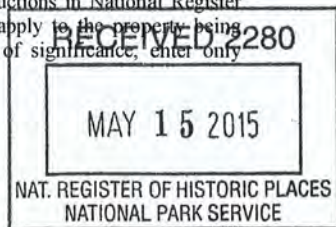


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Von Pfister General Store

Other names/site number: Von Pfister Adobe

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: Von Pfister Alley, 150 feet West of First Street

City or town: Benicia State: CA County: Solano

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A X B X C \_\_\_ D

[Signature] 5/15/15  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Jenan Saunders, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer** **Date**  
California State Office of Historic Preservation  
**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of commenting official:** **Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title :** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

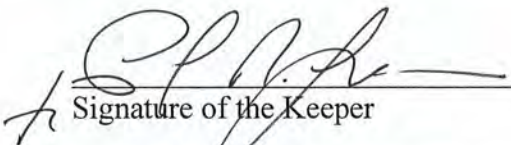
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

  
Signature of the Keeper

6/24/2015  
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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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Adobe, Wood

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Von Pfister General Store is a two-room, one and one-half story wood-frame adobe building located at the western end of Von Pfister Alley in the heart of Benicia's Downtown Historic District. The original 18' by 27.5' building, constructed in 1847, is situated directly between the Carquinez Strait and First Street, the commercial and cultural center of Benicia. The blending of classic Spanish Colonial and later American Period styles reflects the transitional nature of California during the post-Mexican period in which the store was constructed and first occupied. The building is roughly rectangular and comprised of two ground-floor rooms and a loft/attic. The east, west, and interior walls are formed from redwood braces spaced at roughly four-foot intervals, infilled with adobe bricks and covered on the exterior with clapboard. The north and south walls, gabled roof, and interior trusses that compose the loft/attic area are comprised entirely of redwood timber. While portions of both the east and west adobe walls are in a state of collapse, much of the adobe is contained within the wooden cladding and interior braces have been inserted so that the structural integrity of the General Store is maintained. The interior, while in various levels of disrepair, is entirely original and partially maintains its elaborate chair rail, baseboard molding, cove ceiling molding, paneled door, and wallpaper. The freestanding interior adobe wall that separates the two rooms of the General Store is largely intact and well preserved. While aspects of the General Store exhibit fairly poor preservation, the building remains unaltered and it retains much of its original architectural detail. The General Store is

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protected from the elements by a steel-frame structure with a metal front gable roof, an access gate, and chain link fence walls fully covered by protective canvas panels that can be removed for ventilation and viewing purposes. The General Store is almost completely surrounded by restored historical and modern commercial and industrial buildings. It is easily accessible from First Street and has been equipped with a surrounding brick patio, wooden benches, a brass historical marker, and an interpretive plaque. The General Store is in a dilapidated state. This is due predominantly to the fact that the property remains unaltered since the nineteenth century. The historical integrity of the building is retained through the presence of the original and essential interior and exterior physical features and its original location on the historic waterfront of Benicia.

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## Narrative Description

### Setting

Built in 1847, the Von Pfister General Store is a two-room vernacular Monterey Colonial-type adobe building. The architecture is emblematic of the building's construction during a transitional socio-political period and is defined by its blending of Colonial Spanish and Victorian architectural styles and the use of locally available materials.<sup>1</sup> The property is located on a 25' by 40' parcel in the heart of Benicia's Downtown Historic District at the west end of Von Pfister Alley between West C and D streets.<sup>2</sup> Adjacent to the Southampton Bay portion of the Carquinez Strait, the General Store stands roughly 150 feet west of Benicia's First Street, the city's commercial center. Directly east of the building is a wooden bench and a small brick patio that serves as viewing space, along with a brass historical marker and an interpretive plaque that provides visitors with information regarding the construction history of the General Store and its role in historically important events. The property is flanked on the north, south, and west by a salvage ship and metal yard and to the east by commercial property and parking spaces that line the alley.

Located roughly in the middle of the western margin of Point Benicia, the location of the General Store provides expansive western views of the Carquinez Strait and its northern and southern headlands. The views from the building to the south are similarly open with views across the strait to Point Carquinez and the rolling hills that surround Port Costa. The views to the north and east are partially impeded by the presence of both historic and more recent development, and views and access to First Street remain open.

The Von Pfister General Store is covered by a weather protective steel-framed structure with chain-link fence walls and a metal front gable roof that extends approximately three feet beyond the historic building's walls. The walls of the protective structure are covered on two sides by

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (Mount Vernon, NY: Consumer Union, 1984), 129-133.

<sup>2</sup> *Benicia General Plan: From 1847 into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Adopted June 15, 1999), 99; *Historic Context Statement: City of Benicia, Final Report* (San Francisco: Page and Turnbull, 2010), 3-4; *Downtown Historic Conservation Plan: Benicia, California* (Canon Design Group, 1990), 7; McAlester and McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (Mount Vernon, NY: Consumer Union, 1984), 129-133.

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removable canvas panels that extend two-thirds of the distance from roof to grade. The western and southern walls are closed and covered by aluminum siding.

### Exterior

The Von Pfister General Store is a rectangular, one and one-half story redwood-framed and adobe infilled building with an exterior wood paneling and front gable roof oriented on a north-south axis. Blending traditional Spanish and American materials and construction styles, the building is emblematic of the humble buildings constructed in the area during the transitional years between the Mexican and American Periods in California (1846-1850).<sup>3</sup> The building measures roughly 18' by 27.5'.<sup>4</sup> Historic dimensions may have differed, as historic maps suggest the presence of an awning or porch and a single story wooden addition to the southern aspect of the building.<sup>5</sup>

An archaeological investigation undertaken in 1989 exposed a four tier brick and stone subsurface foundation, an aspect of the building that was previously unrecognized.<sup>6</sup> The top two courses of the foundation, beginning just below ground surface, are comprised of brick while the bottom two courses, beginning between 10 and 15 cm below ground surface, are comprised of sandstone cobbles aligned linearly.<sup>7</sup>

The east and west walls are formed from rough sawn redwood braces spaced at roughly four-foot intervals, infilled with adobe bricks. The north and south walls are constructed entirely of timber, although remains suggest the south wall was at one time at least partially comprised of adobe bricks. The north wall is comprised of two layers of wood planking. The exterior façade of the north wall is clad with 5 ½" wide, horizontally laid redwood clapboards with a one inch lap and taper and a thickness ranging from ½ to ¼." The south wall is similarly comprised of two layers of horizontally laid wood planking. Many of the planks from the exterior of the southern facing are no longer attached to the building and efforts have been made to collect and retain the fallen planks for future restoration purposes. The boards are stored in the north room of the building. The adobe infilled east and west walls are approximately 10 ½" thick and are covered on the exterior with 5 ¾" wood clapboard siding, ¾" thick with ¼" lapping laid with 1 ¾" overlap. It is possible that the wood siding was a later protective addition to the adobe wall. It was present by at least 1886.<sup>8</sup>

Two framed doorways mark the north façade, the westernmost serving as the main entrance and the eastern having been infilled at some unknown point. Centered under the gable peak above the

<sup>3</sup> Donald R. Hannaford and Revel Edwards, *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800-1850* (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing, 1990), x.

<sup>4</sup> S.C. Gray, "Recollections of Benicia," in *History of Solano County* (San Francisco: Wood, Alley, and Co., 1879), 150; Kenneth H. Cardwell, *E.H. Von Pfister Adobe, Benicia, California: A Historic Structure Report* (City of Benicia, 1986), 12.

<sup>5</sup> "Benicia, Cal.," 1886, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1886-1970*, California.

<sup>6</sup> Archeo-Tech, "Archaeological Investigations at the Von Pfister Adobe Site, Benicia, California" (Oakland: Archeo-Tech, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Benicia, Cal.," 1886, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1886-1970*, California.

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plate line in the upper half story is a framed opening. Additionally, there is a noticeable scar above the main entrance running the width of the north façade that is most likely the evidence of a previous porch or awning.

The adobe of the west wall is failing with the structural integrity being maintained by the remaining interior and exterior wood cladding. Exterior wood planking comprised of horizontally laid V-grooved shiplap remains attached to the wood framing. Many of the planks have collapsed and lay grouped on the ground. Much of the wall for the front room is absent and forms an opening into the interior. Heavy char is also evident on much of the exterior wood as is the presence of reinforcing boards that have been added to various truss and frame elements to support the failing roof and walls.

Exterior 1" by 6" vertically laid shiplap cladding on the south façade is limited to the southwest corner, with only the interior wallboards present on the remaining aspect. There is some evidence of adobe infill in the southwest portion suggesting the southwest aspect, and possibly the entire south wall was at one point wood framed and adobe infilled in a manner similar to the east and west walls. A boarded doorway is located along the centerline of the south façade. The entire south wall leans outward, most likely from the failure of the west adobe wall.

The eastern façade is clad with horizontally laid clapboard, much of which remains. The southern aspect of the eastern façade is mostly intact, probably due to the presence of 2" by 4" vertically positioned redwood reinforcement boards that have been nailed in place from the interior with square nails. A framed window opening with sash is located on the southern portion of the façade, and the muntin and glass are missing. The wooden clapboard of the northern portion of the façade bows severely due to the collapse of the adobe within the interior and exterior boarding. Originally there was a matching northern window, and the opening has been filled and covered with clapboard.

Simple king post trusses set on a sill plate resting directly on the top of the east and west adobe walls frame the gabled roof. The north gable retains much of its horizontal cladding and exhibits a framed opening along the centerline. The south gable also exhibits a framed opening, and most of the original cladding is missing. The western face of the roof slopes at roughly 35° and the eastern at 40°, both having exposed, partially charred, and reinforced 4" by 6" rafters. The roof is missing any soffit and fascia as well as any original shingling and is covered with a protective tarp.

### **Interior**

The interior of the General Store consists of two rooms, accessed from north to south. A 10.5" thick exposed internal adobe wall partitions the rooms. This portion of adobe is almost entirely intact and undisturbed. All four walls appear to have been clad with wide redwood boards. The degree to which this original boarding is displaced varies between walls.

The north room is an approximately 17'-5" square with a ceiling height of roughly 7'-10." The overall condition of the north room is poor. A large portion of the original elaborate chair rail,

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baseboard molding, and cove ceiling molding remain and are in good condition. The north wall of the north room consists of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick vertical redwood boards with widths ranging from  $7\frac{3}{4}$ " to 18." There are two framed door openings in the north wall; the western opening serves as the main entrance and is missing a door. The eastern doorway is blocked from the exterior by boarding and retains a four panel wooden door. Portions of the interior north wall exhibit canvas or wallpaper on muslin that covers the wood planking.

The eastern wall of the north room slopes inward and the interior wood planks bulge due to the failure of the adobe infill, causing portions of the wall to have collapsed. The collapse has exposed a framed and trimmed window opening with several attached shutter louvers that have been blocked with boarding from the outside.

The south wall of the north room is freestanding adobe brick. It appears to have been originally covered with wide, horizontally placed wood cladding in a manner similar to the other walls in the room. Most of the cladding has been removed or fallen and the adobe is exposed. A framed, trimmed, and partially charred doorway leading to the south room is positioned within the south wall directly opposite the main entrance to the room in the north wall. Constituting the passageway through the adobe partition, the doorway is over 10" thick and is blocked with boarding. In the ceiling along the southern wall, just east of the centerline, there is a framed opening providing access to the loft/attic.

The interior of the west wall is in a state of collapse. Shorter lengths of cladding are still attached at the southeast corner. Most are partially detached and hang by nails or are fully detached. A blocked window opening roughly matching the one on the east wall is located in the southern portion of the wall. Fire damage is most severe on this wall and on the ceiling, roof trusses, and rafters. Stabilizing braces were added in the 1990s to support areas that become susceptible to collapse after the failure of the adobe wall.

Only a fraction of the original flooring remains in the northeast corner of the north room. The remaining space consists of plywood sheeting placed over 4" by 6" wooden floor joists set on the grade. The 1989 archaeological investigation discovered that the floorboards were constructed of fir using a tongue-in-groove technique overlying redwood joists.<sup>9</sup> Roughly 11.5 cm below the wooden floor the excavations exposed another well-preserved floor composed of irregularly shaped adobe brick.<sup>10</sup> Due to the nature of the recovered archaeological material associated with the adobe and wooden floors the archaeologists determined that the redwood and fir floor was installed at an early point in the building's history, most likely between 1847 and 1851.<sup>11</sup> Most of the ceiling boards have been removed or have collapsed, exposing the underside of the loft level floorboards.

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<sup>9</sup> Archeo-Tech, "Archaeological Investigations at the Von Pfister Adobe Site, Benicia, California" (Oakland: Archeo-Tech, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



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Because of the blocked doorway in the southern wall of the north room, access to the south room is restricted and observations are limited. The south room is a rectangle roughly 17'-4" wide east to west and 6' long with a 7'-10" tall ceiling. The south and east walls of the south room are clad in vertical, narrow-width shiplap. There is a framed window opening in the east and west walls. Additionally, there is a fully framed and trimmed door opening in the west wall, as well as a simpler door opening in the south wall. Both are blocked with wooden boards. The floor in the south room is largely intact and comprised of wide plank wood. The ceiling covers charred roof trusses and loft floor planks and is clad in shiplap similar to that used on the room's interior walls. Above the north wall of the south room, roughly along the centerline, there is a large rectangular opening providing access to the loft/attic area. The loft/attic is partially charred. It retains many of its floorboards and has periodically since the early 1990s been reinforced with lumber framing.

Overall, while aspects of the building are in disrepair, very few alterations were made to the building after 1900 and virtually no refurbishment efforts have been undertaken. The building is true to its nineteenth century character and retains enough of the original architectural elements and detailing to have historic integrity.

### **ALTERATIONS**

The significance and integrity of the Von Pfister General Store is due in large part to its lack of alterations and its retention of original architectural features. An analysis of the location and material present suggests that there have been no significant alterations since the nineteenth century outside of the addition of interior structural lumber supports and the surrounding weather-protective steel structure.

Based on a comparison with the earliest documentary evidence it appears that during the early period of operation there was the addition of a wooden single story room to the southern aspect of the building.<sup>12</sup> While the exact date of the addition is unknown, it is already present in the earliest Sanborn Insurance Map for the city dating to 1886, and it appears to have been removed by 1899.<sup>13</sup> It is also possible that the wooden clapboard siding on the east and west exterior walls was added as a protective measure after the original construction of the adobe walls in 1847. The entirely wooden wall construction of the north and south walls suggests, however, that the entire exterior of the building was originally clad with timber siding. Descriptions in the 1886 Sanborn Map note that the adobe building is "weather boarded."<sup>14</sup>

Alterations to the setting in the form of commercial development have taken place in the area between the General Store and First Street. A large portion of this development took part in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and can therefore be considered part of the larger historic waterfront development initiated by the establishment of the General Store. The most

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<sup>12</sup> Gray, "Recollections of Benicia," in *History of Solano County* (San Francisco: Wood, Alley, and Co., 1879), 149; Robert Bruegmann, *Benicia: Portrait of an Early California Town* (San Francisco: 101 Productions, 1980), 6.

<sup>13</sup> "Benicia, Cal.," 1886, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1886-1970*, California.; "Benicia, Cal.," 1899, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1886-1970*, California.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

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immediately adjacent space serves as a viewing area and parking lot, providing a buffer in all directions except the southeast between the General Store and twentieth century construction. The area west of the building to the waterfront (roughly 50 feet to the west) is a privately owned dock and maritime salvage yard that has been only minimally developed since its initial construction as a lumber dock by at least 1886 and does not significantly impede views west, or detract from the historical association between the General Store and the western waterfront.

### **INTEGRITY**

The Von Pfister General Store is in a dilapidated state, largely due to the lack of alteration and restoration during or after its mid nineteenth to early twentieth century period of operation and occupation. As a result, historical integrity is retained through its original location on what became a bustling waterfront and the nuanced details of construction design, material use, and humble workmanship and decoration. It is the original and unmodified quality of these physical characteristics that link this building materially to significant historic events and contribute to a feeling of the historically significant nature of the General Store and the larger Benicia Historic Waterfront area.

The General Store remains in its original location on the western Benicia waterfront. The location of the General Store on the edge of a deepwater shoreline allowed for shiploads of cargo and people to be unloaded directly on the waterfront adjacent to the store, ensuring that the establishment would be a hub of social and economic interaction in the burgeoning city. As the oldest surviving building in the city, this setting of the General store reflects the importance of maritime transportation and infrastructure as well as the geographically strategic importance of Benicia as a port and waypoint during the development of California during the early American Period and Gold Rush years.

In multiple ways, the design of the General Store reflects the intentions and aspirations of its early builders and proprietors and reflects larger social sentiments of the early American Period in California. In size, interior organization, and decoration, the builders indexed an architectural style that is emblematic of mid nineteenth century general stores. Composed of two rooms, the north room is large and open, conducive to the storage and display of goods and the housing of guests and lodgers during the evening periods. A smaller room to the south would have provided a private space for additional storage and the proprietor to reside. An attic space, accessed through a ladder would have also provided much needed storage space for a frontier store with potentially inconsistent resupplies. All of this original orientation and spacing has been retained along with its original construction material, although some aspects are in a serious state of degradation. At one time, the exterior exhibited a short, slanting awning typical of nineteenth century general stores in America that would have provided a visual clue for travelers as to the nature and function of the waterfront establishment.<sup>15</sup> While this awning is no longer present, the location and dimensions can still be discerned through markings and discoloration on the northern façade.

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<sup>15</sup> Henry C. Klassen, *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 60.

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The materials used in the construction of the General Store, most of which are original and date to the mid to late nineteenth century, reflect the transitional period during which it was constructed and the need to rely on local material and knowledge of building practices in a frontier setting. The combination of Colonial Spanish and Victorian architectural styles resulted in the use of both adobe bricks and timber elements in the construction of the building. This reflects both the humble nature of the store and its builders, and also the constraints placed upon early American settlers in Northern California. The resulting hybrid architecture reflects materially the time and place of its construction. The lack of alteration and restoration means the General Store retains the key elements that provide a rare material link to the early American Period in California and the earliest entrepreneurs who settled the area and laid the foundation for future development.

The ingenuity employed in the construction of the General Store reflects the vernacular methods in use during the early American Period in frontier California and the particular skill sets of the builders. The adobe bricks, while traditionally associated with Spanish Colonial construction, are shaped according to traditional American masonry dimensions.<sup>16</sup> While aspects of the original adobe are highly degraded, the interior adobe wall is in good condition and provides significant insight into the practices of adobe brick manufacture and use at the site. The redwood braces that support the east and west adobe walls are rough-hewn, reflecting the lack of infrastructure and established timber industry and the need to hand work major structural elements during this early period of settlement and construction. The partial timber elements, such as the gabled roof, reflect the larger social process of increased American influence in California during this period.

In particular, the use of shiplap and the nature of the construction of the timber cladding and wooden north and south walls reflect shipbuilding practices and principles of the period and provide a direct material association to Captain E.H. von Pfister, who finished the construction of the building and conducted its operation during its most historically significant period. All of these physical elements are retained in their original form, along with many of the humble decorations that reflect both skills and aesthetic preferences, including aspects of a chair rail, baseboard molding, cove ceiling molding, and wallpaper. In many ways the original material and non-restored character, along with the evidence for individual workmanship exhibited in the hybrid nature of the construction, provides an association to historically significant events and people of a particular time and place, and together work to provide a feeling for the types of experiences and relationships that would have been typical at a frontier General Store in a fledgling waterfront community on the farthest western margins of the country and state.

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<sup>16</sup> Cardwell, *A Historic Structure Report*, 16.

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## 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.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1847-1937

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1847- Construction completed and ownership by von Pfister began

1848- Announcement of Gold Rush

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

von Pfister, Edward Horatio

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

McDonald, Benjamin

von Pfister, Edward Horatio

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

### Summary Paragraph

The Von Pfister General Store is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement at the local level for its association with the establishment of the community of Benicia and its integral role in the development of Benicia as an important node for transportation and commerce in early American Period California. The period of significance under Criterion A begins with construction and commercial operation in 1847 and continues through its use in waterfront economic activity associated with the early development of the community of Benicia until abandonment of the building in 1937. The General Store is eligible under Criterion B in the area of Commerce at the local level for its association with pioneer Benicia resident and merchant Captain Edward Horatio von Pfister, who came to Benicia as an entrepreneurial shipping captain and went on to become a successful merchant operating numerous businesses in Benicia and occupying influential political positions during the city's formative years. The period of significance under Criterion B is split, 1847 to 1848 and 1853 to 1863. This reflects von Pfister's initial role in Benicia as store owner, sale of the property when he left for the gold fields, then repurchase of the building associated with his subsequent role as public political figure, a role that continued in association with other properties after he rented the store building to someone else in 1863. Additionally, the Von Pfister General Store is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level as a vernacular Monterey Colonial-type adobe that exhibits the local and period specific traits of a transitional building in its humble and mixed material construction. The period of significance under Criterion C is 1847, the year of construction.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Criterion A:** The Von Pfister General Store was integral to the economic and cultural development of the community of Benicia, and associated with the advent of the Gold Rush, a critical and transformative series of events that had lasting implications for the State of California. As the earliest store in Solano County the Von Pfister General Store provided access to much needed supplies and commodities for frontier settlers, facilitating the establishment and operation of early homes and serving as a central meeting point for residents and travelers in the area to exchange news and goods. In its role as an important commercial and transportation center the General Store became associated with the announcement of the discovery of gold in California. Following the announcement, the General Store played an integral role in providing the economic and social infrastructure that allowed the citizens of Benicia to seize upon the economic and developmental opportunities provided by Benicia's strategic geographic position in the early years of the Gold Rush.

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Envisaged by its founders Thomas O. Larkin and Dr. Robert Semple as the preeminent “Pacific metropolis,” Benicia was founded in 1847 on a plot of land owned by General Mariano Vallejo that stretched five square miles along the northern Carquinez Strait coastline.<sup>17</sup> The building that came to be known as the Von Pfister General Store was the third building built in Benicia.<sup>18</sup> Commissioned by Semple, Benjamin McDonald began the adobe building. Before construction was completed the building was leased to a merchant ship captain named Edward Horatio von Pfister.<sup>19</sup> Finishing construction of the building using timber elements and stocking the building with goods procured from Hawaii earlier in the year through von Pfister’s shipping enterprise, the adobe building became the first general store in Solano County.<sup>20</sup>

The General Store served the vital function of providing commodities to pioneer settlers,<sup>21</sup> and also became a critical node in the early commercial and social network of the county and larger North Bay-Sierra Foothill region. The Von Pfister General Store “was commodious enough to constitute the rendezvous of the whole town by day and to accommodate everyone in want of lodging for the night,”<sup>22</sup> and it quickly became the unofficial “community center”<sup>23</sup> where local residents and pioneers from outer areas came to buy and trade goods, exchange news, and socialize. The presence of a well-stocked general store in Benicia provided the infrastructure and supply chain that supported the arrival of pioneer and entrepreneurial newcomers buying plots in Benicia and establishing various businesses. Without the tools, equipment, food, and supplies acquired through von Pfister’s merchant network and made available locally through his general store, it would have been much more difficult to solicit the establishment of new residents and businesses in Benicia. In *The American Grocery Store*, Klassen notes that antebellum general stores in rural areas “represented an essential commercial outpost in the nation’s frontier and hinterland. Its spatial isolation and architectural presence in a landscape dominated by nature often meant that it was the only form of communal civilization that existed. As much as it was a center of community life, the country store was also capitalism penetrating its spatial margins so that the economy of the nation could maximize markets through settlement trade.”<sup>24</sup> Due in part to the location of the county’s only store being in Benicia, by the early months of 1848 the city boasted a population of around 1,000 residents and was rivaling San Francisco as the preeminent

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<sup>17</sup> Bancroft, *History of California, Vol. V* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), 671.

Hunt, *History of Solano County* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1926), 33-34; Tooley, “Robert Baylor Semple,” in *Benicia’s Early Glory: California State Capital 1853-1854* (Solano County Historical Society, 1958), 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Gray, “Recollections of Benicia,” in *History of Solano County* (San Francisco: Wood, Alley, and Co., 1879), 149; Brueggemann, *Benicia: Portrait of an Early California Town* (San Francisco: 101 Productions, 1980), 6.

<sup>19</sup> *History of Solano County* (San Francisco: Wood, Alley, and Co., 1879), 149, 450.

<sup>20</sup> Cardwell, *E.H. Von Pfister Adobe, Benicia, California: A Historic Structure Report* (City of Benicia, 1986), 3; Hendry and Bowman, *The Spanish and Mexican Adobe and Other Buildings in the Nine San Francisco Bay Counties 1776 to about 1850*, Part IV. Solano County, A. Town of Benicia, 1847-1852 (Berkeley: 1940), 419; Bussinger and Phelan, *Images of America: Benicia* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2004), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Conmy, *Benicia: Intended Metropolis* (San Francisco: Dolores Press, 1958), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Gray, “Recollections of Benicia,” 150.

<sup>23</sup> Cardwell, *A Historic Structure Report*, 3; Bussinger and Phelan, *Images of America: Benicia*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Klassen, Henry C., *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 60.

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port on the northern West Coast.<sup>25</sup> Following the discovery of gold in California, the Von Pfister General Store facilitated the community's ability to capitalize commercially on the demands of gold-searching pioneers, and thus served as an integral component of the early commercial infrastructure that led to increased local population, a cultural florescence and, the large-scale establishment of industries such as the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the Pioneer Tannery, the Carquinez Packing Company, and the eventual establishment of the State Capitol in the city in 1853.<sup>26</sup>

It is within the context of the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill and the subsequent Gold Rush that swept California that Von Pfister's General Store made a significant contribution to state and national history. By 1848, due to its strategic geographic location and entrepreneurial early population, Benicia had become an important transit point for travelers and commerce moving northeast from the lower San Francisco Bay to the Sacramento Valley and Sierra Nevada Foothills,<sup>27</sup> and Von Pfister's General Store remained as the central community meeting place for residents and transient travelers. It is no coincidence, then, that the first word of the discovery of gold outside of Sutter's camp occurred in Von Pfister's store. This first announcement to the wider public of gold in California came about as one of Sutter's emissaries, Charles Bennett, was traveling to Monterey to meet with Governor R.B. Mason in mid February to make an official claim on the land and was required to stop for the night in Benicia.<sup>28</sup> S.C. Gray, a pioneering resident of Benicia and personal acquaintance of Captain von Pfister and Dr. Robert Semple,<sup>29</sup> recounts the story in a lecture titled "Recollections of Benicia:"

"The men of Benicia who usually congregated at von Pfister's rendezvous, were sitting there discussing the future prospects of the country under its new ownership, and the conversation turned upon coal mines. They little dreamed that within 25 miles of them, among the foothills near Mt. Diablo, the 'Black Diamond' mines were awaiting the prying eyes of the prospector. During the conversation, a man named Bennett, who had been engaged with John W. Marshall, at Coloma, in building a mill for Gen'l Sutter, and who was on his way to Monterey, listened quietly for some time and finally said that something better than a coal mine had been discovered where he had been at work, something which was believed to be gold... He then displayed about four ounces in small

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<sup>25</sup> Buffum, *Six Months in the Gold Mines* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 149; Woodruff, *Benicia: The Promise of California, 1846-1889* (Vallejo, Ca: 1947), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory, *History of Solano and Napa Counties with Biographical Sketches* (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1912), 58-59.

<sup>27</sup> Cohen, *Gateway to the Inland Coast: The Story of the Carquinez Strait* (Crockett, Ca: Carquinez Strait Preservation Trust, 1996), 34-40.

<sup>28</sup> Bigler, *Diary of a Mormon in California-Discovery of Gold 1848* (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, 1872), 66; Bancroft, *History of California, Vol. VI* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888), 43; Jackson, *Gold Dust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 13; Dillon, *Great Expectations: The Story of Benicia, California* (Benicia, Ca: Benicia Heritage Book, 1980), 32-33; Hoover, *Historic Spots in California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 494.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, "Benicia the City, 1847-1854," in *Benicia's Early Glory* (Solano County Historical Society, 1958), 54.



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pieces such as had been discovered when the water was first applied to turn the mill.”<sup>30</sup>

Bancroft, in his comprehensive work on California history published in 1888,<sup>31</sup> provides a parallel account of the events that unfolded in von Pfister’s store on that seminal day. While Bancroft acknowledges that there have been multiple claims to the first announcement of the discovery of gold he presents a critical examination of the various accounts and determined Bennett’s reveal to be the earliest.<sup>32</sup>

Within months the able body male population had left Benicia for the gold fields, a pattern echoed throughout the U.S. that initiated a series of events, known as the California Gold Rush, that would have rippling consequences for the state, the American West, and the country as a whole.<sup>33</sup> During the first few months of the gold rush, before the establishment of hotels and businesses catering specifically to the transient prospector, Von Pfister’s General Store served as the waypoint, providing much needed goods and services to the miners as they stopped in Benicia on their way to and from the goldfields. The natural geographic position of Benicia plus the presence of an established store and commercial infrastructure led to Benicia being one of the primary stopping points on the gold rush travel route and has even been described as the “gateway to the mines.”<sup>34</sup> Anticipating the implications of the gold discovery for his fledgling town Semple keenly observed, “Sutter’s launch is now here...There can be no doubt that the mines are very rich- if so Benicia will be no small business in a very short time.”<sup>35</sup> The established prominence of the General Store on this early route to the mines proved to be critical to the subsequent growth of Benicia and would have significant implications for the further development of the city as a major industrial center and transportation node in early American Period California.

**Criterion B:** The Von Pfister General Store is eligible under Criterion B for its association with proprietor Edward Horatio von Pfister (1813-1886), a Benicia pioneer merchant and an influential early community member. Von Pfister was born in Albany, New York in 1813 and by the age of 24 he had crossed the Atlantic thirty-two times and was a captain of his own vessel.<sup>36</sup> Becoming interested in the China Trade and the burgeoning commercial potential of the West, von Pfister traveled to California in 1846 and plied trade goods from the Hawaiian and Sandwich Islands to the California port towns of San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and Monterey as master of the shipping vessel *Commodore Shubrick*.<sup>37</sup> In 1847, “being so well pleased with the climate,”<sup>38</sup> von

<sup>30</sup> Gray, “Recollections of Benicia,” 153.

<sup>31</sup> Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. VI, 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 43-44.

<sup>33</sup> Starr, *California: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), 80-81; Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 35; Hunt, *History of Solano County*, 193.

<sup>34</sup> Woodruff, *Benicia: The Promise of California*, 26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Bullock, “Edward H. von Pfister” in *The Ship Brooklyn Story*, Vol. 2, accessed June 20, 2014,

<http://shipbrooklyn.com/pdf/vonpfister.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> *History of Solano County*, 450; Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> *History of Solano County*, 450.

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Pfister decided to abandon his life on the sea and settle in the state of California as a merchant, originally planning on opening a store in San Jose. Semple was able to illustrate to von Pfister the advantages of Benicia as an ample port that could accommodate deep-sea vessels and convince him of the city's potential for being the preeminent center of commercial activity on the West Coast.<sup>39</sup> Von Pfister abandoned his plan for San Jose and instead began operating his store out of an unfinished adobe building in Benicia.

Von Pfister's General Store was a quick success, employing a cook, two stewards, a dishwasher, a housekeeper, and a bar tender, and allegedly netting roughly \$1,000 per month in profits.<sup>40</sup> At the General Store customers could purchase almost anything, from eyeglasses and suspenders to kegs of brandy and loads of lumber.<sup>41</sup> Being the first, and only, general store in Solano County, cash was in limited supply and von Pfister accepted cowhides, known locally as "California bank-bills,"<sup>42</sup> and other staple goods such as corn and barley. Being the only commercial establishment the General Store also functioned as a saloon and boarding house, and many prominent members of early Benicia and San Francisco Bay Area society, including Robert Semple, Thomas Larkin, members of the Martinez family, Sam Brannan, and Major Stephen Cooper, all came to the General Store to do business, as can be seen in the 1847-1848 store ledger.<sup>43</sup>

That von Pfister was himself a prominent and influential member of the community in Benicia's early years is evident in his appointment as agent for Thomas Larkin's interests in Benicia, his writing on the first deed of the records of the county, as an elected member of the city's first City Council, and later as Tax Assessor, City Clerk, Justice of the Peace, and one of three men on the Board of Trustees that saw to the affairs of the city during the years where debates over the Suscol Land Grant excluded Benicia from being recognized as part of the State of California.<sup>44</sup> In the *History of Solano County*, published in 1879, von Pfister is praised for his role in holding "positions of honor, trust, and importance," and his determination and sacrifice in investing for the development and future of Benicia.<sup>45</sup>

Von Pfister's General Store served as the communal gathering point in early Benicia due to the nature of the business and the products that were available, and also in large part to the personal character of Captain von Pfister. He was a gregarious man, described as "enterprising"<sup>46</sup> and a "likeable man,"<sup>47</sup> with a February 9, 1856 *Solano County Herald* article commenting on his "liberality and accommodating spirit," noting that "everybody this side of the Bay knows him." In describing the General Store, S.C. Gray attributes the convivial atmosphere to the "jovial and

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Hunt, *History of Solano County*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Von Pfister Store Ledger Book, Benicia City, Nov. 18, 1847 to May 17, 1848*.

<sup>42</sup> *History of Solano County*, 451.

<sup>43</sup> *Von Pfister Store Ledger Book*; Gregory, *History of Solano and Napa Counties*, 58-59.

<sup>44</sup> Bullock, "Edward H. von Pfister" in *The Ship Brooklyn Story; History of Solano County*, 451; Larkin, *The Larkin Papers, Vol. VII*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 143, 162; Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> *History of Solano County*, 451.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 450.

<sup>47</sup> Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 26.

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hospitable” von Pfister, acknowledging that “everybody was at home in his presence or under his roof.”<sup>48</sup> It is no coincidence then, being the central point in early Solano County for commerce and socialization, that Von Pfister’s General Store would be the location for the announcement of the discovery of gold.

Von Pfister’s prominence, renown, and his contributions as a merchant during this period are epitomized in events transpiring during the earliest period of the gold rush. After verifying for himself the presence of gold at Sutter’s Mill, Sam Brannan approached von Pfister and proposed partnering with him in the establishment of a general store closer to the gold fields at Coloma, to take advantage of the need for businesses that could support and service the pioneer miners who were already beginning to flock to the area.<sup>49</sup> With business in Benicia declining drastically coinciding with the mass exodus of men, von Pfister agreed and operated a business closer to the gold fields with Brannan until von Pfister’s brother was murdered and an unsuccessful hunt for the killer brought von Pfister back to Benicia later in 1848.<sup>50</sup> Upon his return to Benicia, having established himself as a reputable and astute merchant and entrepreneur with the success of the previous general stores, von Pfister became proprietor of the California House and El Dorado Saloon (neither building extant).<sup>51</sup> He bought back the General Store building in 1853 for use as his office as Justice of the Peace and possibly his residence, until he rented out the building in 1863.<sup>52</sup> Von Pfister maintained a prominent position in business and political affairs of the city until his death in 1886.<sup>53</sup> The building was then sold.

While von Pfister came to California as a ship captain, and later owned various hotels and saloons in Benicia, it is as a merchant, and specifically as the proprietor of the first general store in Solano County, that he came to prominence as an important figure in local and state history. The Solano Hotel, another building he was closely associated with, was destroyed in a fire in 1944 and von Pfister’s home, while still extant, is more reflective of his personal life as a family man. The General Store remains as a significant materialization of von Pfister’s time as an important merchant in Benicia, a position that bolstered his reputation in California and served as a catalyst for his later business and political ventures.

**Criterion C:** California adobes, from their inception, were an intermingling of architectural styles and building methods, coming to constitute a distinct architectural type through simplicity of design and use of local materials aimed at meeting the needs of frontier residents.<sup>54</sup> The Von Pfister General Store is eligible under Criterion C for its type, period, and method of construction. Specifically, the mixed material adobe method of construction—redwood framed

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<sup>48</sup> Gray, “Recollections of Benicia,” 150.

<sup>49</sup> Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 36; *History of Solano County*, 451.

<sup>50</sup> Von Pfister, “Letter to Thomas Oliver Larkin, May 19, 1847 [1848],” in *The Larkin Papers, Vol. VIII* (Los Angeles: The University of California, 1960), 266-267; Gray, “Recollections of Benicia,” 153; Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> Cardwell, *A Historic Structure Report*, 5, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 35-36.

<sup>54</sup> Hannaford and Edwards, *Spanish Colonial or Adobe Architecture of California, 1800-1850* (Stamford, CT: Architectural Book Publishing, 1990), x.

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and adobe infill—employed in the fabrication of the General Store in 1847 reflects the local availability of material and the blending of architectural styles characteristic of building construction in California during the interregnum period between Mexican and American control. This period is characterized by an influx of American immigrants to the area who brought with them a heritage of timber house construction and shipbuilding. The General Store exhibits a marrying of this typical timber-based American approach with more traditional Spanish adobe construction practices and materials.<sup>55</sup> The General Store, then, is a rare surviving example of the architecture type that distinguishes the transition between the Spanish Colonial style of the Spanish and Mexican periods in California and the subsequent Folk Victorian style that came to define the Early American Period in Benicia and in Northern California in general.<sup>56</sup>

The General Store, in both form and materials, is a hybrid building. The building is framed and clad with redwood timber, the typical medium for American building construction in coastal California. The framed walls were infilled in a manner typical of Anglo American masonry practices, and the bricks were constructed of adobe, the traditional material used in Spanish colonies in North America. Since the General Store was taken over unfinished by the New York born Anglo American ship captain, von Pfister, the remaining elements were constructed with timber, employing techniques and styles familiar to him. With mixtures such as this common in early American Period California, the mixed transitional style is classified as Monterey Colonial architecture, although the General Store lacks many of the distinctive characteristics of this style including a second story and surrounding porch.<sup>57</sup>

The layout and architectural elements of the General Store are similarly mixed, with building orientation, room location, and room access locations constructed in a traditional Spanish Colonial style, and with a wooden gable roof, interior and exterior wooden cladding, and wooden floorboards giving the store a distinctive Anglo American aesthetic. This mixture is perhaps best exemplified in the adobe bricks themselves. The adobe bricks are constructed in the traditional Spanish Colonial fashion and are nine inches in width, reflecting the common American masonry dimension as opposed to the Spanish “pie,” which measures roughly eleven inches.<sup>58</sup>

While emblematic of a transitional architecture type, the General Store is the only surviving example in Benicia of a vernacular Monterey Colonial style that was characteristic of the very early settlement architecture in the city. In a letter to the newspaper the *California Star* on March 22, 1848, the pioneer Benicia resident Stephen C. Cooper writes that, “Concerning Benicia City... the first house was finished last August and there are now 14 houses of adobe and frame.”<sup>59</sup> Records suggest that these early domestic buildings were modest buildings of a few rooms, very similar to the General Store. The fact that this mixed adobe-timber construction

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.; Archeo-Tech, “Archaeological Investigations at the Von Pfister Adobe Site, Benicia, California” (Oakland: Archeo-Tech, 1989).

<sup>56</sup> Masson, *The California House* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 14-15; McAlester and McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (Mount Vernon, NY: Consumer Union, 1984), 129-133.

<sup>57</sup> Masson, *The California House*, 14-15.

<sup>58</sup> Cardwell, *A Historic Structure Report*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Woodruff, *Benicia: The Promise of California*, 23.

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method was being employed in Benicia during the first months of the city's establishment is not surprising considering that Thomas O. Larkin, one of Benicia's founders, built in Monterey a two story adobe that epitomizes the Monterey Colonial style.<sup>60</sup> It appears, then, that the early settlers and builders of Benicia employed a similar construction technique in the fabrication of their more modest residences. In following a similar stylistic approach, limited by the materials and labor available, a vernacular Monterey Colonial style and fabrication technique monopolized the earliest construction in Benicia. The General Store, being the oldest extant building in Benicia, is the only remaining of these original hybrid buildings, making it a significant and unique example of Benicia's original vernacular architecture that illustrates the pluralistic nature of the state during the period of building's construction.<sup>61</sup>

### **After the Period of Significance:**

The General Store is most significantly associated with Captain von Pfister during the early years of Benicia as the community took advantage of its position as a bustling Gold Rush port and aspiring metropolis. The adobe building served many important purposes after von Pfister left to join Sam Brannan in the gold fields during 1848. W.S. Richey and O.P. Evans immediately took ownership of the adobe and continued to serve the needs of transient miners and residents alike through their operation of a bakery and store.<sup>62</sup> While successful during the early months of the gold rush, the small store was soon competing with numerous other mercantile establishments that cropped up in Benicia to take advantage of the city's strategic position and heavy traffic. Evans eventually sold the property sometime after 1851 to Charles Hayden, who appears to have used the adobe as part of a hotel before the property was sold back to von Pfister in 1853. Von Pfister used the adobe as an office for his position as Justice of the Peace and it most likely served as his home for the first few years of his marriage.<sup>63</sup>

Beginning in 1863 it appears the building was rented for residential use. Von Pfister likely maintained responsibility for maintenance and construction until his death in 1886 when the adobe was sold to C.B. Houghton. It appears residential activity ceased at this point and the building was used as a storage space. This function continued under the ownership of the Port Costa Lumber Company from 1898 to roughly 1937 when the building appears to have been abandoned. The building remained unused, aside from storage purposes, until owner Joseph Garske, recognized the historical importance of the building and deeded the property to the city of Benicia on May 28, 1976.<sup>64</sup> Since this date the Benicia Historical Society, in collaboration with the city, has acted as the steward for the resource and worked to stabilize and protect the building from further natural damage. While ownership of the adobe has changed hands multiple times during its history, von Pfister was the owner for the longest period of time during its active use and he is the figure most closely associated with the building. In its various forms, from general store, to hotel, office, and residence, the adobe building was intimately involved with the development of Benicia as a early prominent American city in California and the events of the

<sup>60</sup> Masson, *The California House*, 14-15; Starr, *California: A History*, 59.

<sup>61</sup> Hendry and Bowman, *The Spanish and Mexican Adobe*, 421.

<sup>62</sup> Dillon, *Great Expectations*, 26, 38; Gray, "Recollections of Benicia," 157.

<sup>63</sup> Cardwell, *A Historic Structure Report*, 5, 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 6, 10-11.

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Gold Rush that would leave an indelible mark on the history of the state. The General Store, as the oldest extant building in the city, is the unique physical link that binds the community of Benicia to its earliest history. From gold rush port to state capital and strategic military arsenal, to the earliest days when the potential for the city was still just a dream of the original founders and the first pioneer residents, the adobe building has stood as an important feature on the Benicia landscape.

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**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 # CA-1912  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** less than one acre

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**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 38.047125 Longitude: -122.161325

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Von Pfister General Store is located at the northeast corner of Block 13, Parcel 11 on the south side of Von Pfister Alley in Benicia, California. The northeast corner of the boundary is located 146 feet northwest from First Street, commencing 29 feet northwest, there forming a 90° angle and extending southwest 40 feet, there forming a 90° angle and extending 25 feet southeast, there forming a 90° angle and extending 15 feet northeast, there forming a 90° angle and extending southeast 4 feet, there forming a 90° angle and extending northeast 25 feet to the northeast corner of the boundary.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the original parcel description and includes the area historically associated with the property.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: David Hyde, Archaeologist  
organization: Archaeological Research Facility, University of California, Berkeley  
street & number: 2251 College Avenue  
city or town: Berkeley state: CA zip code: 94720  
e-mail david.hyde@berkeley.edu  
telephone: (707) 567-5392  
date: February 2013; Revised July 2014, November 2014

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

Name of Property: Von Pfister General Store  
City or Vicinity: Benicia  
County: Solano  
State: California

Photographer: Vic Randall  
Date Photographed: January 31, 2013  
Photographs: 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10 of 10

Photographer: David Hyde  
Date Photographed: September 22, 2014  
Photographs: 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of 10

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0001

View northwest of eastern façade from brick patio viewing area. Protective metal structure covers the General Store, with canvas wall removed for photography.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0002

View west of eastern façade from adjacent parking lot. Protective metal structure covers the General Store, with canvas wall removed for photography.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0003

View northwest of northern façade from within protective structure. Obtuse angle is necessary because photographs of this façade only retrievable from within the protective structure.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0004

View southeast of northern façade from within protective structure. Obtuse angle is necessary because photographs of this façade only retrievable from within the protective structure.

Von Pfister General Store

Name of Property

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CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0005

View southwest of western façade from within protective structure. Obtuse angle is necessary because photographs of this façade only retrievable from within the protective structure.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0006

View northeast of western façade from within protective structure. Obtuse angle is necessary because photographs of this façade only retrievable from within the protective structure.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0007

View southeast of southern façade from within protective structure. Obtuse angle is necessary because photographs of this façade only retrievable from within the protective structure.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0008

View north of eastern façade from brick patio viewing area. Protective metal structure covers the General Store, with canvas wall removed for photography.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0009

View southwest of northern façade from adjacent lot highlighting the composition of the protective structure and the location of the General Store in relation to surrounding contemporary buildings and spaces.

CA\_Solano County\_Von Pfister General Store\_0010

View southwest of interior adobe wall from within the larger north room, highlighting the high degree of adobe brick integrity in this area and the general disrepair of the interior wooden elements in the north room.

**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.460 et seq.).

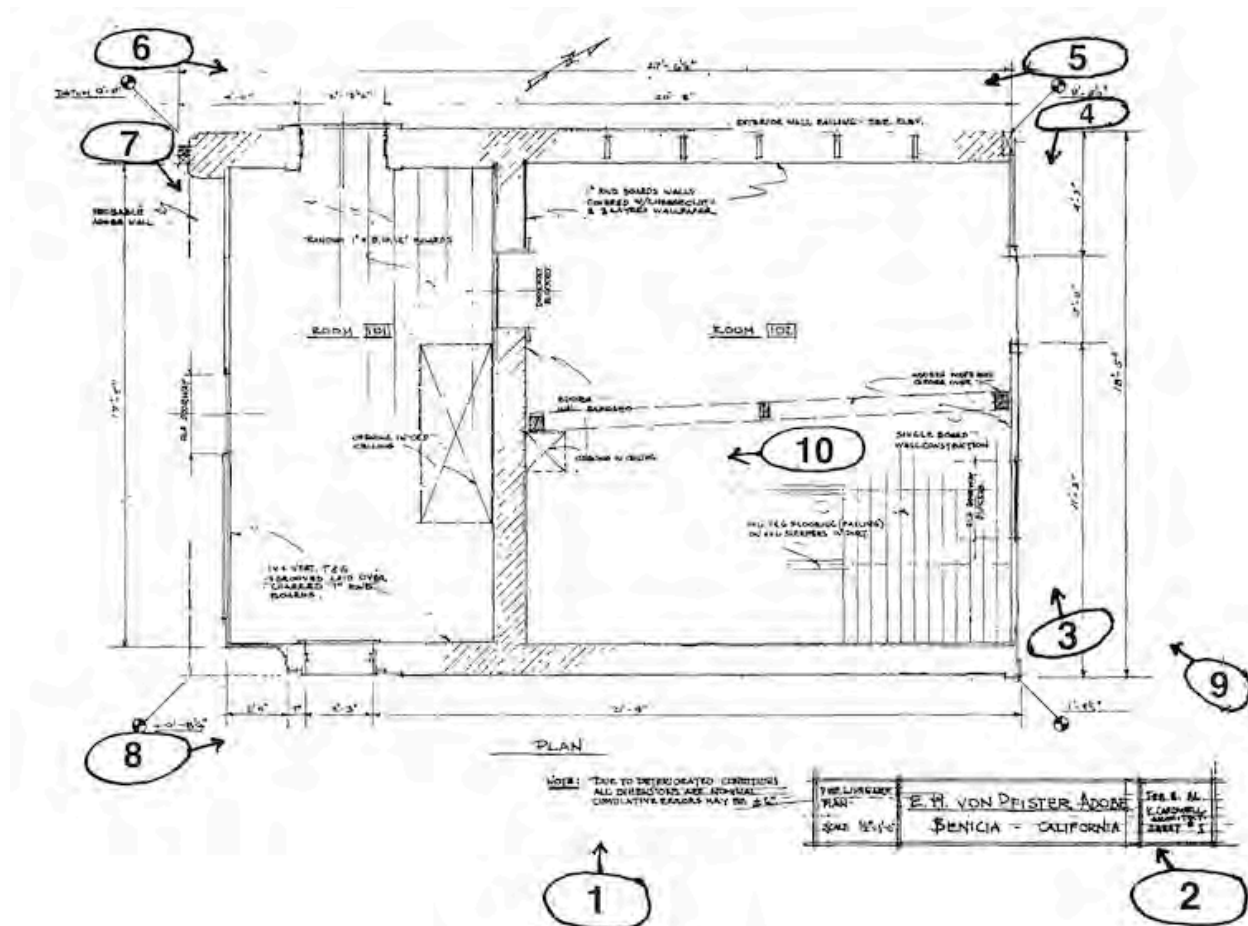
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Von Pfister General Store  
 Name of Property

Solano County, California  
 County and State

**Sketch Map/Photo Key**

(from *E.H. Von Pfister Adobe, Benicia, California: A Historic Structure Report*, by Kenneth H. Cardwell, 1986)



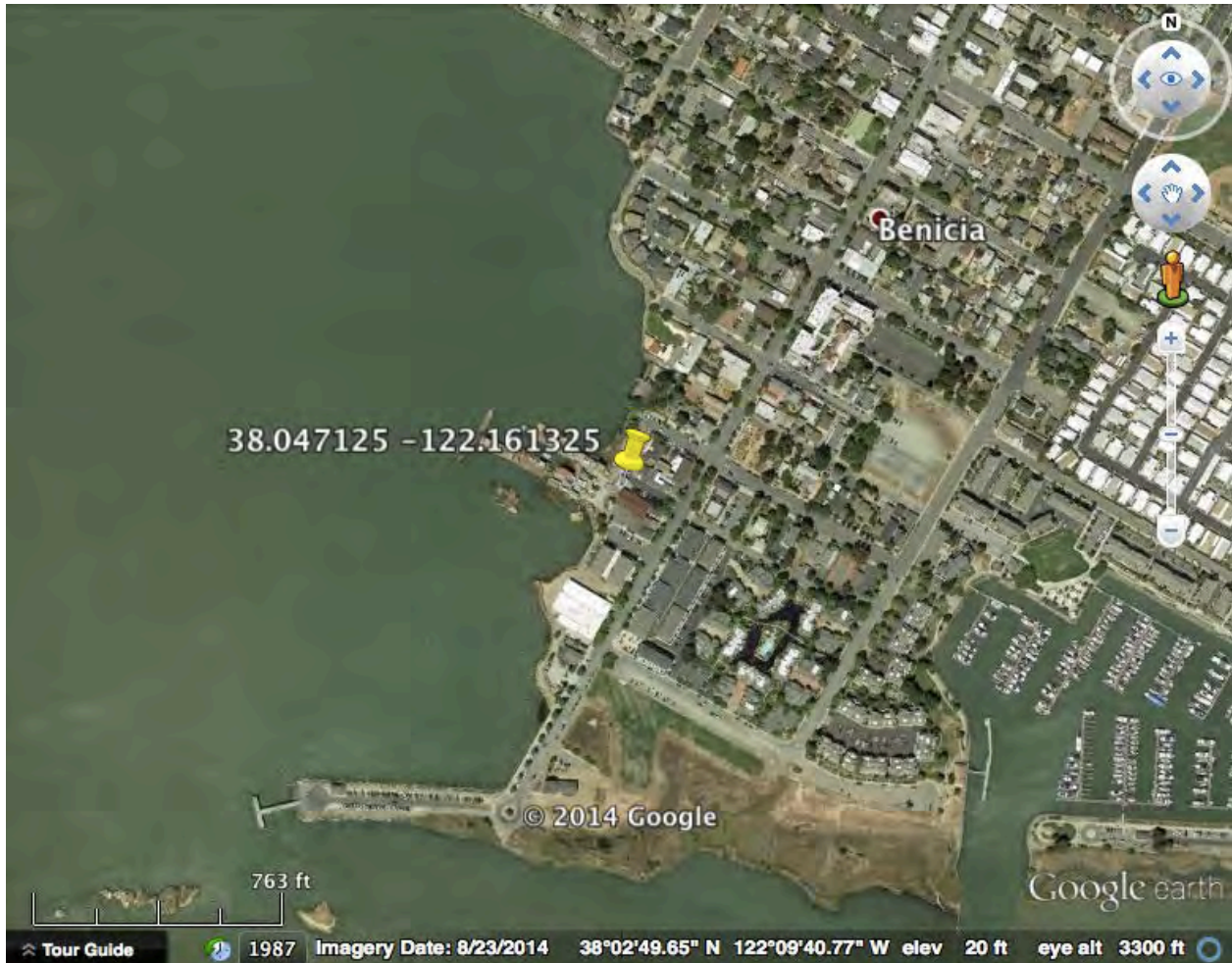
Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

### Location Map 1

Latitude: 38.047125

Longitude: -122.161325



Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

## Location Map 2

Latitude: 38.047125

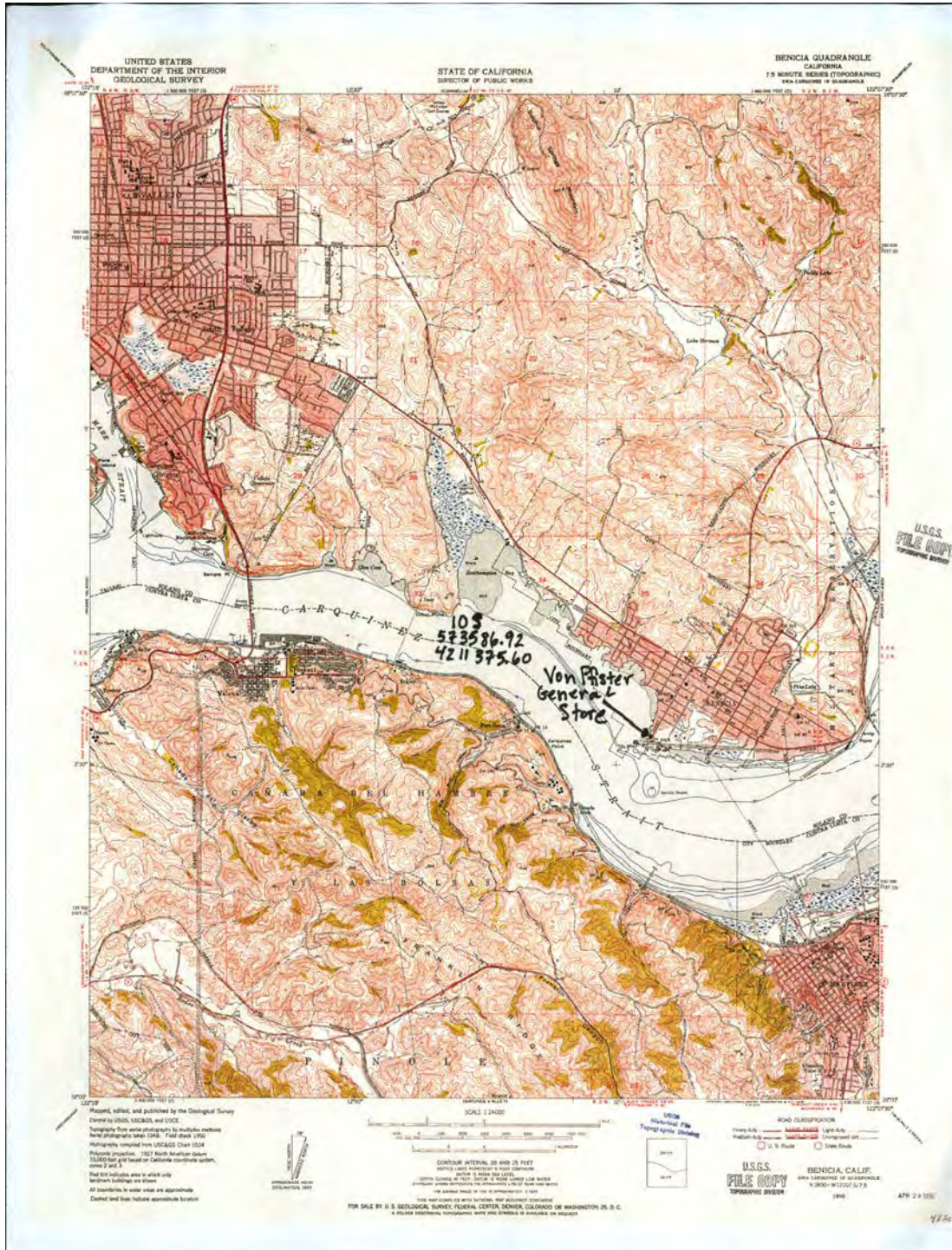
Longitude: -122.161325



Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

### Supplemental Map (USGS)





Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

**Figure 1.** View south of northern and western façades; photographer and date unknown.  
Courtesy Benicia Historical Museum.



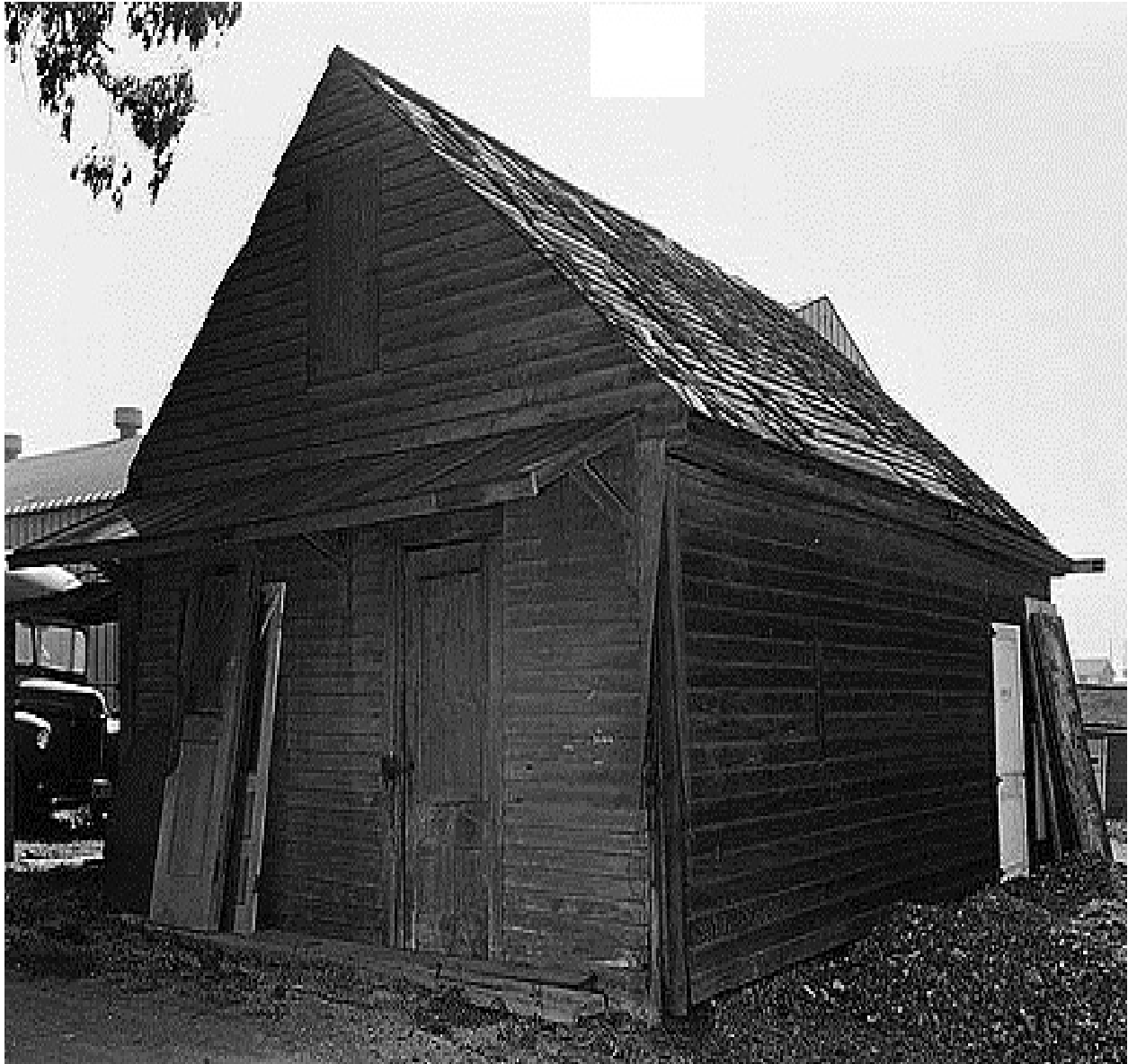
**Figure 2.** View southwest of northern and eastern façades; February 1968, photographer unknown. Courtesy Benicia Historical Museum.



Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

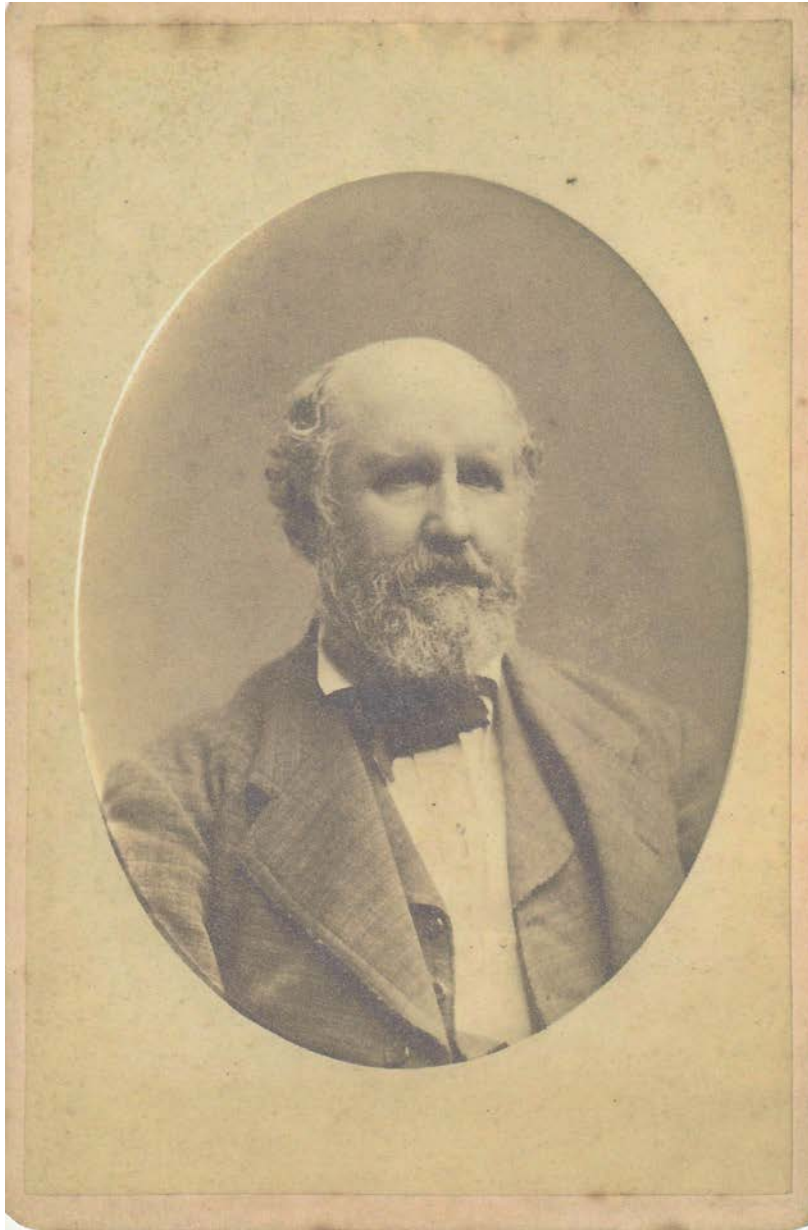
**Figure 3.** View south of northern and western façades; photographer and date unknown [likely later than Figure 1, given general dilapidation of wood and walls beginning to bulge].  
Courtesy City of Benicia.



Von Pfister General Store  
Name of Property

Solano County, California  
County and State

**Figure 4.** Edward Horatio von Pfister, April 18, 1876.  
Courtesy Benicia Capitol State Historic Park

























UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Von Pfister General Store

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, Solano

DATE RECEIVED: 5/15/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/09/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/24/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/30/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000360

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

\_\_\_ ACCEPT \_\_\_ RETURN \_\_\_ REJECT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Von Pfister General Store is locally significant under National Register Criteria A, B and C in the areas of Exploration/Settlement, Commerce, and Architecture. Although in extremely poor structural condition, the two-room, 1-1/2 story, wood-frame and adobe building, retains a substantial amount of original material and features characteristic construction forms dating from the 1840s era, uniquely blending classic Spanish Colonial/Monterey and American Period architectural traditions. An extremely rare survivor from this early settlement era in Solano County, the modest 18' x 27' building has had no significant alterations since the late nineteenth century outside of the recent addition of temporary structural supports, resulting in an amazing retention of period fabric, design forms, and workmanship. The open-sided metal shed erected above the redwood and adobe building protects the fragile fabric, while still allowing the structure to be viewed and understood as a stand-alone resource. Solano County's first commercial operation, the store served as the hub for early social and economic activity in the young port community of Benicia on the eve of the California Gold Rush. The store was operated by influential early Benicia businessman Edward Horatio von Pfister, whose business success and political activity significantly shaped local development during the late nineteenth century.

RECOMMENDATION: ACCEPT CRITERIA A, B & C

REVIEWER: Paul R. Lusignea DISCIPLINE: HISTORIAN (ARCHIT.)

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: 6/24/2015

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y (N)

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

**Von Pfister General Store  
Benicia, Solano County  
Staff Report**

The Von Pfister General Store is a two-room, one and one-half story redwood frame adobe building in the heart of Benicia's Downtown Historic District. The original 18' by 27.5' building, constructed in 1847, is situated directly between the Carquinez Strait and First Street, the commercial and cultural center of Benicia. The blending of classic Spanish Colonial and later American Period styles reflects the transitional nature of California during the post-Mexican period in which the store was constructed and first occupied. The building has high integrity, remains unaltered, and retains much of its original architectural detail. The General Store is protected from the elements by a steel-frame structure with a metal front gable roof, an access gate, and chain link fence walls fully covered by protective canvas panels that can be removed for ventilation and viewing purposes.

The Von Pfister General Store is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement at the local level for its association with the establishment of the community of Benicia and its integral role in the development of Benicia as an important node for transportation and commerce in early American Period California. The period of significance under Criterion A begins with construction and commercial operation in 1847 and continues through its use in waterfront economic activity associated with the early development of the community of Benicia until abandonment of the building in 1937.

The General Store is eligible under Criterion B in the area of Commerce at the local level for its association with pioneer Benicia resident and merchant Captain Edward Horatio von Pfister, who came to Benicia as an entrepreneurial shipping captain and went on to become a successful merchant operating numerous businesses in Benicia and occupying influential political positions during the city's formative years. The period of significance under Criterion B is split, 1847 to 1848 and 1853 to 1863. This reflects von Pfister's initial role in Benicia as store owner, sale of the property when he left for the gold fields, then repurchase of the building associated with his subsequent role as public political figure, a role that continued in association with other properties after he rented the store building to someone else in 1863.

Additionally, the Von Pfister General Store is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level as a vernacular Monterey Colonial-type adobe that exhibits the local and period specific traits of a transitional building in its humble and mixed material construction. The period of significance under Criterion C is 1847, the year of construction.

The property is nominated by the Benicia Historical Society, in collaboration with the City of Benicia Parks & Community Services Department. In its role as representative of a Certified Local Government, the Benicia Historic Preservation Review Commission discussed the nomination at their regular meeting March 26, 2015. A letter of support was approved. Before the nomination was submitted to the Office of Historic Preservation, the City discussed the nomination at a public meeting November 15, 2012, and passed a resolution recommending that City Council support the nomination. The City of Benicia Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Commission discussed the nomination at a public meeting December 12, 2012, and voted to recommend that City Council support the nomination. The City Council of the City of Benicia adopted Resolution 13-2 supporting the nomination January 15, 2013.

OHP staff supports the nomination and recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine the Von Pfister General Store meets National Register Criteria A, B, and C at the local level of significance with an inclusive combined period of significance 1847 to 1937. Staff recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service.

Amy H. Crain  
State Historian II  
April 2, 2015



March 26, 2015

California State Parks  
Attn: Office of Historic Preservation  
Carol Roland-Nawi, Ph.D., State Historic Preservation Officer  
1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95186

Re: Nomination of Von Pfister General Store to National Register of Historic Places

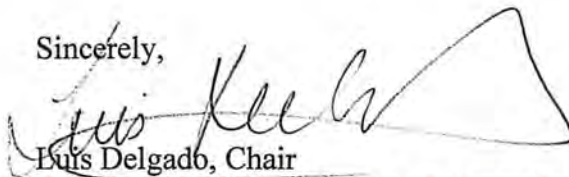
Dear Ms. Roland-Nawi:

The City of Benicia Historic Preservation Review Commission enthusiastically supports the nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places. Nomination of this important structure was truly a community effort, which was achieved with significant effort by the Benicia Historical Society in partnership with the Benicia Parks and Community Services Department.

The Von Pfister General Store, which dates to 1847, was the first and only general store in Solano County prior to and during the Gold Rush. The building had a strong association with Dr. Robert Semple, Benicia's founder, who was also a leading figure in the early development of California's statehood. Shortly after construction began it was acquired by Captain Edward Von Pfister, an early Benicia leader and local merchant. During the Gold Rush, the General Store served as a community gathering place and an important waypoint for newcomers and pioneers to obtain supplies for settlement and establishment of industry and commerce. The Von Pfister General Store is significant not only for its association with early leaders and the Gold Rush, but also for its California adobe construction and historic integrity. The building retains its original architectural features and association with Benicia's strategic location along the Carquinez Strait.

It is our Commission's opinion that the General Store meets all criteria for nomination as a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places and we are pleased to offer our recommendation of support to the State Historical Resources Commission.

Sincerely,



Luis Delgado, Chair

Benicia Historic Preservation Review Commission



**RESOLUTION NO. 13-2**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BENICIA  
SUPPORTING THE NOMINATION OF THE VON PFISTER GENERAL STORE  
TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**WHEREAS**, the Benicia Historical Society, in collaboration with the Parks & Community Services Department, drafted a nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places; and

**WHEREAS**, General Plan Goal 3.1 is to "Maintain and enhance Benicia's historic character" and the nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places is consistent with this Goal; and

**WHEREAS**, on November 15, 2012 the Historic Preservation Review Commission held a public meeting, received public testimony, and passed a resolution recommending that City Council support the nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places; and

**WHEREAS**, on December 12, 2012 the Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Commission held a public meeting, received public testimony, and voted to recommend that City Council support the nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the City Council of the City of Benicia hereby expresses its support for the nomination of the Von Pfister General Store to the National Register of Historic Places; and

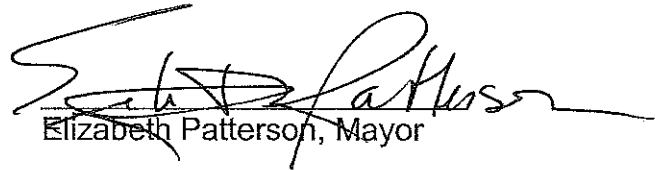
\*\*\*\*\*

On motion of Council Member **Hughes**, seconded by Council Member **Schwartzman**, the above Resolution was introduced and passed by the City Council of the City of Benicia at a regular meeting of said Council held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2013, and adopted by the following vote.

**Ayes: Council Members Campbell, Hughes, Schwartzman, Strawbridge and Mayor Patterson**

**Noes: None**

**Absent: None**



Elizabeth Patterson, Mayor

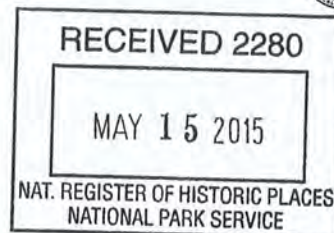
Attest:



Lisa Wolfe, City Clerk

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 100  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816-7100  
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053  
calshpo@parks.ca.gov  
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



May 5, 2015

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmark Programs  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Fl.  
Washington D.C. 20005

Subject: **Von Pfister General Store  
Solano County, California  
National Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the **Von Pfister General Store** nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. On April 29, 2015 in San Diego, California, the California State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register at the local level of significance under Criteria A, B, and C with an inclusive combined period of significance 1847 to 1937.

The Von Pfister General Store is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/Settlement for its association with the establishment of the community of Benicia and its integral role in the development of Benicia as an important node for transportation and commerce in early American Period California. The General Store is eligible under Criterion B in the area of Commerce for its association with pioneer Benicia resident and merchant Captain Edward Horatio von Pfister, who came to Benicia as an entrepreneurial shipping captain and went on to become a successful merchant operating numerous businesses in Benicia and occupying influential political positions during the city's formative years. Additionally, the property is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a vernacular Monterey Colonial-type adobe that exhibits the local and period specific traits of a transitional building in its humble and mixed material construction.

The property is nominated by the Benicia Historical Society, in collaboration with the City of Benicia Parks & Community Services Department. If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Amy Crain of my staff at (916) 445-7009.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jenan Saunders".

Jenan Saunders  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures