

PH 0076279

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| STATE: California | |
| COUNTY: San Mateo | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | MAY 9 1973 |

1. NAME

COMMON:
James Johnston House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
White House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Higgins - Purisima Road

CITY OR TOWN:
Half Moon Bay

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| STATE Calif. | CODE 06 | COUNTY: San Mateo 94019 | CODE 081 |
|-----------------|------------|----------------------------|-------------|

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress | Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No |

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

| | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural | <input type="checkbox"/> Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Comments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) unused | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | | |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
San Mateo County, California

STREET AND NUMBER:
County Government Center

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| CITY OR TOWN: Redwood City | STATE: California | CODE: 06 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
County Recorder's Office (Volume 5583, P. 488).

STREET AND NUMBER:
County Hall of Justice and Records, County Government Center

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| CITY OR TOWN: Redwood City | STATE: California | CODE: 94063 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Application made and approved for State of California Point of Historic Interest.

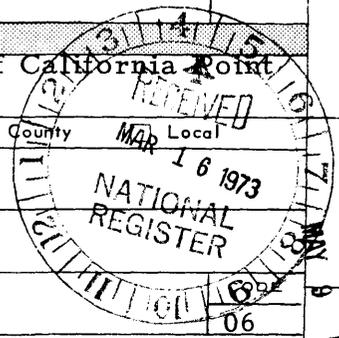
DATE OF SURVEY: May, 1971 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Depository: Department of Parks & Recreation

STREET AND NUMBER:
State of California

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| CITY OR TOWN: Sacramento, California. | STATE: California |
|--|----------------------|

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



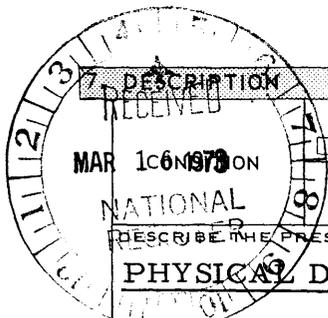
STATE: California

COUNTY: San Mateo

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE: 5/9/73

FOR NPS USE ONLY



DESCRIPTION

(Check One)

Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Ruins Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE HOUSE

The James Johnston "White House" in Half Moon Bay, San Mateo County, California, is a survival of the traditional eastern "salt-box" as transplanted by early Anglo-American settlers on the West Coast. The name is derived from the resemblance to the colonial wooden salt-box, which had a slanting lid. Such houses had a two-story rear roof extending down to the first floor ceiling level at the back.

Now weathered and graying, the house is on its original site overlooking the Pacific Ocean, a short distance east of the Coast Highway (Route 1). It is windowless and much of the flooring has fallen through. The frame, most of the walls and some of the exterior clapboarding remain. According to Leslie O. Merrill, curator of the San Mateo County Historical Museum, the building ^{FRAME} overall is in "remarkable condition".

The house was built sometime between 1853 and 1856. The frame is of coast redwood, probably lumbered nearby. The exterior was clapboarding, while the windows were symmetrically placed in the manner of colonial and 19th century houses in the East. As the name indicated, it was originally painted white. Evidence shows that there were originally brick chimneys and fireplaces. On the ground floor there was a central hall flanked on the south by a single large room and on the north by two rooms, each half the size of the larger one. Further on was the lean-to section with two large rooms. On the second floor the plan was similar, except for an additional room at the front over the hall. A photograph, probably dating from the early part of this century, indicates the lean-to section extended about 12 feet further than at present.

Construction was similar to that of eastern timber-frame houses of earlier date. The frame members were hand-hewn and the framework was doweled and slotted. The 8x4" corner posts were morticed in a heavy sill frame supported on sandstone blocks (there was no cellar). First floor ceiling girts and second story plates were morticed in. The ceiling joists were split redwood, 10 inches deep by irregular dimensions. The studs were also split in one dimension but trimmed to 4 inches in the other. The downstairs rooms in the main portion of the house were originally plastered, while the upper rooms were instead sheathed with wide, flush surface tongue and groove boards, as were the lean-to rooms.

Writings of visitors indicate that interior appointments were elegant and opulent, in the Victorian tradition. Some of the furnishings are now in the possession of Mrs. Petra Cooper of Redwood City, granddaughter of James and Petra Johnston.

See Attachment "A"

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

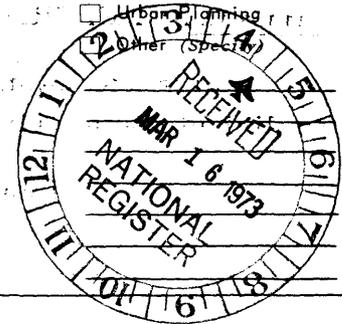
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1853-56

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The James Johnston house is a very rare, still-existing example of the earliest Anglo-American architecture in California. Because most such Gold Rush era houses have long-since vanished, it may seem an oddity. Yet it typifies the manner in which traditional eastern concepts of design and construction were applied in a new land of primarily Hispanic culture.

James Johnston (1813-1879) was born in Scotland but came with his family to the United States as a child. A daguerreotype in the family papers depicts a house that resembles in many ways the "White House" in Half Moon Bay. It is believed that Johnston lived in the house as a teen-ager in Gallipolis, Ohio. He came to California in the Gold Rush year of 1849, and quickly met with business success. He acquired 1,162 acres of the San Benito Ranch from the Miramontes family in 1853, the year after he had married Petra Maria de Jara. Nearby was the village now called Half Moon Bay, but known to the Spanish as San Benito and to Yankee settlers as Spanish Town. Johnston built his house sometime between 1853 and 1856, and stocked his ranch with dairy cattle driven West from Ohio by three of his brothers.

Though Johnston obviously intended to build a house conforming to his nostalgic remembrances of the eastern United States, the structure was a true California home. The original kitchen was a separate structure behind the main house, possibly to make large-scale feeding of ranch hands easier. A desire to keep the Johnston's Chinese cook separate from the family may have been a social factor. The rear section of the lean-to was not occupied by a large kitchen and a bedroom, as in New England saltbox houses, but was divided into chambers and had an open gallery facing a patio. Undoubtedly a result of Spanish influence, the patio was bounded by the house and by outbuildings. There was also a fenced garden around the house. The house included a Roman Catholic chapel as in Spanish-American homes. The garret of the lean-to, reached by a door from the stair hall, was used as sleeping quarters for wayfarers, according to Western tradition, in the days before public hostleries became common. Thus the Johnston house deserves preservation and restoration as a striking specimen of architecture deriving from the cross-blend of cultures during California's Gold Rush.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Hoover, Mildred Brooke; Rensch, Hero & Ethel. Historic Spots in California, 3rd. ed., revised by Abeloe, William N., Stanford University Press, Stanford, Ca., 1966, p. 395.

Stanger Frank M., South from San Francisco; San Mateo County, Its History & Heritage. S. M. Historical Assoc., 1963. p. 125

Watkins, C. Malcolm, James Johnston's White House in Half Moon Bay: An Example of Early Anglo-American Reminiscent Architecture in California, Johnston House Foundation, Half Moon Bay, California, 1972.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA See Exhibit A attached

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------|---|-------------------------|--|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | |
| | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | |
| NW | 0 ' " | 0 ' " | | 37 0 27 | 122 0 25 20 | |
| NE | 0 ' " | 0 ' " | | | | |
| SE | 0 ' " | 0 ' " | | | | |
| SW | 0 ' " | 0 ' " | | | | |

UTM
10/55116
414473
CD

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **10 acres (house alone = 1320 sq. ft.)**

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

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|--------|------|---------|------|
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Alanna D. Zuppann, Chairman**

ORGANIZATION: **Johnston House Foundation**

STREET AND NUMBER: **P. O. Box 789**

CITY OR TOWN: **Half Moon Bay** STATE: **California 94019** CODE: **06**

DATE: **June 21st 1972**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: *[Signature]* Title: **State Liaison Officer**

Date: **MAR 12 1972**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

[Signature]
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 5/9/73

ATTEST: *[Signature]*
Keeper of The National Register

Date: 5 7 73

INTRODUCTION

The National Register application for the James Johnston House in San Mateo County was tabled at the October 27 meeting of the California Historical Landmarks Committee, as it was felt to contain insufficient information for evaluation. It was referred to the Historic Preservation Section staff for additional research.

DESCRIPTION

The Johnston House was built in 1853 using mortice and tenon redwood frame construction. It is solidly built using 8" x 4" corner posts morticed in a heavy sill frame supported on sandstone blocks. Ceiling joists are split redwood, 10" deep. The house is structurally "over-built", reflecting New England colonial building traditions. The exterior is sheathed with clapboards.

The two-story structure with its symmetrical facade and lean-to section at the rear is a salt-box type, similar to those constructed earlier in New England. The detailing is of a simple classic nature with a suggestion of Greek Revival origins in the cornice returns and fascia board. Originally, the lean-to section extended an additional 12 feet, but was removed sometime after the 1906 Earthquake. The building has lost most of the interior partitioning through vandalism and weathering, but the studs are still standing.

The house is prominently sited on a rise overlooking the coastal plain and town of Half Moon Bay. At present time the land is undeveloped, but development interests have purchased the parcel to the north of the property.

METHOD

It was determined that an on-site investigation would be needed to determine the exact condition of the structure. The building was visited on January 5 by Aaron Gallup of the History Preservation Section, accompanied by Mr. Walter Sontheimer, AIA Northern California Chapter Preservation Officer. It was inspected for deterioration and evaluated with regard to its potential for restoration. Photographs were taken of the interior and exterior of the building.

RESULTS OF INSPECTION

Condition and integrity - The interior of the structure is badly deteriorated. Most of the wall partitioning has been destroyed, although the studs are still standing to mark the division into the original interior spaces. Large sections of the flooring have been destroyed, especially in the southern end of the building. The stairway has been largely destroyed, so no evaluations of the second story were made. Although the interior has been gutted by vandalism, the framing is still intact. The mortise and tenon construction can be clearly seen in a number of places. The ceiling joists appear solid. The southern section of the framing rests directly upon the ground and the architect felt this section should be investigated for dry rot, but otherwise found the structure members intact.



The exterior of the house is in poor condition. Original clapboarding still remains on the facade and the north side, and would require restoration and some replacement where boards are missing or damaged. The entire south wall was reconstructed at an unknown date, as evidenced by the difference in siding material. The lower portion of this wall has been largely destroyed and has now been boarded up. The rear of the building was covered with shingles following the removal of a 12 foot section of the lean-to. The architect felt the roof was still covered with original shingles, but would probably need replacing due to weathering.

As the building appears structurally sound, the architect felt that restoration would be feasible, at a fairly high cost. The amount of actual reconstruction necessary could not be determined, although interior walls, stairway, portions of the floor, and the south exterior wall would require reconstruction, in addition to the reconstruction of 12 feet of the lean-to to bring the building back to its original appearance. The architect was impressed by the solid construction of the building and noted there was no sagging along the roof line and that the walls were still perfectly plumb.

The integrity of the site is fairly high, being situated in an area of open space on a rise above the coastal plain. The view of the building from a distance is impressive. Development pressures appear to exist with nearby townhouse developments clearly visible from the Johnston House. Adjacent property is owned by a developer. At this time, the site still retains its rural character and has high integrity, surrounded by open space with an unbroken view of the coastal plain and ocean.

Significance - The building is one of the few remaining examples of a salt-box type of structure from the early Anglo period in California. Although deteriorated, it still retains the basic elements of the style as it was brought to California in the 1850's, and shows the strong East Coast influences in early architectural diffusion to the Pacific Coast.

Several architectural historians were contacted in attempting to determine the significance of the structure. Professor Joseph Baird of the University of California at Davis felt the building was a rare survivor of its type. Although he felt others of the type might exist elsewhere, he knew of no other specific examples.

Professor Kenneth Cardwell of the University of California at Berkeley also felt other structures of this type may exist but knew of no specific locations other than an unverified report of a salt-box near San Jose.

Professor David Gebhard of the University of California at Santa Barbara is preparing a book on Northern California architecture, and reported two salt-boxes in Benicia, possibly constructed earlier than the Johnston House, although one was recently demolished. He, too, felt that other examples of the salt-box were in existence, but felt that those surviving are rare examples of the type.

During the discussions with the architectural historians it was pointed out that salt-box types once existed along the coast north of San Francisco Bay and in the vicinity of Vallejo, and that other survivors could possibly exist in these locations.

Submitted by Aaron A. Gallup, History Preservation Section
California Department of Parks and Recreation

January 26, 1973

