

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. **NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES** Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Larsen Family House

other names/site number Kimberly's Jewelry

2. Location

street & number 84 State Street  not for publication

city or town Willits  vicinity

state California code CA county Mendocino code 045 zip code 95490

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 8/30/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State of 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 certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:)

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper  
Edson W. Beall  
Enter in the National Register

10/5/95  
Date of Action

Larsen Family House  
Name of Property

Mendocino County, CA  
County and State

**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

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store  
DOMESTIC: secondary structure  
DOMESTIC: single dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls WOOD: weatherboard  
roof WOOD: shingle  
other WOOD: shingle

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1904

**Significant Dates**

1904

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Mendocino County Museum, Willits, CA

Larsen Family House  
Name of Property

Mendocino County, CA  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	0
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4	6	9	6	6	0
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4	3	6	2	5	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3 

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Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Susie Van Kirk

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date March 22, 1995

street & number P.O. Box 568 telephone (707) 822-6066

city or town Bayside state CA zip code 95524

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Larry W. and Virginia L. Stranske

street & number 84 State Street telephone (707) 459-2234

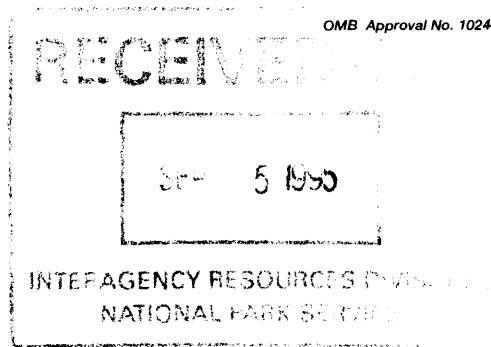
city or town Willits state CA zip code 95490

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**



Section number 7 Page 1

Larsen Family House  
Mendocino County, CA

Description

Summary Paragraph

The Larsen Family House occupies a corner lot in the Northwestern Addition to the Town of Willits, a rural community in northern California. Part of a streetscape that includes other turn-of-the-century houses and bungalow styles, the house is quint-essential Queen Anne architecture. Built on a platform framing system using select redwood lumber, the one-and-a-half story house covers 2,827 square feet of floor space. Significant exterior features include the corner tower, wrap-around veranda with curved windows, cutaway bays, gables, and spindlework detail. The house is in excellent condition and retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and setting.

Location

Located about 130 miles north of the San Francisco Bay area, Willits is a town of approximately 5,000 inhabitants. Part of the Little Lake Valley, settled in 1855 for its agricultural potential, Willits had its beginnings a decade later as a commercial center for the growing valley community. But forests of giant redwood trees, stretching from the valley westward about 25 miles to the Pacific Ocean and the famous Mendocino coast, offered an unparalleled opportunity for economic return. Among the more significant developers of that opportunity was the Northwestern Redwood Company, whose milling operations at Willits and rail connections to the San Francisco Bay area brought a new dimension to the town's social and economic life.

The plat of the Company's Northwestern Addition to Willits was filed for record in April 1902. The addition consisted of 27 whole or partial blocks, the majority of which were located west of Main street, now Highway 101, the major south-to-north connector between San Francisco and the Oregon border. Blocks one through seven were located east of Main and faced State, Commercial, Humboldt, Marin, and Main streets. The Larsen Family House occupies lot 5 in block 7 at the northwest corner of Humboldt and State streets, just one block east of Highway 101.

Setting

The property, 50 feet by 150 feet, consists of the house, a garage to which a shed was added, and small yards at the front and rear of the house. At the rear property line and facing the side street is a two-vehicle garage which measures 19 feet wide and 20 feet 8 inches long. It has a gable roof of galvanized sheet metal and walls of clapboard. The west wall contains a door and a small, paneless window. The east wall has two sliding doors. On both walls is a narrow stringcourse about ten feet from the ground. Attached to the south side of the garage is a shed-roof addition, 12 feet wide and 20 feet 8 inches long. A row of six windows extends along the south wall.

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Larsen Family House  
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Construction dates for the garage/shed building can only be estimated. The 1911 Sanborn fire map shows a single outbuilding along Humboldt street at the rear of the house, but not where the present building is located. One informant who lived in the house in the mid-1930's recalled the present garage/shed as it is today. Assuming the garage was built for the Larsen Family's first car, a 1910's date is reasonable. The shed would be a later addition, perhaps in the 1920's. The garage/shed is a noncontributing building, but it is not intrusive to the architectural integrity of the house.

There is virtually no west side yard as the house extends almost to the property line. The east side yard is small and appears as an extension of the front yard, following the curve of the wrap-around veranda. Yard vegetation includes low-growing shrubs and flowers below the veranda and beneath the bays. Two flowering trees in the front yard are part of a row that extends across the front yards of the adjoining houses to the west. A third is located in the east side yard. In the rear yard are two producing walnut trees, planted probably in the 1910's by Peter Larsen, and a single redwood tree. Bush roses and an overgrown hedge, now intertwined with grape vines which still bear fruit, border the side street. An unpainted, vertical-board fence marks the west and rear property lines.

Directly west of the house and facing State street are two, turn-of-the-century houses with gables and cutaway bays. Across State street from the property and facing Humboldt street is a fine Craftsman bungalow. Across Humboldt street east of the property and facing State street is a line of early bungalows, dating to the 1910's. To the rear of the property on the north is a vacant lumberyard, but adjacent to the back fence is a dwelling and studio, apparently converted from an existing building.

At the southeast corner of Humboldt and State streets diagonally across from the property and covering block 5 of the addition is the City Park. Donated by the Northwestern Redwood Company to the town, the Park was designed by the Superintendent of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, but, "of course, on a much smaller scale." In the spring of 1902, walkways, benches, and a band stand were constructed and hundreds of trees planted, including three giant sequoias from the famous Calaveras Grove in the Sierra. Progressive officials of the Northwestern Redwood Company were doing their "utmost to make Willits a good town" by providing this "beautiful pleasuring ground." Continuing to be enjoyed by local residents, the Park enhances and complements the early twentieth century character of the neighborhood.

Description of House

The Larsen Family House is a one-and-a-half story, rectangular Queen Anne residence, built by the Northwestern Redwood Company in 1904. Characteristic Queen Anne features are displayed in the steeply pitched gable-on-hip roof with projecting side gables, cutaway bays, asymmetrical front facade and wrap-around veranda, a corner tower, and spindlework detail. Gables and bays, the spacious veranda with its curved windows,

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Mendocino County, CA

decorative woodwork, and roof projections are used to avoid the flat wall surface shunned in Queen Anne architecture.

It rests on a concrete foundation, which replaced the original post-and-pier foundation about thirty years ago. The house sits high off the ground with a four-foot crawl space between the floor and the foundation. A false-block wooden siding covers this space on the side and front elevations except around the veranda which has latticework skirting. Wall cladding on the main house is a center-grooved, horizontal shiplap; the rear enclosed porch has a narrow, vertical lap board. A drip cap tops a wide stringcourse that marks the junction of the foundation and wall cladding. The house has corner boards, a wide-board frieze under the eaves, plain window mouldings, panels on the bays and recessed front entry, new unpainted shingles on the tower and dormer and in the gables, and a new redwood shingle roof. The original wooden gutters were replaced about thirty years ago with metal ones.

The front facade is a mixture of shapes and textures. Projecting from the roof at the southeast corner is a witch's hat tower, decorated with brackets and clad in new shingles. A pair of single-pane, double-hung windows lights the interior alcove. Beneath the tower is the curve of a wrap-around veranda with turned posts and a spindlework balustrade and frieze. To the left of the front entrance is a cutaway bay beneath a pedimented gable. Single-pane, double-hung side windows are recessed behind the same spindlework as the porch frieze. The center bay window is divided into a large lower pane and a smaller upper one. Panels give texture to the space above and below the windows. The gable has a single stationary window, new shingles, brackets under the pediment, and a lacy spindlework bargeboard. The east elevation repeats the gable and cutaway bay of the front, except the center window is replaced with a pair of single-pane, double-hung windows.

In the roof above the front door is a small dormer, newly clad in shingles and sporting new colored squares of glass bordering a larger, clear pane. Above the dormer, a gable projects from the roof hip. It repeats the spindlework and new shingles of the bay's gable. Marking the top of the porch steps, a smaller gable, covered with new shingles, projects from the porch roof.

Somewhat offset from the veranda steps, the front door is recessed beyond a slight step-up. Panels decorate the alcove surrounding the door which contains a single pane in the upper portion. Horizontal panels and incised and beaded ornamentation decorate the door.

Where the house curves beneath the tower, four windows light the interior space. All are single-pane and double-hung, but the center two are noteworthy for their curved glass. The angles and straight lines of the gables and bays are in sharp contrast to the soft curves of the tower, veranda, wall, and windows at the southeast corner of the house.

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Larsen Family House  
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The west wall of the house is flat and without decoration. There are two pairs of single-pane, double-hung windows and a shorter bathroom window of the same arrangement. Marking the center of the wall is a roof gable containing a single, stationary window and clad in new shingles.

At the rear of the east wall is a pair of short, single-pane, double-hung windows that identifies the kitchen. Beneath these windows in the foundation covering is a horizontal casement window that lights the crawl space.

Projecting from the hip at the rear of the house is another gable covered with new shingles. Below it is a flat skylight which lights the upper floor. Attached to the back of the house and under a separate roof is an enclosed porch. Screened-in originally, the porch now has two 6/6 windows in the east wall and three 6/6 windows and a new door in the north wall. A single window at the west end of the rear wall is original. This interior space, off the porch, contained a toilet and washroom.

The interior of the house has been altered by the removal of walls, eliminating the central hall and creating one room where there had been a front parlor and rear living room. This large space, once used as a music studio, is now a display room for Kimberley's Jewelry, owned by Larry and Virginia Stranske. The two bedrooms and bath on the west side of the house remain as they were originally with the rear bedroom connected to the large room by French doors, which are also present in the doorway between the large room and a dining area and the kitchen. The original lath and plaster walls, window mouldings, baseboard, and picture rails are still present. The bathroom, located on the west side of the house between the front and rear bedrooms, has not been remodeled and still displays the narrow, lapped board on the walls and floor.

The second floor was never finished and, in fact, there was no access, except by a ladder in the second bedroom closet. Present owner Larry Stranske, a teacher of wood shop at Willits High School for more than thirty years, recently completed a lovely curved stairway which begins just inside the front door. Constructed of local oak and walnut, the stairs lead to a newly-finished upstairs highlighted by a gleaming chinquapin floor. The tower, dormer, and gables create unique spaces and light to this upper floor, now finished as living quarters for the Stranskes.

#### Alterations and Integrity

Exterior alterations to the house have generally been in the form of maintenance and repair. The noticeable alterations are restricted to the rear of the house and include the skylight, porch enclosure, and door and window additions. These alterations, however, preserve the original shape of the house, are not visible from State street and only partially visible from the side street, and are not intrusive.

Originally the house was painted green, but throughout Larsen Family ownership, it was white, including the patterned shingles in the gables, dormer, and tower. The small



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windows in the gables and dormer were of clear glass. A white picket fence extended across the front of the property and around the east side yard. A wisteria vine on the veranda and palm trees on either side of the front walk added decidedly Victorian touches to the house. The living area, lighted by the east side bay, was accessed directly from the veranda by a side door. There was a screened-in back porch, an enclosed toilet and washroom at the northwest corner of the house, and a boardwalk from the porch to the garage.

It is unclear when the east side door off the veranda was removed, but one informant recalled its presence when she lived in the house in the 1940's. During the Leggs' ownership in the 1940's and 1950's, the kitchen was enlarged and the windows on the north wall at the east corner were added. In the early 1960's, during the Fulkersons' ownership, the house was put on a concrete foundation, the wooden gutters were replaced with metal ones, and the house was roofed with composition shingles.

Interior changes to the original floorplan were made during Emma Larsen Wade Garaventa's occupancy of the house between about 1925 and 1944. Two informants who lived in the house as children and teenagers recalled that Emma liked big rooms and was responsible for removing the hall wall and the wall between the front parlor and the living room, creating one large space, now used by the jewelry store. The fireplace and doorway in the north wall of the living room were removed in the 1980's.

When the present owners, Larry and Virginia Stranske, purchased the house in late 1990, the house was in serious need of maintenance and repair. The assessor described the interior as "original, delapidated." Since acquisition of the property, the Stranskes have renovated the interior, installed large beams to support the ceiling where the walls were removed, added the stairway, and finished the second floor. They replaced the roof with redwood shingles, added unpainted shingles to the gables, dormer, and tower, added colored glass panes to the small windows in the gables and dormer, and painted the exterior.

Despite its age, numerous ownerships, and periods of neglect, the Larsen Family House retains its architectural integrity as displayed in materials, design, workmanship, and setting. The house is in excellent condition and a notable representative of that popular Victorian style known as Queen Anne. Identifying characteristics of this style remain intact, specifically its form and avoidance of flat surfaces evident in the corner tower, wrap-around veranda and curved windows, gables over cutaway bays, spindle-work decoration, and shingles.

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Larsen Family House  
Mendocino County, CA

Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

The Larsen Family House, built in 1904, is historically significant under National Register criterion C as an excellent example of Queen Anne architecture. It was built as a showpiece by the Northwestern Redwood Company to promote development of its subdivision and the purchase of construction materials from its Willits lumberyard. Retaining integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and setting, it displays those distinctive characteristics that identify this popular Victorian house, including a steeply pitched roof of irregular shape, shingles, gables above cutaway bays, wrap-around veranda, corner tower, and spindlework detail. It remains the single best example of high-style Queen Anne architecture in Willits.

History and Significance of Property

The Larsen Family House is quintessential Queen Anne architecture, the purest and most Victorian of that style extant in Willits. Built after the turn-of-the-century when transitional styles were moving away from the Victorian into the Craftsman period, the house has a full complement of identifying Queen Anne characteristics and is uncompromised by features of other styles.

The discussion of Queen Anne houses in Virginia and Lee McAlester's book, A Field Guide to American Houses, lists identifying features, shape subtypes, decorative subtypes, and variants and details. The Larsen Family House fits perfectly into these descriptions: steeply pitched roof of irregular shape, shingles, cutaway bay windows, asymmetrical facade, hipped roof with cross gables, spindlework detail, differing wall textures, corner tower, and wrap-around veranda. It retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, as well as setting, having experienced only minor alterations, none of which is intrusive.

The Little Lake Valley, where Willits is located some 130 miles north of the San Francisco Bay area, was settled as a farming area shortly after California became a state in 1850. Part of Mendocino County, Willits became the commercial hub of the valley, beginning with the first necessities--a store, blacksmith shop, and saloon. Called initially Willitsville for an early settler and store owner, Hiram Willits, the town became a "thriving, beautiful hamlet with about one hundred inhabitants" by 1880, when a history of the county was written. At that time the community had fourteen businesses, including a hotel and a restaurant, and the "neat and thrifty appearance of the homes and places of business of the people of the place betoken[ed] prosperity beyond mediocrity."

Events at the turn-of-the-century significantly changed the focus of the community's social and economic life, expanding it beyond the valley and bringing the area's population to 3,000 by 1905. Where agriculture had initiated and encouraged settlement and

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growth, redwood trees and a highly profitable timber industry moved Willits into the twentieth century. A.W. Foster, a wealthy Bay area financier, built the Northwestern Redwood Company mill and company town on the outskirts of Willits and brought the railroad to the community in 1901, connecting this rural region with the urban San Francisco Bay area. Employment opportunities, community services, commercial development, and residential construction were benefits the Company lavished on the town.

Northwestern's mill, located three miles west of town, was the largest in the county with a capacity of 100,000 feet of lumber every day and employment for 300 men, including choppers and other woodsmen. The mill was connected by a spur rail to Willits and initially to the Bay area and in 1914 with Eureka on Humboldt Bay, 140 miles north. Destroyed by fire in the fall of 1902, the mill was quickly rebuilt and in operation the following spring. The Company remained an important local employer and community influence until the late 1920's, when the mill was closed and dismantled.

In 1902 the Company subdivided land it owned west and northeast of Willits' commercial district, creating the Northwestern Addition of 27 whole or partial blocks with streets named Spruce, Maple, Pine and Redwood, and Mendocino, Humboldt and Marin, along with generic School, State, North, Commercial, and Main. Lots in the addition were up for sale, not to the rank-and-file mill worker, most of whom lived in the Company town just west of Willits, but to the town's merchants and professional people, drawn to Willits by its booming lumber economy and its easy accessibility via the railroad from the Bay area. The Company had great plans for the development of Willits and this new residential area.

Among its contributions to this development was a electric lighting plant at the new mill with a capacity of 1,500 lights, sufficient to "illuminate" the entire town. A 150-acre tract of land near town was purchased by the Company to provide a "sewer farm" for its new Northwestern Addition. The Company took the lead in developing a water system for the town. The City Park and such accouterments as a flag pole, band stand, benches, walkways, and gardens added to the attractiveness of the town and promoted the Company's residential area. Other town property developed by the Company included the lumberyard, railroad facilities, commercial buildings, and, in time, Company offices.

Despite these efforts and opportunities for employment, the sale of lots in the Northwestern Addition got off to a slow start. So slow, in fact, that three years after filing the subdivision, the Company advertised in the local Willits News that it was reducing realty prices in its Northwestern Addition and purchasers of lots would be furnished lumber for construction of homes at wholesale rates for a period of six months.

To further promote the sale of lots and construction materials from its Willits lumberyard, the Company built a \$3,000 Craftsman-style shingle for its president, E.A. Selfridge, in 1905. Designed to be a "showcase of locally milled redwood," the house was built on Redwood Avenue, where several other Company employees--the accountant,

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woods superintendent, and the civil engineer on the railroad--had houses. Newspaper accounts of the construction of the Selfridge house do not indicate that the Company had the house built, nor is that fact apparent for the other houses, but Selfridge did not own the lot and the tax assessments for the house and the accountant's house in 1908 were against the Company. It seems that, at least in a couple of instances, the Company constructed houses for its personnel.

This appears to also be the case for the house at 84 State street. California's Historic Resources Inventory form, prepared by Susan Pritchard in 1988, states that the house was built in 1904 for L.J. Roach, but none of the listed sources confirms that information. Ileta Shimmin Grabenauer, a retired school teacher who lived across State street from the house as a child, said her grandmother told her that Lou Roach, a "kissing cousin" relative built the house in the early 1900's.

Roach never owned the property and it remained on the tax assessment rolls under the Northwestern Redwood Company until 1912. Roach, however, was hired as the manager of the Company's Willits lumberyard in January 1904 and a note in the September 1, 1904 Willits News under the heading "How the Town is Building Up" stated that the "handsome cottage of L.J. Roach in the Northwestern addition is nearly completed." Building a Victorian showpiece for the manager of its lumberyard would serve to encourage people to purchase nearby lots in the addition and, of course, to buy construction materials and the fancy woodwork required by such a house from the Company's lumberyard, where Mr. Roach presided.

The tax assessment roll for 1908 shows the Company owning all five lots in block 7 with improvements valued at \$2,200. The 1911 roll valued the improvements on the five lots at \$1,200. The 1913 assessment for lot 5 valued the Larsen Family House at \$750. These figures indicate that the turn-of-the-century cottages with cutaway bays and gables located on lots 3 and 4, directly west of the Larsen Family House, were also built by the Company. Their simpler architecture and affordability would make them more attractive to Company and railroad workers. But neither the grand house on the corner nor these more modest houses were replicated in the construction down the street. Instead, the popular California bungalow styles were built in the 1910's along the north side of State street facing the Park.

Roach left Willits in 1908 and three years later, the Company sold the property to Peter Larsen. Although the deed for the property is dated June 1911, family members had possession prior to that time. Larsen and his wife, Elisa Hansen, were natives of Denmark, but they met and were married in this country in 1874. Hard Nebraska winters prompted a move to Springer, New Mexico in 1890. They came to the Willits area in April 1909. Peter and Elisa had twelve babies, six of whom grew to adulthood: Mary, Minnie, Emma, Charlotte, Florence, and Louis.

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Mendocino County, CA

A rancher most of his life, Larsen purchased the Swortfiguer ranch a few miles north of town upon his arrival in April 1909 and soon afterwards the "Big House," as it was known by the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. By the time he bought the house, the Larsen children, except for teenager Florence, were adults and there were already grandchildren and within a few years, great-grandchildren. For this extended family, Peter needed a town house.

He saw the Big House as a home for Larsen women and over the years, various daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters lived in the house. Minnie Pearson, later McCool, and her two daughters, Inez and Edith, lived there and after Inez's marriage to Obie Southard, she and her baby daughter, Vavian, came back to the Big House. Emma lived there before her marriage to Claude Wade and again with him and later a second husband, Eugene Garaventa, from about 1925 to 1944. Charlotte's adopted daughter Maxine lived with Emma and when Vavian was a teenager, she came back to live with Aunt Emma. Florence and her daughter Marjorie spent some time in the Big House, too. For perhaps thirty-five years, the house truly was the Larsen Family House.

Emma Wade, later Emma Garaventa, was the town's music teacher. She began teaching soon after the family's arrival in Willits, offering "first-class" piano instruction at 50 cents a lesson in her home at 42 (now 84) State street, beginning in January 1911. A note in the local newspaper six months later reported on a recital given at Miss Larsen's home with fifty people present and a "good time was had...the hostess serv[ing] ice cream and cake."

The house was ideal for Emma's music classes and recitals, once the walls were removed to create the one large space. Windows on the south and east gave plenty of light to the interior and the curved veranda windows provided the perfect setting for Emma's grand piano, a fine Knobe.

Shortly before Elisa's death, Peter purchased two houses in Alameda and they were in the process of moving there when she died suddenly in May 1918. Over the next eight years before his death in the Big House in 1926, Peter spent his time with various children in Alameda, Santa Rosa, and Willits.

After more than a third of a century of Larsen Family occupancy, the house was officially deeded to Donald and Mary Legg in April 1944. Legg was a 42-year veteran with the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, working at the end of his career as the engineer on the "helper" over Ridgewood Hill between Ukiah and Willits. The property was deeded to Margaret Fulkerson in January 1962; Verne and Eleanor Nazarek owned the house from 1979 to 1983; William and Dionne Adams from 1983 to 1990; and the present owners, Larry and Virginia Stranske, since 1990.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places**

## **Continuation Sheet**

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The Larsen Family House was found to be National Register eligible in the survey of historic resources undertaken in 1988. In addition, the Larsen House was the only residential property in Willits noted in David Gebhard and Robert Winter's Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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Larsen Family House  
Mendocino County, CA

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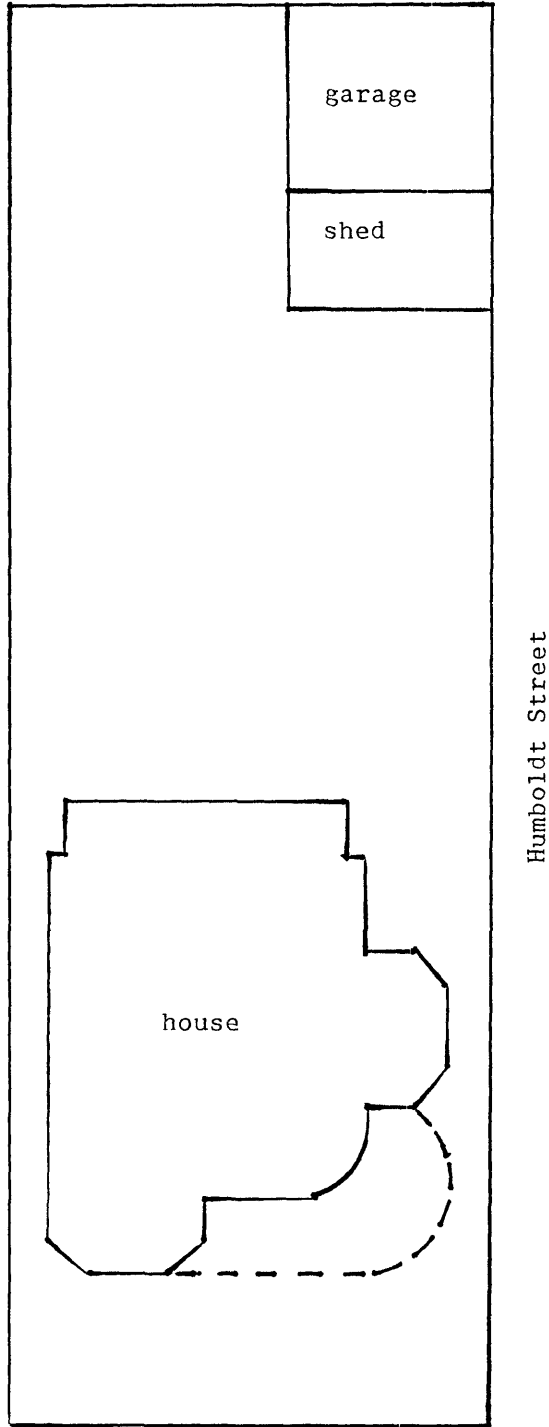
U.S. Censuses, Population Schedules, Mendocino County, 1900, 1910, 1920.

Verbal boundary description

Lot 5, Block 7, Northwestern Addition to City of Willits, measuring 50 feet by 150  
feet at the northwest corner of State and Humboldt streets.

Verbal boundary justification

The nominated property includes the house, garage/shed, and yard located within the  
boundaries of Lot 5, Block 7 as depicted on the map of the Northwestern Addition to  
Willits, filed for record on April 19, 1902. This is the lot historically associated  
with the property.



State Street

Humboldt Street



1 inch=20 feet

Larsen Family House  
84 State Street  
Willits, CA 95490  
Mendocino County