

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAY 31 1978  
DATE ENTERED NOV 14 1978

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

CROOKS MANSION

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

285 West "G" Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Benicia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

4th

STATE

California

VICINITY OF

CODE

06

COUNTY

Solano

CODE

095

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

John F. & Constance J. Wilson

STREET & NUMBER

285 West "G" Street

CITY, TOWN

Benicia

VICINITY OF

STATE

California

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Solano County Records Office

STREET & NUMBER

(No Street Address)

CITY, TOWN

Fairfield

STATE

California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Habs Report by Robert Bruegman

DATE

Summer 1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

U.S. Department of the Interior

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D.C.

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Crooks Mansion property is located on a bluff overlooking Carquinez Straits, and is visible from a number of points along the shoreline of Benicia. As of today, the house is uniquely sited on a large block of property near the corner of West "H" and 3rd. A number of old exotic shrubs and a few old citrus trees are located throughout the northeast portion of the property--apparently the remains of a once elegant garden. Elsewhere, there is an assortment of trees such as pepper, locust, buckeye, plum, walnut, cedar, and palm. Of particular beauty is the very large olive tree near the northwest corner of the house.

The house itself stands over three stories tall and contains seventeen rooms--not including the attic or the three room basement. "On the exterior, the Eastlake detailing allows a concise articulation of the vertical wood structure and the massing clearly reflects the interior dispositions of the house."<sup>1</sup> "Details of the Crooks house such as its fish scale shingles, the carved fans or sunbursts, the treatment of the windows, the pilasters and brackets, and the squared bay windows are the features which identify this house as one of primarily Eastlake-Stick style (with a little Shingle style detail)."<sup>2</sup>

Due to the fact that the house remained in the Crooks families ownership for three quarters of a century, it remains virtually intact and unaltered. Extensive restoration has been carried out with great care taken to preserve the house as it was originally conceived, including the exterior color of pale yellow, which was not necessarily typical of the era in which it was built.

Of the original three buildings on the property, only the house and the tool shed remain. The carriage house, once on the northeast corner of the property, has been relocated across "H" street and now sits restored on the property of Mr. and Mrs. Neil Rich.

The interior of the house contains over 5000 square feet of living space, and is planned around a central east west axis. The servant areas occupy the north portion of the house which includes the remodeled kitchen and pantries, side door and back stairway, and servants living quarters. (The pantries have been altered and now accomodate a much needed second bathroom-1973.)

Elaborate plaster moldings and ornaments enhance the ballooning hugeness of the living and dining rooms, which can be opened up into one another by sliding doors. Hand graining is evident on most of the woodwork throughout the house and is not always uniform in temperment from room to room. More than half of the well over 100 windows are the original irregularly pressed glass indicative of the technology of the 1870's.

The floors are golden oak and pine, and have been repaired only in the kitchen and areas where water seepage caused extensive rotting. Only the living and dining rooms contain the original plaster walls, and the remaining walls are being sheetrocked to simulate the appearance of the original. The fireplace mantels that are still intact and the wainscotting in the living and dining rooms are carved with the traditional wheat and ornamental patterns typical of the era in which executed.

(continued...)

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

There are several perspectives through which the significance of the Crooks Mansion can be justified, the first of which involves the residents, the Crooks family who occupied the house from its beginning c. 1880 to 1970.<sup>1</sup> W. L. Crooks bought the house from his brother, the original owner John E. Crooks, who left town shortly after a shooting incident in which Bishop Wingfield's son was killed. "William Crooks, is still well remembered in Benicia, for he was mayor for years, from 1898-1918, and again from 1924-1940. He was both Justice of the Peace and Judge after that. He was also president of the People's Bank of Benicia for 30 years, and was active and financially successful in real estate as owner and manager of the Smelter Land Co. He built the Majestic Theatre in 1920..."<sup>2</sup>

The second perspective involves the architectural significance. A Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California lists the Crooks house among its thirteen Benicia selections.

"HOUSE c. 1880s  
 SE cor. W. H and W. 3rd Streets  
 A good sized Eastlake house, almost devoid of ornament; romantically situated on extensive tree covered grounds which extend directly down to the river."<sup>3</sup>

Mr. David Beghard, author of the Benicia section of this guide and Director of the Art Galleries, University of California at Santa Barbara, was asked for his architectural appraisal for the Madrone and Associates E.I.R. report. An excerpt from his response states, "What is significant for Benicia in this building is the house and its total site facing out toward the water. It has preserved and still presents an image of 19th century California which has generally been destroyed in other urban environments. As of today, the house and its grounds offer an open space which is much needed in the community. Architecturally the house represents one of the only remaining examples of the Eastlake style of architecture to be found in Benicia."<sup>4</sup>

A final perspective involves the land on which the mansion sits, for it is clear that it was once an elegant Victorian Garden covered with Gardenia Bushes, Rosebush arches, exotic trees imported from Australia and New Zealand, etc. Little, in comparison, is remaining.

The most unresearched aspect of the significance of the Crooks Mansion and property lies in its possible archeological importance. Benicia was inhabited by

(continued...)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Gebhard, David, and Others. A Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California, Peregrine Smith, Inc. Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City, 1973
- Madrone Associates. Environmental Impact Report on the Development of the Former Crooks Property & Residence, June 1964.
- Bruegmann, Robert. Habs Report, 1976.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3/5 of an acre (25,600 square feet)

QUADRANGLE NAME Benecia Quadrangle 15'

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 10 573600 4211700  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Crooks Mansion property is bounded to the north 100 feet east of West "H" street, and to the west by West 3rd street. The Wilt Mansion Driveway is the east boundary and the southern boundary is the bluff overlooking West "G" street and the Carquinez

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES straits.

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

John F. & Constance J. Wilson

ORGANIZATION

DATE

December 20, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

285 West "G" Street

TELEPHONE

(707) 745-1138

CITY OR TOWN

Benecia

STATE

California

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Knoumellon*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 5/22/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *Charles A. [Signature]*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11-14-78

ATTEST: *Marcella [Signature]*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 11-8-78

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

#7 Description continued...

Of the original six fireplaces, only three remain visible and these are not usable due to damaged stacks as a result of the 1906 earthquake. As a result of vandalism in the early 1970's, when the house was unoccupied, the grand entrance has only one of the original stained glass windows, but the elegance of the house is clearly exemplified in the stairway, which remains in near perfect condition.

<sup>1</sup> Bruegman, Robert. Habs Report, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Madrone Associates. Environmental Impact Report on the Development of the Former Crooks Property & Residence, June 1974, p. II-16.

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#8 Significance continued...

ethnographic population known as the Castanoan of the Penutian language family. A human skeleton was unearthed (though partially destroyed) on the property directly across the street from the Crooks house, and artifactual material from the Crooks property (found when the cistern was constructed), includes projectile points. A mortar and pestal was found by Weston Lockry as he excavated in preparation for a concrete house foundation on W. 3rd street. Because of these finds, the Crooks property was searched for any obvious surface remains and a hole was dug in the garden area on the east side of the property and another where the shed stands today. "Although nothing archaeologically significant was located with the two sondages, given the previous burial and known artifacts in the immediate area, it is imperative that an archaeologist be called before any digging is done in preparation for a concrete foundation for the proposed carriage house."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Madrone Associates. Environmental Impact Report on the Development of the Former Crooks Property & Residence, June 1974, p. II-14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. II-12

<sup>3</sup> Gebhard, David, and others. A Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California, Peregrine Smith, Inc. Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Madrone Associates, E.I.R., p. II-16

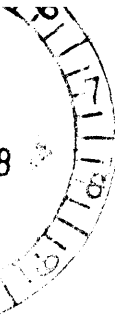
<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. II-18

WEST "H" STREET

RECEIVED

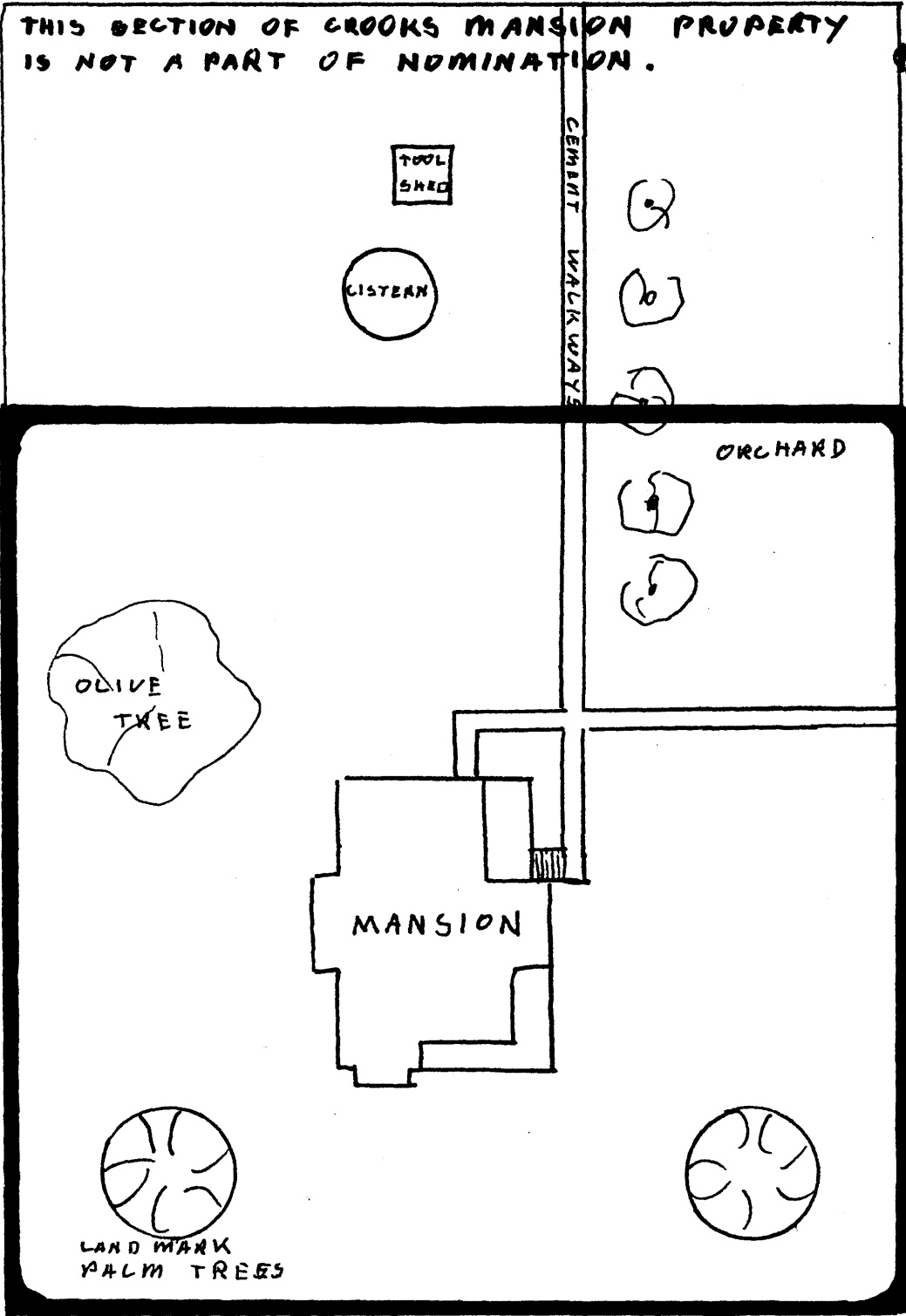
1978

NATIONAL REGISTER



THIS SECTION OF CROOKS MANSION PROPERTY IS NOT A PART OF NOMINATION.

WEST THIRD STREET



CARQUINEZ STRAITS