

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Croll Building

and/or common Croll Building

2. Location

street & number 1400 Webster Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Alameda

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 9th

state California

code 06

county Alameda

code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name O & W Development Company (Mr. and Mrs. Donald Watson, Jr.; Mr. and Mrs. Alfred

street & number 27 Olive Street

Obermayr; DBA)

city, town Piedmont

N/A vicinity of

state California 91764

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alameda County Courthouse

street & number 12th and Oak Streets

city, town Oakland

state California

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alameda Historical Monument

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date December 9, 1979

federal state county local

depository for survey records Alameda Architectural Historical Survey

city, town Alameda

state California

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

(Portions moved to this site ca. 1908)

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Croll Building is actually an assemblage of three historical structures with one small recent addition carefully blended with the historical structures. The corner three-story building was built in 1879 as Britt's Hotel and formed the nucleus for the Croll Hotel, which later occupied it and adjacent buildings. The two-story building to the north along Webster Street was moved to this site about 1908. According to surviving members of the Croll family, this structure was moved from Croll's Gardens, an amusement park and bathing resort across the street from the hotel site. At that time, it was architecturally unified with the existing three-story structure. In 1908, a one-story structure was located at the northwest corner of this building along Webster Street and a two-story structure at the southeast corner along Central Avenue. Each of these small buildings had also been relocated from Croll's Gardens about 1908. The two-story addition was structurally damaged in a 1980 earthquake, demolished, and replaced by the present small one-story structure at its site. The structural history of this property is outlined in the attached "Affidavit" of Ralph Croll (Appendix A).

The Croll Hotel and Saloon, or Croll Building, is a commercial building with storefronts at the first floor. It is built on a roughly L-shaped plan on a 8,712 square foot lot. The building is woodframe with double wall construction using horizontal drop siding. Its roofline is varied, with a third floor mansard at the corner and flat roof elsewhere. The mansard is clad in wood shingle while roofing elsewhere is tar and gravel.

West Elevation

The ground floor includes six entrances along the major street frontage, Webster Street. The roofline is irregular at this elevation, including a three-story segment at the corner, two stories along the larger addition, and the one-story addition at the northwest. The corner building measures about 40' in width at this elevation, the middle segment about 45', and the one-story addition about 15'.

The appearance of this elevation was changed very little during the 1980 renovation and appears to differ little from its appearance in 1908, when the two principal structures were brought together and unified architecturally. The ground floor is dominated by recessed entrances with large storefront windows, surmounted by a continuous series of multiple pane fixed transoms. The first and second stories are separated by a wide belt course with a panelled frieze. This pattern of recessed entrance, transom, and belt course was extended to the one-story addition. At the second story, one-over-one double hung sash extend across the facade, with differing rhythm in the two and three-story segments. A projecting cornice supported by brackets separate the second and third stories. Curved dormers project from the third-story mansard. Quoins accent the second story corners at the north and south.

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South Elevation

This elevation is dominated by the three-story mansard building, which extends about 60' along Central Avenue. It is joined by a small 16' one-story addition to the east. Three ground floor entrances are found at this elevation, two in the three-story segment, one in the one-story addition. Fixed transoms, similar to those on the west elevation, are located above storefront windows and two entrances. First and second stories and second and third stories are separated by continuations of the belt course and cornice from the west elevation. Second-story windows are irregularly placed one-over-one double-hung sash. This elevation is little changed from its appearance before the 1980 renovation, an appearance dating to the 1908 enlargement of this hotel, save for the one-story addition. This addition, which replaces a similar structure on its site, is carefully unified into the architectural design of the larger structures.

North and East Elevations

These, the endpoints of the L-shaped structure, include the plain sides of the two one-story additions as well as the equally plain sides of the two larger buildings. The one-story segment at the east extends about 48' to the north, several feet beyond the three-story building. The northern one-story segment is about 30' long, some twenty feet shorter than the two-story building. The roof of each one-story segment is enclosed by iron railing.

Rear Elevation

The rear of the Croll Building was not historically a public entrance, but was remodeled in 1980 to provide greater public access and a more pleasing appearance. These alterations are illustrated on the attached plan. An elevator shaft was attached to the northeast corner of the structure. The eastern one-story structure was extended around part of the northern side of the three-story building to provide additional entrances. Architectural features of the street facades--the belt course and cornice, transoms, and other wood moulding--were extended to the rear elevation.

The rear alterations affect only the relatively insignificant service area of the historic hotel and were necessary steps in the rehabilitation and revitalization of this historic structure.

Interior

The original tavern, at the corner of Webster and Central contains case work and tile flooring virtually unchanged since the early twentieth century. The tavern's main entrance is at the corner; another is from Central Avenue. The room measures 21' 6" x 37', and the bar is 30' in length. The bar, manufactured by Brunswick Calendar Company in Boston, Massachusetts, was shipped around the Horn in 1902.

It is carved from Philippine mahogany and has stained glass overhead lights. The same year, the mirrors were imported from Belgium, also by sailing vessel around Cape Horn.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1879; 1908 **Builder/Architect** Unknown **Sports**

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Croll Building was designated an Alameda Historical Landmark in June 1979, and the reasoning behind this designation applies equally to this National Register application. The City Council determined that the Croll Building best exemplified the community's history in the following ways:

1. Its architecture and quality of urban design;
2. The major historical persons and historical events related to the growth of the community; and
3. Its contribution to the social and cultural history of the community.

Architecturally, the Croll Building is noteworthy as a fine example of Mansard and Italianate design, carefully blended into a single architectural statement. It is also distinctive as one of the earliest taverns in the Bay Area or California, dating to its construction in 1879 by Patrick Britt and in constant use for that purpose to the present time, excepting, of course, the Prohibition years. It is also significant to the history of Alameda for its close association with a landmark bathing resort and amusement park operating during the late nineteenth century. Finally, the Croll Building was closely associated with the training and housing of prominent boxers in the early twentieth century, when the San Francisco Bay Area was at the peak of its importance in the boxing industry.

John G. Croll acquired this property in 1891. It had previously been known as Britt's, then as the West End Hotel and Tavern, then as the Encinal Hotel and Saloon, and then as the Bella Vista, prior to its renaming as Croll's Saloon. The hotel and saloon had been situated to take advantage of traffic from the famous Neptune Gardens, a popular amusement park, bathing resort, and community center owned by James G. Fair. Fair, whose considerable fortune derived from Nevada's Comstock Lode mines, also built a narrow gauge railroad which ran along Central Avenue between Croll's Saloon and the Neptune Gardens. Croll managed the Gardens for Fair from 1883 to their demise in 1891, reputedly as a result of the enactment by the City of Alameda of "blue laws" against sporting events on Sunday. In 1891, Croll took possession, not only of Croll's Saloon, but of the Gardens as well.

Croll attempted to promote his hotel and gardens as an athletic training and staging center. Baseball, cricket, and soccer games were staged in a nearby lot. Most important, however, Croll promoted boxing, housing boxers at his hotel, which was at that time the three-story mansard roofed corner segment of the present building. Boxing promotion proved so successful that in 1908 Croll moved the two-story segment of the existing building from across the street to provide additional hotel space. Subsequently, he also moved two smaller structures to the hotel lot from the gardens.

9. Major Bibliographical References

F.G. Monteagle, The Coney Island of the West; Imelda Merlin, Alameda Geographical History; Paul G. Vigness, Ph.D. Alameda County Book; Interview with Ralph Croll, January 31, 1979; Staff Report to Historical Advisory Commission, April 1979.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 8712 square feet (Less than 1 acre)

Quadrangle name Oakland West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	0	5	6	3	8	4	0	4	1	8	0	5	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C

Zone		Easting				Northing							

D

Zone		Easting				Northing							

E

Zone		Easting				Northing							

F

Zone		Easting				Northing							

G

Zone		Easting				Northing							

H

Zone		Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Start Corner of Webster and Central Avenue, proceed 95' east along Central Avenue; North 78.08', West 30'; North 20'; West 65'; South 98.08' along Webster Street to point of beginning.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Donald Watson Jr. and Chuck Pacheco, O & W Development

organization O & W Development

date January 20, 1980

street & number 1400 Webster Street

telephone (415) 781-6760

city or town Alameda

state California

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

K. Miller

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 3-25-82

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I hereby certify that this property is eligible for listing in the National Register.

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of the National Register

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Many famous boxers were known to have trained at Croll's facilities and stayed in the subject building including: Gentleman Jim Corbett; James J. Jeffries, Jack Root, "Mysterious" Billy Smith; Kid McCoy; Joe Walcott; "Terrible" Terry McGovern; Joe Gans; and Jack Dempsey. Newsmen flocked to Croll's for interviews with these sporting stars, including Jack London.

Around 1910, these sporting activities began to wane and Croll consolidated his business around his hotel and saloon. The hotel remained in business and in the control of the Croll family until 1945, when the upper stories were gutted by fire. The tavern has been in continuous operation except, as noted, during Prohibition. Recent rehabilitation of this structure has retained the saloon, including all significant aspects of its interior, while converting the upper stories to office space.

J-0404H