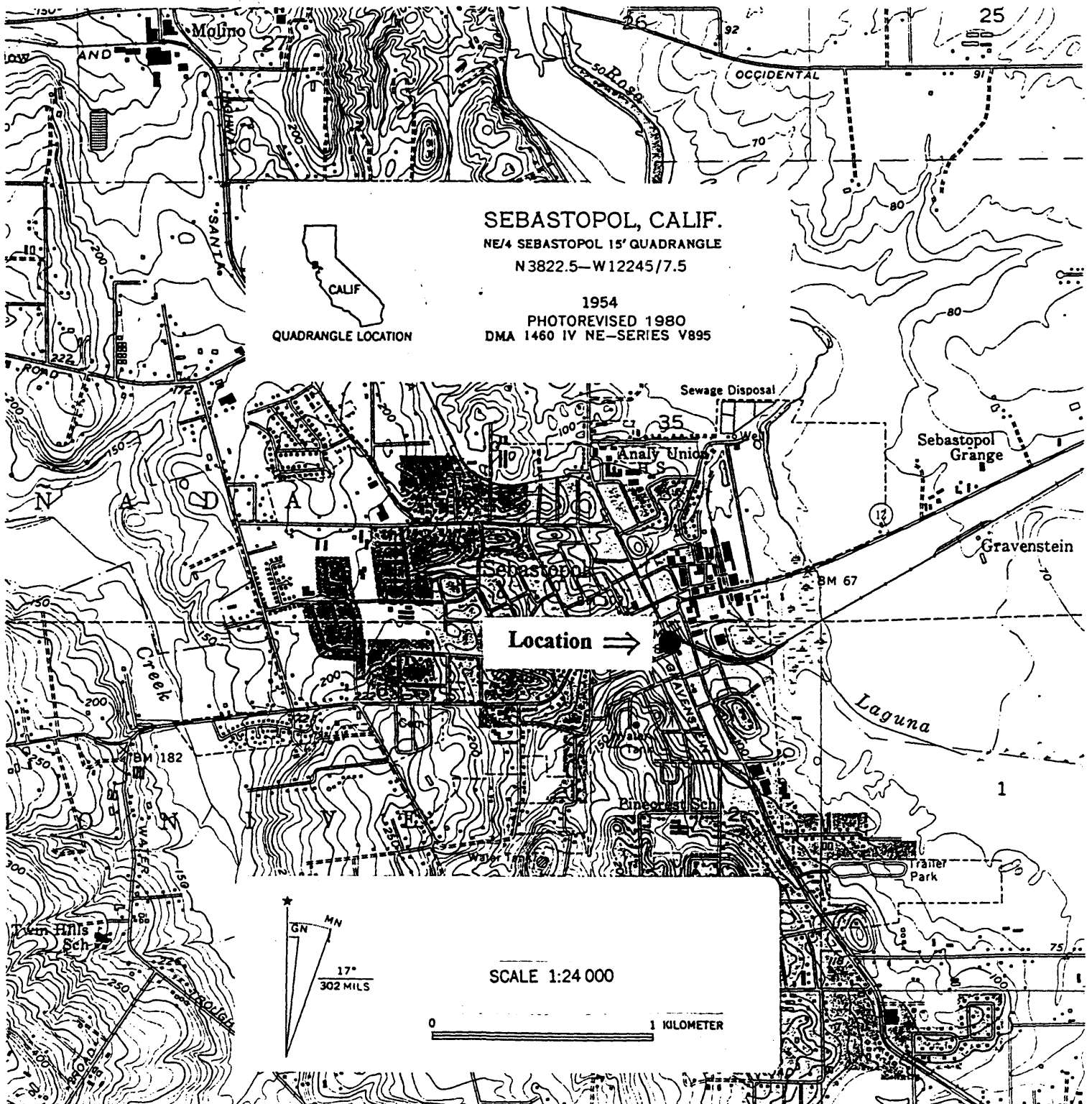
<sup>28</sup> Scrapbooks housed in the depot (now the Museum) document the renovation and extensive community involvement.

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**Sebastopol Depot of the P&SR Railway  
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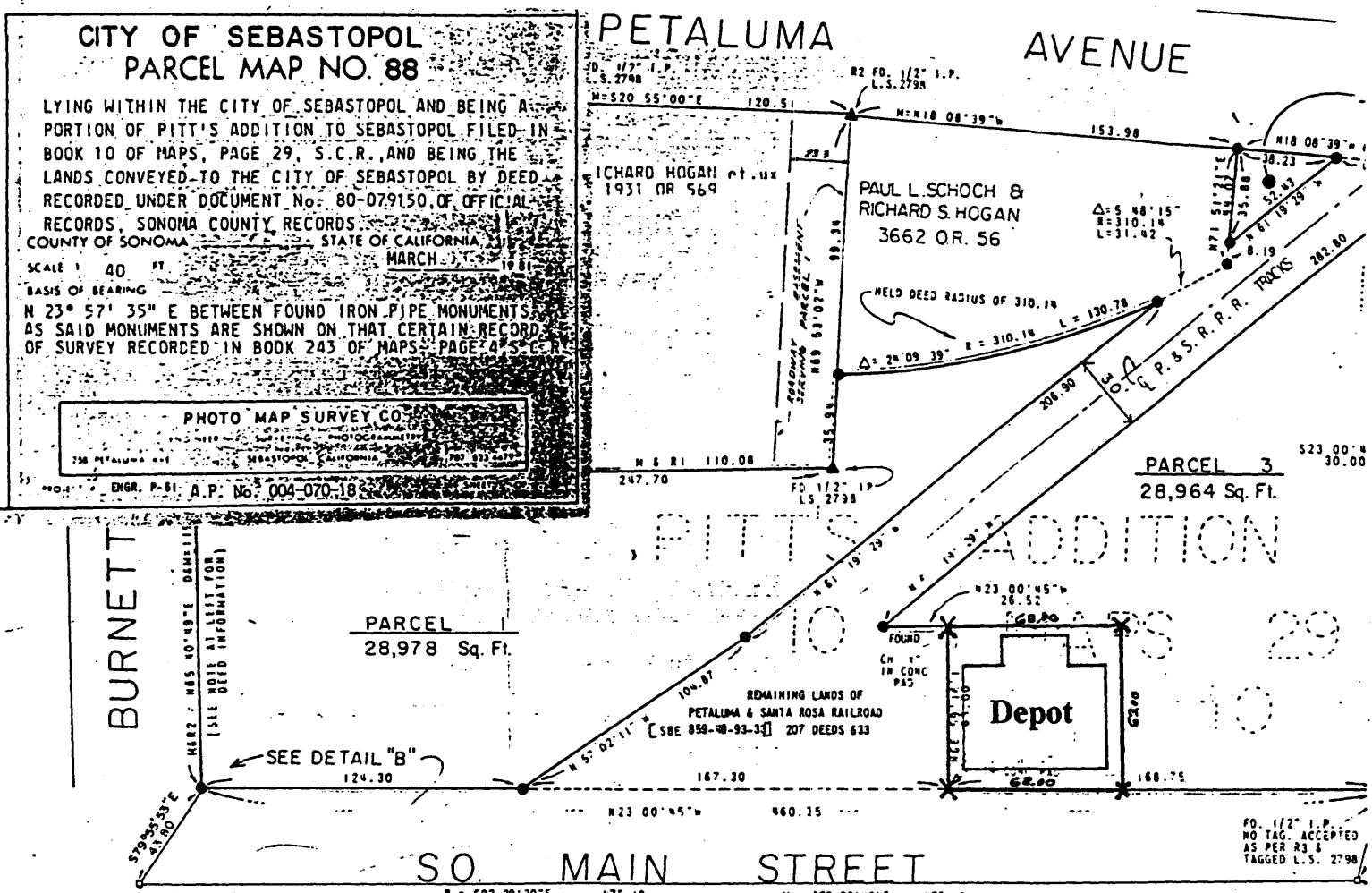
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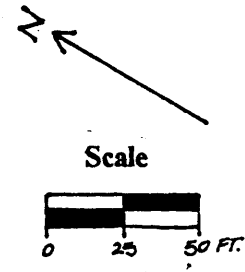
DEED OUT BY DEED 676 A.C. 431 148.8



**LEGEND**

- R1 PLAT OF SURVEY BY R.S. HOGAN, DATED NOV. 28, 1962. ON FILE IN THIS OFFICE UNDER JOB NO. H-136
  - R2 RECORD OF SURVEY, RECORDED IN BOOK 243 OF MAPS, PAGE 4, S.C.R.
  - R3 PLAT OF SURVEY BY R.S. HOGAN, DATED OCT. 1960. ON FILE IN THIS OFFICE UNDER JOB NO. F-112
  - R4 RECORD OF SURVEY, RECORDED IN BOOK 202 OF MAPS, PAGE 22, S.C.R.
- S.C.R. SONOMA COUNTY RECORDS  
O.R. OFFICIAL RECORDS
- FOUND IRON PIPE 1/2" DIA. TAGGED L.S. 2798
  - R & M RECORD COURSE AND/OR MEASURED COURSE
  - ▼ FOUND DEED CALL OR RECORD IRON PIPE, SIZE AS SHOWN
  - ✕ FOUND CHISLED "X" IN CONC. PAD
  - \*\* PER RECORD OF SURVEY 306 MAPS 48

✕ — ✕ = boundary of nominated area



R = S27 29' 20" E 475.19 M = S23 09' 40" E 475.10  
(AS SHOWN ON THE CITY OF SEBASTOPOL HORIZ CONTROL NET MAP ON FILE IN THE OFFICE OF THE CITY ENGINEER)

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**Photographs:**

1.
  1. **Name:** Sebastopol Depot
  2. **Address:** 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  3. **Photographer:** Unknown
  4. **Date:** Between 1918 and 1932; exact date unknown.
  5. **Location of Negative:** West Sonoma County Historical Society, 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  6. **Description of View:** Looks southeast; shows building's north and west facades. Passengers can be seen boarding electric train.
2.
  1. **Name:** Sebastopol Depot/West County Museum
  2. **Address:** 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  3. **Photographer:** Valeska Lattin
  4. **Date:** 1993
  5. **Location of Negative:** West Sonoma County Historical Society, 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  6. **Description of View:** Looks east; shows building's west and north (slightly) facades.
3.
  1. **Name:** Sebastopol Depot/West County Museum
  2. **Address:** 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  3. **Photographer:** Valeska Lattin
  4. **Date:** 1993
  5. **Location of Negative:** West Sonoma County Historical Society, 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  6. **Description of View:** Looks west; shows building's east and south (slightly) facades. Small, hipped-roof extension on the right was originally the trainmaster's quarters.
4.
  1. **Name:** Sebastopol Depot/West County Museum
  2. **Address:** 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  3. **Photographer:** John Sharp
  4. **Date:** October 15, 1995
  5. **Location of Negative:** West Sonoma County Historical Society., 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  6. **Description of View:** Looks east; shows building's north facade.
5.
  1. **Name:** Sebastopol Depot/West County Museum
  2. **Address:** 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  3. **Photographer:** John Sharp
  4. **Date:** October 15, 1995
  5. **Location of Negative:** West Sonoma County Historical Society, 261 South Main St., Sebastopol, CA
  6. **Description of View:** Looks east; shows building's south facade.