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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Nathaniel Brittan Party House

2. Location

street & number: 125 Dale Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: San Carlos

vicinity: N/A

state: CA county: San Mateo code: 081 zip code: 94070

3. Classification

Ownership of property: private

Catagory of property: building

Number of resources within property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____ 1 _____	_____ 1 _____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____ 1 _____	_____ 1 _____	Total

Total of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

9. Major Bibliographical References

 See continuation sheet.

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 Building Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
 - Other state agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other -- Specify Repository: _____
-

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre.

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing
10 564450 4150440

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundry Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundry Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Kent L. Seavey/Preservation Consultant

Organization: N/A

Date: August 1, 1994

Street & Number 310 Lighthouse Avenue

Telephone: (408) 375-8739

City or Town: Pacific Grove

State: CA

Zip: 93950

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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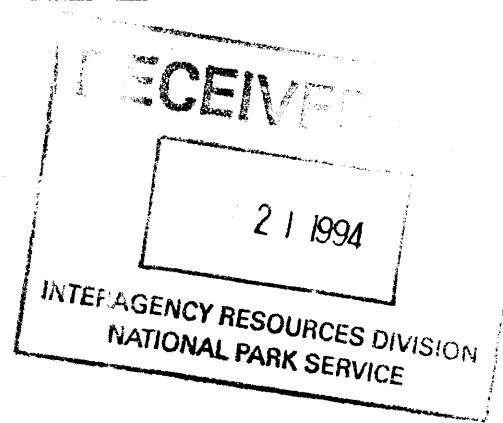
Section number 7 Page 1 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA
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The Brittan "Party House" is a two-and-a-half story redwood framed octagonal "folly" constructed in 1872. The exterior wall cladding includes a variety of wood sidings separated by simple, horizontal belt courses. Fenestration is irregular, with multi-paned wooden windows that are fixed, double hung or transom type. Some were replaced about 1950 with large single panes. A small, one-story ca 1926 kitchen addition projects slightly from the second floor level on the SW. The upper floor is characterised by a series of five steeply pitched gable roofs that partially wrap around the building. They abut a full two story wall at the SW, and an enclosed shed roofed stairwell on the SE. The roof is surmounted by an octagonal cupola with witches cap. The exterior has been only slightly altered from its original appearance. The upper floor interior, with its large walk in fireplace, is basically intact as constructed in 1872. Sited high on a hillside, surrounded by mature trees and shrubbery in a lush landscape setting, the house retains a high degree of integrity as well as a strong sense of time and place.

The board and batten ground floor of the house rests on a brick foundation that forms part of a cistern, used in the past for water collection. Metal pipes projecting from the perimeter of a patio just below the house on the north side suggest that the collected water may have been employed for irrigation at the Brittan Manor House (1882), about a half-block away on Pine Avenue. Nat Brittan was well known for his active interest in developing water resources for San Carlos. At some point in the past range cattle were housed in this ground floor level, and as late as the 1930s the Van Dee Camp Dairy stabled their cows under the building. While the exterior has remained essentially the same, with large fixed and double hung multi-paned wood windows, the interior has undergone considerable change through a series of remodelings over time.

The original entry was under a gabled hood on the projecting second-floor stairwell bay at the SE. It was reached by a brick fenced walk that is now part of an adjacent residential property. The current entry is just left, or north of the ca 1926 kitchen addition on this floor.

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Original fenestration along the wood shingled second floor had paired 9/9 double hung wood sash, separated by smaller louvered vents, in each of the five gabled bays. This arrangement was modified about 1950 in the principal north facing bay, which is somewhat larger than the others and faceted. Owner/contractor John Nielsen replaced the original fenestration with wide rectangular openings, using two fixed lights in each facet. Smaller vertical 2/4 outward opening wood casement windows at the gable ends of this feature, used for ventilation and to maintain the rhythm of the smaller-paned windows, may be original. Nielsen also changed the exterior wall cladding around the new windows, employing a horizontal "V" siding. He used the same "V" siding vertically below the sills, almost like a skirt-board.

Original fenestration in the gable heads that characterize the upper half-story of the house include a central double hung window flanked by a pair of smaller outward opening casement windows. These are all multi-paned, except in the principal north facing bay. These windows were also slightly modified by John Nielsen in his ca 1950 remodel. Evidence of openings for sash weights suggest that the existing fixed central window was once double hung and either 9/9 or 12/12 (like those found in the octagonal cupola). Tall flanking hopper windows were probably 2/4, like those found on the second floor. The small outward opening casement windows that flank the hopper types are original. A tiny, square fixed four-light window in the gable peak is also original.

About 1981, owner Walter Baccala slightly extended the existing second floor kitchen under the footbridge leading to the third floor, carefully maintaining the character of the house through the use of similar forms and materials. The upper half-story rises to full story height on this SW elevation, with a steeply pitched shed roof reaching to the base of the transom windows in the cupola.

A massive brick chimney at the south anchors the building to the steeply rising hillside. The chimney includes segmentally arched brick window casings, with square, outward opening two-light wood casement windows, on either side of an unusual upper-floor walk in fireplace. (This element will be discussed under significant interiors.)

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The original bracketed wooden pent hood over the window on the east side of the chimney is missing. An open wooden footbridge connects a hillside trail to the upper half-story on the east side of the chimney.

Access to the interior from the footbridge is through a glazed panel door, possibly from the 1926 remodel. Immediately to the right, or east of the door is a square projecting bay, rising from the second story level, enclosing bathrooms and an interior stairwell. The bay features a bracketed gable window hood over the original entry door, and has single, multi-paned double hung wood windows at each floor on its side elevations. The bay is capped by a stepped shed roof and dormer. The dormer has a bank of three, multi-paned fixed windows. A much smaller shed roofed projection at the base of the roof cupola, on its east side, covers fixed, colored glass windows. These light the stairwell leading to the cupola's railed interior observation platform. A similar feature appears on the NW side of the cupola.

While the first and second floor interiors of the house have gone through a series of remodelings over time, the upper half-story has remained remarkably intact. It was used by Nat Brittan and his San Francisco Bohemian Club friends as a social, gaming and dining room. At one time it housed one or more billard tables. The interior is in effect a single open space of approximately nine hundred square feet.

The five gabled bays that wrap around the building from the east to west are open on the interior, affording a variety of landscape and San Francisco Bay views. The shed roof on the SW side of the building forms an angled plane terminating just below the transom windows of the roof cupola, creating an open interior balcony space above the main floor. This octagonal balcony, the interior of the cupola, affords even better views of the surrounding countryside than those of the gabled bays. This feature, with its pierced decorative balusters, is reached by an open wood staircase along the east side of the room. The interior wall finish is three inch beaded redwood panel throughout.

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A noteworthy feature of the room is the walk in brick fireplace at the south wall. Approximately ten feet wide and ten feet deep, there are brick seats on either side of the fireplace interior with pressed metal seats and backs in the form of buttoned cushions. The open hearth, between the seats, was used to roast sides of venison obtained during hunting parties on the property. Above and behind each seat are outward opening two-light wood casement windows. The fireplace design was probably derived from hunting lodges seen by Nat Brittan on one of his many European visits.

A noncontributing wood frame gable-roofed garage with wood shingle siding is found below the house at the the north end of the property. This feature was added by about 1926. It is just above Dale Ave. and is reached by an asphalt driveway. The main house is approached via an open brick staircase with low stone retaining walls in uncoursed stone rubble. Brick walks and small patios of similar design are found around the perimeter of the house as well. While most of these features appear to be from the period of construction, some may be later. The house sits high on its steep hillside property, behind mature trees and shrubbery that effectively screen it from view, making photographic recordation all but impossible. That is why the 1963 Morley Baer, and 1989 Augustine Buonocore photographs are employed for primary visual documentation. The building as seen in these images remains unchanged.

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Section number 8 Page 1 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA
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The Brittan "Party House" is significant in the architectural history of California under Criterion C as one of the few remaining examples of the nineteenth century Octagon Mode of building design. Introduced by Orson Squire Fowler through his 1853 publication, *A Home For All*, the octagon form gained wide popularity countrywide. Seven or more octagons were constructed in San Francisco in the 1850s and 1860s, of which only two remain. Nathaniel Brittan's 1872 "Party House" embodies the distinctive characteristics of this once popular but no longer common building type. It also illustrates the individuality of expression afforded within the Octagon Mode. The house retains a high degree of integrity and a strong sense of time and place.

CONTEXT

The Brittan "Party House" was constructed on land that was once part of the Las Pulgas Rancho, deeded to Don Jose Dario Arguello by Governor Diego de Borcia (1794-1800). In 1835 Governor Jose Castro reconfirmed the grant to Arguello's heirs, and in 1856, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a patent for 32,240 acres of the original rancho to Dona Maria Arguello (widow of Don Luis Dario Arguello), and her two sons.

Another recipient of Pulgas Rancho acreage was San Francisco attorney Simon Mezes, who had successfully defended the land grant before the United States Land Commission. His fee for services was fifteen percent of the Las Pulgas property, which included the future site of the city of San Carlos. In 1854 Mezes sold portions of his San Carlos land holdings to two American businessmen. Timothy Guy Phelps, a grain speculator, and San Francisco hardware dealer John Brittan.

Brittan purchased three thousand acres between Pulgas Creek, to the north, and Cordilleras Creek on the south. His land ran from the San Francisco Bay marshes west into the coastal foothills. He planted most of the property in hay and grain, with some dairy pasturage. Brittan built a country home, Wesly Bays at what is today's St. Francis Way and Elm Street. Here he raised his three children, one of whom was Nathaniel J. Brittan.

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Section number 8 Page 2 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA

Nathanial, or Nat as he was popularly known, was by far the most colorful of John Brittan's children. Nat followed his father in the hardware business, but was far more interested in the bohemian social life of the time in San Francisco, and in his self-styled role as country squire. The San Francisco press referred to him as "the Duke of San Carlos". One of his avocations was the development of water wells on his and his neighbor's property in San Carlos, the only source of water for the community until the 1920s. When John Brittan died in 1872 Nat acquired the family land north of what is now Brittan Avenue to Pulgas Creek.

Nat Brittan and his wife Isobel were cultured and well-traveled, making regular visits to Europe. Their foothill home at 40 Pine Avenue, just east of the "Party House", was constructed in 1881 and known as San Carlos Manor. Probably designed in part by Brittan himself, it incorporated European design elements into a basic Queen Anne plan. San Carlos Manor was landscaped with exotic trees and shrubs collected during the family's world travels, and had a small zoo which included bear pits. The property featured its own Japanese tea garden.

Brittan's "Party House" or "foily" predated San Carlos Manor by a decade, and had been constructed in order to separate he and his San Francisco bohemian friends from Mrs. Brittan, who was not fond of their noisy carousing. The San Francisco press reported an incident in which Mrs. Brittan resorted to firing a shotgun over the heads of one group of revellers to restore order.

Although Nat Brittan didn't formally join the Bohemian Club until two years after its incorporation in 1872, he was a strong and ardent supporter of the group. Besides the regular hunting and drinking activities at the "Party House", in the early 1890s Brittan offered the Bohemian Club a prominent hill on his San Carlos property for their country retreat. He even engaged architect club member Willis Polk to design a clubhouse to be located on its summit. "The Owl's Nest", as it was to be called, was loosely modeled after England's Haddon Hall. In 1893 a political schism between the "regular ticket" and "opposition members", led by Brittan, ended with the project being abandoned.

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Section number 8 Page 3 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA

A plaqued cornerstone laid for the San Carlos retreat was later given to the club and is now located at the Bohemian Grove on the Russian River.

ARCHITECTURE

The Brittan "Party House" is one of the few remaining examples, in California, of the Octagon Mode of architecture, a building type made popular nationwide in the mid-nineteenth century through the writings of Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887). Fowler was well ahead of his time in the area of domestic building design. He argued that the eight sides of his octagon form enclosed more space per square foot than that of the traditional four wall building, and gave greater lateral stability for wind loads.

A strong advocate of healthful and affordable housing, Fowler employed an early form of concrete slab wall construction that could be fabricated from materials generally found on a building site. He incorporated innovative ideas in sanitation and ventilation in his building design. He noted that his many-sided house allowed for maximum air movement and sunlight, important components of healthful living. Fowler proposed hot-air and hot-water furnaces, built in cisterns for the capture and distillation of rainwater, indoor plumbing, and speaking tubes in every room for greater ease in internal communication. He preferred the use of a flat roof on the building form because of its potential as a promenade and for drying clothing.

Orson Squire Fowler held the view that every man was capable of being his own architect. Because the octagon was a building type rather than a style, each house tended to take on the decorative and programatic trappings of its builder. The exterior of the octagon was adaptable to any fashionable style, Greek, Gothic, Italian or French, etc.. The most ornate example of the form in America, Longwood, at Natchez, Mississippi, employs the decorative vocabulary of the exotic Moorish style, replete with an onion dome roof.

Houses in the Octagon Mode were constructed throughout the United States during the 1850s and 1860s and later.

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In California the "Round House", a circular adobe structure in Los Angeles, was turned into an octagon in 1856. In San Francisco, that same year, someone erected a copy of the John J. Brown octagon in Williamsburg, New York. In the 1860s there were at least seven octagon houses in San Francisco. Today only two remain. The Louis Feusier house at 1067 Green Street, built in 1857-58 for George Kenny, acquired a Mansard roof in the 1880s. The William C. McElroy house at 2645 Gough Street, constructed in 1861, was damaged in the 1906 earthquake, and moved in the early 1950s to become the headquarters for the San Francisco chapter of the Colonial Dames of America. Other known octagons from this period include one in Nevada City and the Santa Cruz Hall of Records, a one story brick octagon with classical detailing designed by J. W. Newcum of Oakland, California in 1882. The only other identified octagon house in the San Francisco Bay area is the Nathaniel Brittan "Party House".

The record is mute on why Nathaniel Brittan choose the Octagon Mode for his "Party House", but from a practical point of view for its avowed purpose the design choice makes good sense. The building form afforded more interior space for large entertainments. The shape of the building was ideally suited to its hillside site not only for the impressive landscape and bay views it offered, but also because of the greater lateral stability of its design in an earthquake prone environment. The use of redwood for framing, rather than Fowler's gravel wall construction may have been for seismic reasons as well, but we do not know.

While Nat Brittan was clearly a social eccentric, in the mechanical sense he was very practical. The octagonal form of his "Party House" brought light into the building from almost every direction as well as excellent cross ventilation. His interest in the development of water resources is noted in the basement cistern. The unusual gabled roof form, as well as expanding available space and views, is a good example of the individuality of expression possible within the Octagon Mode. The placement of the main staircase in its own bay was a space conserving measure that assured the widest possible use of the upper-floor gaming room, and opened it to interior as well as exterior views from the cupola balcony.

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Section number 8 Page 5 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA

The massive brick chimney anchoring the building to the hillside, with its European style walk in fireplace, was probably constructed by the William Hull Brickworks, established in San Carlos in 1858.

Nat Brittan's hand is clearly evident in the design of his "Party House". Who formalized the plans or executed the construction is as yet unknown. What is known is the fact that the house is one of the very few remaining examples of the Octagon Mode in California dating from the nineteenth century. In spite of a few changes over time the exterior of the building in its landscape setting exists today essentially as it did during its period of significance, 1872. The Brittan "Party House" continues to convey a strong sense of time and place and should be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, perhaps at the state level of significance.

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Section number 9 Page 1 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA
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Fletcher, Robert F. *The Annals of the Bohemian Club, Vol. III*. San Francisco:
The Bohemian Club, 1909, p. 95.

Fowler, O.S. *The Octagon House: A Home For All*. New York: Dover Pub., 1973.

Kirker, Harold. *California's Architectural Frontier*. Santa Barbara, CA:
Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1973, pp. 63-64.

Lund, G.B. "Nathaniel Jones Brittan". monograph. College of San Mateo,
on file at the San Mateo County Historical Assoc., 1988.

Mahany, Effie, *Through the Years in San Carlos*. San Carlos, CA: San Mateo
Times, 1968. pp. 8-12.

Olmstead, R. & Watkins, T.H. *Here Today: San Francisco's Architectural
Heritage*. San Francisco: Junior League of San Francisco, Inc., 1968,
pp. 171-175.

Personal interviews with Mr. & Mrs. James Adams, owners of the Brittan
"Party House" from 1962 to 1976, 6/16/94; 6/24/94.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of San Carlos, CA, 1926, Sheet #20.

Schellens, Richard N. Personal clipping file, San Mateo County Historical
Association. Items pertaining to San Carlos, 1870-1957. Microfilm
Roll #13.

Seavey, K.L. *Historic Resources Inventory, City of San Carlos, California*.
San Carlos, CA: City of San Carlos, 1991, pp. 4-6.

Woodbridge, S. *California Architecture: Historic American Building Survey*.
San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988, pp. 52-53.

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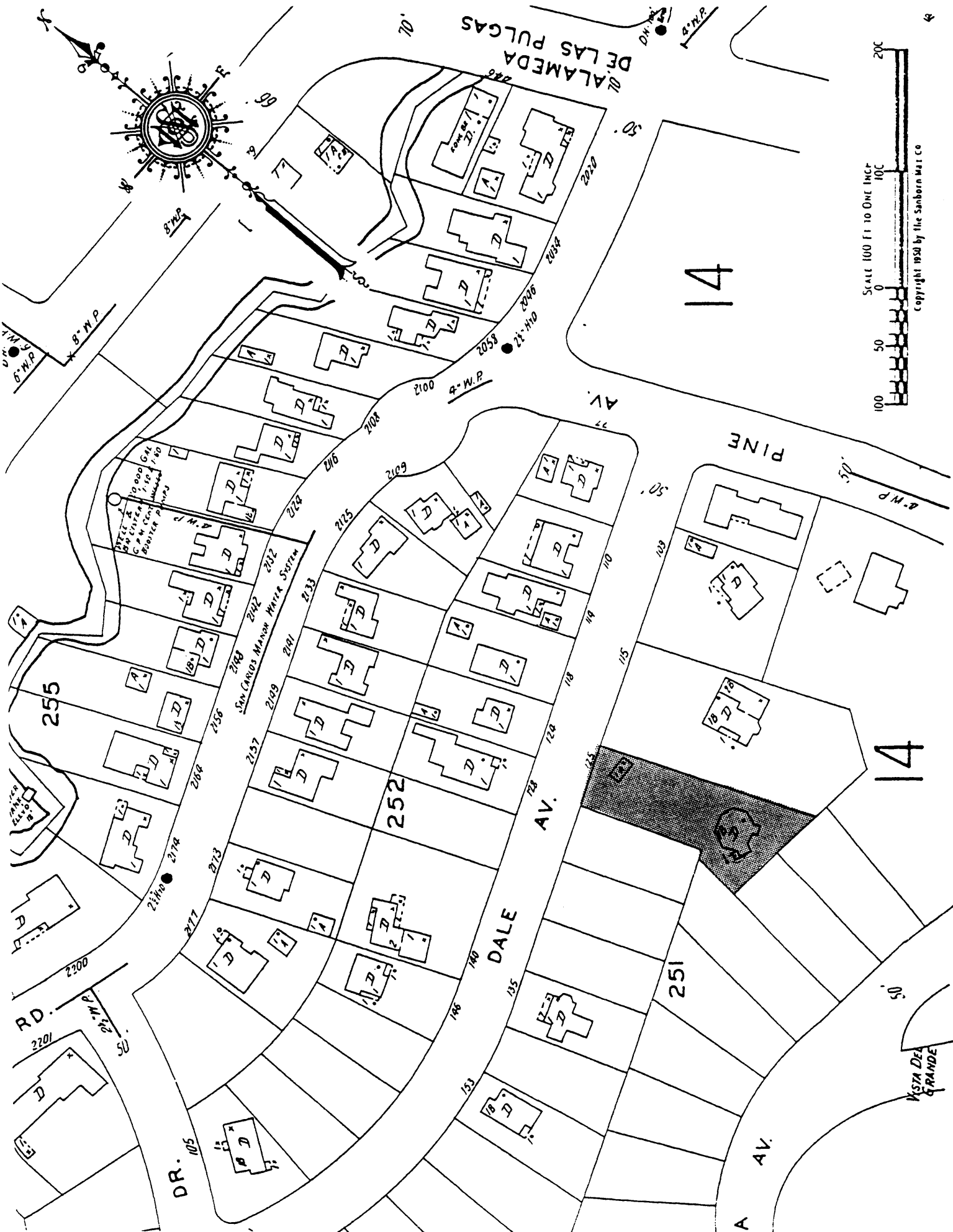
Section number 10 Page 1 Brittan "Party House", San Mateo Co., CA
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Verbal Boundry Description:

Beginning at a point on the southeast side of Dale Avenue 251.36 feet from the southwest corner of Dale and Pine Avenues in San Carlos, thense running 192.08 feet SE, bounded on the NE by a private residence, thense running 142.21 feet west, bounded on the south by residential properties. thense running 17.36 feet north, bounded on the west by a residential property, thense running 10.04 feet in a northeasterly direction, bounded on the northwest by a residential property, thense running 110 feet NW, bounded on the SW by a residential property, thense running 100 feet in a northeasterly direction to the point of beginning, bounded on the northwest by Dale Avenue, the property is identified as Assessors Parcel Number 049-373-590.

Boundry Justification:

The boundry includes the city lot that has historically been associated with the property.



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8" N.P.



ALAMEDA
DE LAS PULGAS

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PINE

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14

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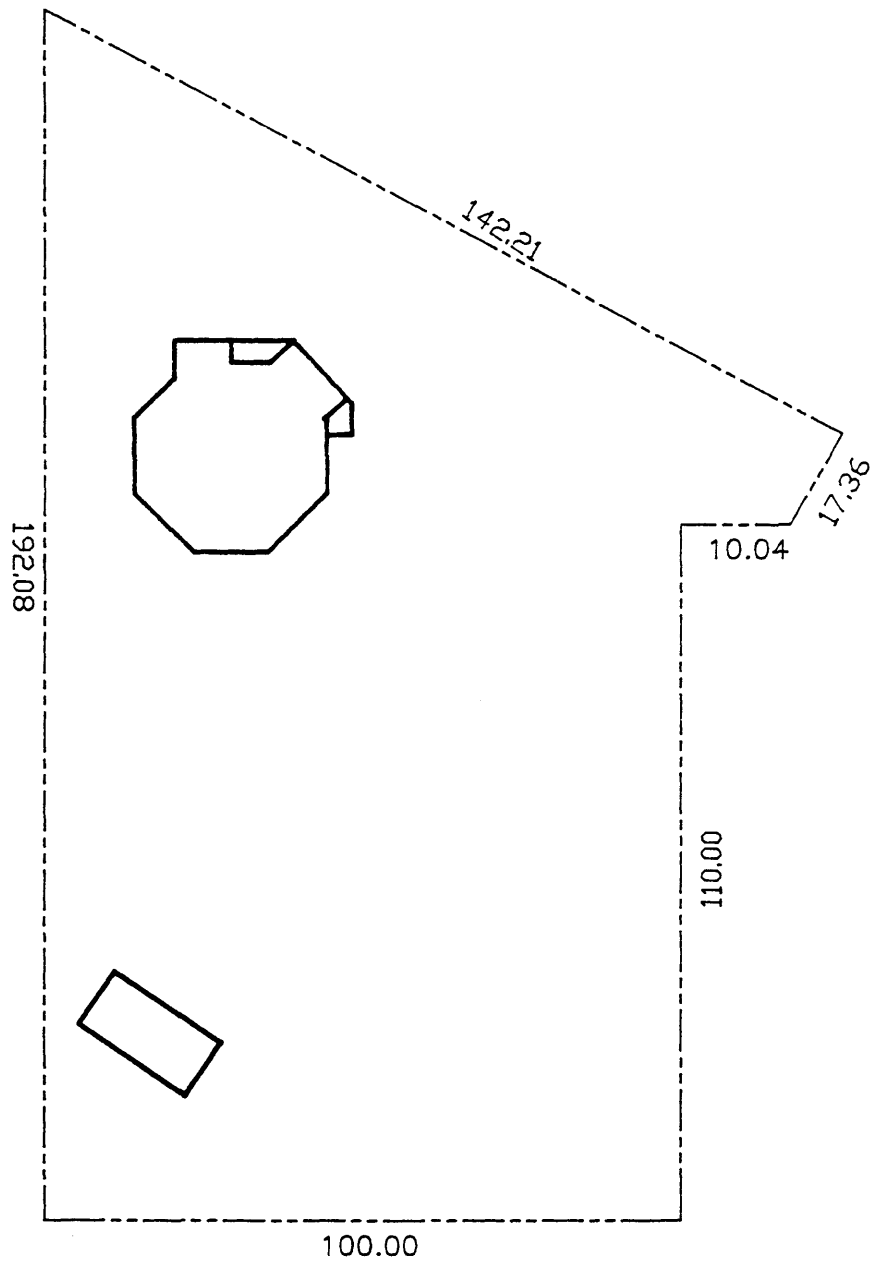
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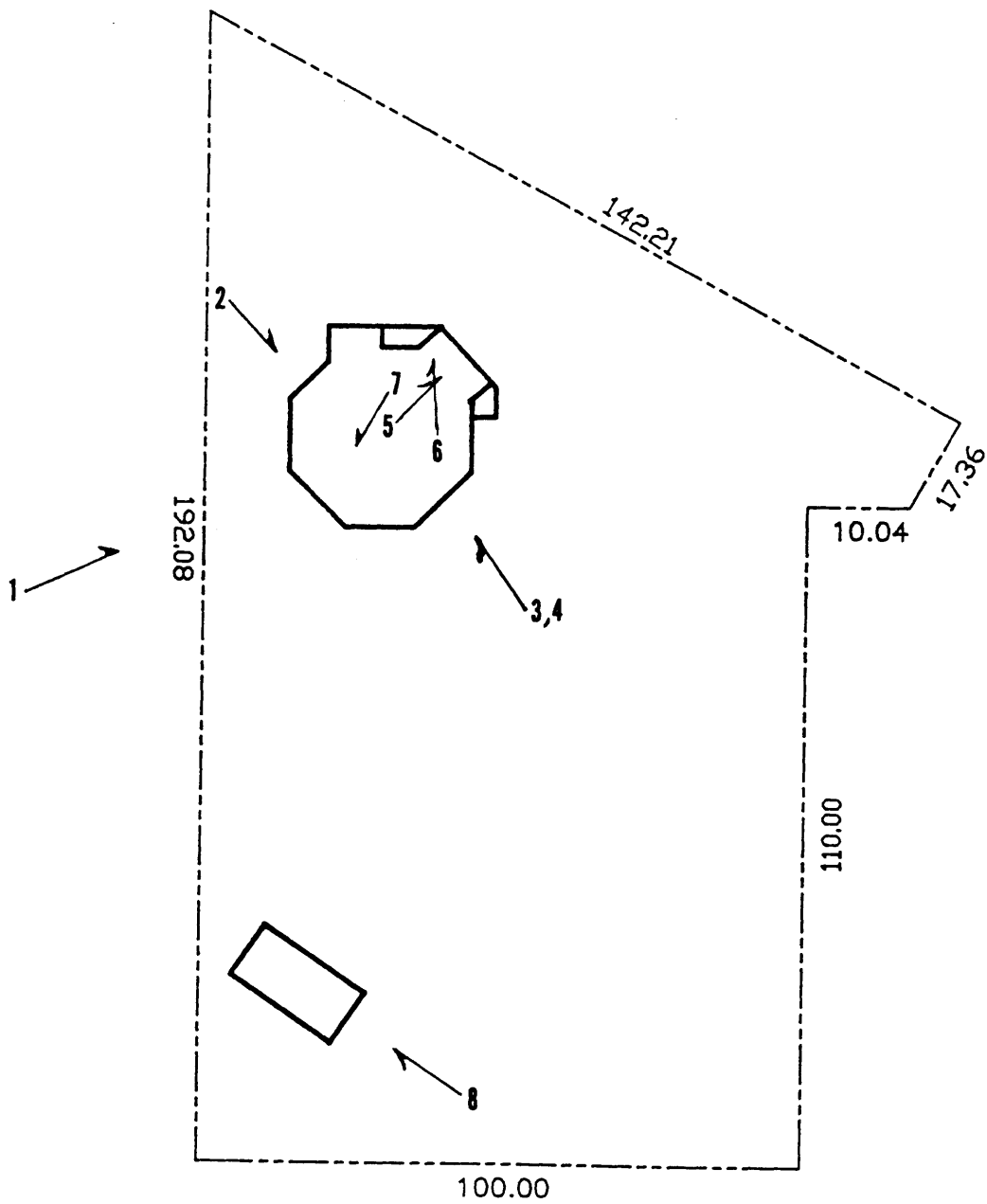
VISTA DE LA
GRANDE





DALE AVENUE

NATHANIAL BRITTAN "PARTY HOUSE"
125 DALE AVENUE, SAN CARLOS, CA



DALE AVENUE

NATHANIAL BRITTAN "PARTY HOUSE"
125 DALE AVENUE, SAN CARLOS, CA

PHOTOGRAPHIC KEY

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(Except where noted the information for items 1 through 5 are the same for all the photographs listed.)

- #1 1. Nathaniel Brittan "Party House"
 2. 125 Dale Ave., San Carlos, CA 94070
 3. Morley Baer
 4. 1963
 5. Morley Baer, Carmel Valley, CA
 6. Looking SW from a neighbor's yard toward the north (facade) elevation of the "Party House". Note stairwell bay at left, and ca 1950 window changes on second and upper half story levels. Original Brittan fence in foreground is on adjoining property.
 7. Photograph #1 of 8.
- #2 3. Augustine Buonocore
 4. 1989
 5. Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Leydig, 125 Dale Ave., San Carlos, CA 94070
 6. Looking NW toward the east side of the "Party House". Note stairwell bay at left.
 7. Photograph #2 of 8.
- #3 3. Edward Adams
 4. 1972
 6. Looking SE from the NW side of the "Party House". Note full two story exterior wall and shed roof on this elevation, small hooded window in brick chimney to right, and ca 1926 kitchen addition in right foreground.
 7. Photograph #3 of 8.
- #4 3. Judith Leydig
 4. 1994
 6. Looking SE from the NW side of the "Party House". Note the ca 1926 kitchen addition.
 7. Photograph #4 of 8.

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- #5 6. Looking south from gaming room interior towards brick walk-in
 -fireplace. Note brick seat w/stamped sheet metal cushions on
 either side of the hearth.
 7. Photograph #5 of 8.
- #6 6. Looking SE from hearth of walk-in-fireplace showing wood
 casement window and stamped sheet metal seats in the form
 of buttoned cushions.
 7. Photograph #6 of 8.
- #7 6. Looking in a northerly direction from the gaming room interior
 towards the octagonal cupola balcony. Note original interior
 wall finishes and decorative pierced baluster of balcony.
 7. Photograph #7 of 8.
- #8 3. Kent Seavey
 4. 1994
 6. Looking east at the west facing entrance of the ca 1926
 noncontributing wood-frame garage.
 7. Photograph #8 of 8.