

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

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



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic OLD BACKS HOUSE

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 215 North Claudina Street  not for publication

city, town Anaheim  vicinity of congressional district 39

state California 92805 code 06 county Orange code 059

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name FIRST AMERICAN TRUST COMPANY

street & number 421 North Main Street

city, town Santa Ana  vicinity of state California 92701

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Orange County Hall of Records

street & number 630 North Broadway

city, town Santa Ana  vicinity of state California 92701

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title None has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town  vicinity of state

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>1885 and 1900</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Old Backs House is virtually unaltered from its 1885 appearance, its period of greatest historical significance. The structure, however, underwent numerous alterations before 1885, its evolution reflecting the history of the Backs family.

A portion of the existing structure was built in 1873, when Ferdinand Backs constructed a two-room cottage behind his furniture and undertaking parlor at the corner of Los Angeles and Chartres Streets in the fledgling community of Anaheim. Backs was married two years later and added a second story to his cottage shortly thereafter. This enlarged cottage comprises most of the two-story (southern) portion of the existing structure.

In early 1885, Backs moved this cottage from its site at Los Angeles and Chartres Streets into a residential area at the corner of North Claudina and East Cypress, two blocks to the northeast. The Anaheim Gazette of April 18, 1885 described this move, noting that "the removal of the dwelling house of Mr. Backs has been the most interesting event of the week. It will look very sightly on its new site."

Backs began immediately to remodel and expand the house to its present appearance.. The Gazette of May 23, 1885 observed: "Mr. F. Backs is building an addition to his house which promises to be larger than the original house and which greatly improves its appearance."

At some point between 1900 and 1902, the Old Backs House was moved to its present location in an adjoining lot, to make room for a new home which Backs planned for the corner site. The Old Backs House has remained at its present location since that time. Its appearance is unaltered except for a 1910 addition of a 3' by 5' attached shed at the rear and other incidental alterations.

### PRESENT DESCRIPTION

The historical evolution of the Old Backs House can be seen in its present appearance. The home is visibly divisible into two distinct parts. The southern two-story portion represents the remnant of the 1873 cottage and its second-story addition. The northern one-story portion, along with the front porch, represent 1885 improvements.

The roofline of the Old Backs House is irregular, reflecting the segmental construction of the structure. The two-story portion of the home has a truncated hip roof with decorative molding at the top. The one-story addition has an elongated hip roof. The two are joined by a low-pitched extension reaching from the eaveline of the two story segment to the top of the one-story addition. The porch is covered by a mansard-shaped exterior. All are covered in old composition shingles with rounded corners.

The entire house is sheathed in shiplapped siding trimmed with 1" x 4" corner boards. Windows throughout are double-hung, 2 over 2 lights with wood mullions. The front door is four-panel, surrounded by side lights and a fixed transom. The front entryway was likely rearranged in the 1885 remodelling, moved from a central location in the two-story cottage to its present siting at the center of the expanded structure.

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An additional door, placed at a right angle to the main entrance, leads to the 1885 addition. It has a clear glass window with wood mullions. The original screens for both doors remain intact.

The front (east) elevation of the single story addition is dominated by a slanted bay window. It has all its original molding (Compare photos 2 and 6). The front porch is supported by two turned columns, with a balustrade along the southern and most of the eastern elevations. The front stairs are wooden and have apparently been altered since 1900 (compare photos 2 and 6).

The rear porch is of the same shiplapped siding. The rear 3' by 5' plumbing shed is covered with white shingles and is added onto the back of the kitchen. There are no outbuildings. A mature fir tree, two palms, a birch tree and fruit trees are placed informally in the front yard.

**INTERIOR**

The interior arrangement of the Old Backs House is somewhat unusual, reflecting the segmental construction of the house. The front door leads to a long hallway which runs from the front to the back. The staircase parallels this hallway, rising from a point just inside the front door. A heavy turned post and delicate railing rises straight to the second floor.

The parlor appears much as when it was built. It has high ceilings, tall, narrow windows, wainscoting and wood floors. The dining room is in the middle of the one-story portion of the home, between the parlor and the kitchen. The kitchen is quite large and was remodeled in the 1940s. Fortunately, the high ceilings here were retained.

The rooms on the older, south side of the house have lower ceilings, reflecting the cottage origins of this part of the home. ~~Rooms~~ <sup>Fireplace</sup> open to the central hall. The doors are four-panel with porcelain door knobs. Instead of a keyplate, individual brass key-shaped keyholes are used, indicating that the doors are very old. Imported German brassware was commonly found in Anaheim at this time. The two bedrooms on the second ~~floor~~ <sup>story</sup> also have low ceilings and are unaltered.

The Old Backs House retains its integrity. Its integrity of workmanship, feeling, association, and design dates to 1885, its setting and location dating to about 1900. Earlier moves and alterations do not detract from the building's integrity. Indeed, these historical changes to the Old Backs House contribute to its value as a representative example of homes evolving from simple vernacular structures to larger, more formal expressions of prevailing fashions and the owner's changing economic circumstances.

# 8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1873, 1885 Builder/Architect Not Known

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Old Backs House is significant both for its architectural merit and for its association with events important to the patterns of the history of the town of Anaheim. The structure is a kind of palimpsest, on which are recorded several stages of the parallel histories of the Backs family and the town of Anaheim.

The evolution of the home from a one-story cottage to a substantial dwelling records the increasing economic wherewithal of the Backs family and the growth of Anaheim into the commercial hub of Orange County. Elements of the small immigrant cottage are still evident in the low ceilings and room placement of the two-story portion of the home. In its present appearance, however, the home is designed to express distance from the immigrant cottage. The building possesses a somewhat eclectic but balanced blending of architectural features fashionable in the mid-1880s. The home has a substantial, well-built sturdiness which makes a firm statement of permanence and prosperity. It was meant to signify that the immigrant family and the new town of Anaheim were "here to stay."

The home is associated with two prominent early Anaheim families, that of Ferdinand Backs and his wife, Louisa Werder Backs. Mrs. Louisa Werder Backs was a member of one of Anaheim's fifty founding families. She arrived in the new town in November, 1859, at the age of two. Anaheim was a socialistic colony whose economic success has been attributed to the German work ethic. Please see the Appendix for further details on this family. Ferdinand Backs was a poor German immigrant who arrived in Anaheim in 1867 and built up a substantial furniture and undertaking business. He was one of many merchants who worked diligently to make Anaheim the commercial center of Orange County after the grape industry was wiped out in the early 1880's. Many towns in the vicinity were assimilated by other towns or simply vanished, but Anaheim thrived and grew, nourished by members of the founding families and by newly-arrived immigrants, such as the Werders and the Backs.

The Old Backs House is one of the oldest homes in Anaheim. With the exception of a few one-story cottages, it is perhaps the only reminder of an important stage in the town's residential development. The home represents and illustrates 106 years of life in Anaheim.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

UTM NOT VERIFIED  
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property           .09          

Quadrangle name Anaheim

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

**UMT References**

11 415460 3744490  
A 10 415540 3744300  
Zone Easting Northing

B [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
Zone Easting Northing

C [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

D [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

E [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

F [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

G [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

H [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

**Verbal boundary description and justification**

Commencing 155 feet from the corner of Cypress and Claudina, on Claudina, go west 94 feet and at right angles south 45 feet, east 94 feet, and north 45 feet to the point of beginning. Lot 4 and the southerly 5 feet of Lot 3 in Block D of the Subdivision of Vineyard Lot D3, city of Anaheim, shown in Book 34, Page 592, Deeds, Los Angeles County.

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Diann Marsh and Andrew Deneau

organization Anaheim Historical Society date June 1, 1980

street & number P.O. Box 247 Federal Station telephone (714) 635-9249

city or town Anaheim state California 92805

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Thomas M. Egan*

title SAPP date 8/14/80

**For HCRS use only**  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Ronnie Ann Douglas* date 10-14-80  
for Keeper of the National Register

Attest: *Patrick Andrews* date 10/9/80  
Chief of Registration

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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"History and Genealogy of the Werder Family," notes by Louisa Werder Backs.

Mildred Yorba MacArthur, Anaheim: The Mother Colony Book (1959).

The Story of a Parish, undated book published by the St. Boniface Catholic Church.

Anaheim Gazette, April, 1885; May, 1885; July 6, 1922; "Centennial Issue," 1957; September 9, 1951.

All material can be located in the Mother Colony History Room, Anaheim Public Library, 500 West Broadway, Anaheim, California 92805.

OLD BACKS HOUSE  
APPENDIX

FERDINAND AND LOUISA BACKS  
(FAMILY HISTORY)

The roots of the Backs family are entwined in the earliest roots of Anaheim. Both branches of the original family tree show a typical German heritage, as did most Anaheim families in those days. Mrs. Backs was part of the original group of fifty families who founded and settled the town in 1857. Ferdinand Backs was a penniless, but skilled, cabinetmaker who arrived in the bustling fledgling town of Anaheim in 1867 to open the first undertaking parlor and furniture store.

Mrs. Backs' father, Herman Werder (1823), was a cabinetmaker in Germany. In 1849 he married Eliese Adolfine Brett (1825) in Hamburg. According to the Werder family history written by Louisa Werder Backs, they sailed to New Orleans, Louisiana, shortly after their marriage in 1849. In 1853 they left New Orleans for San Francisco, crossing the Isthmus of Panama by muleback. Eliese Werder was one of only seven women out of 1500 people on the ship. The Werders arrived in San Francisco with a few pieces of luggage and nine dollars in their pockets. They were met by Theodore Schmidt, the brother of a friend from New Orleans. Four years later the Schmidt family would also become part of the group which would found Anaheim.

Herman and Eliese Werder started life in San Francisco as a cook and a dishwasher. Eventually, Herman was able to purchase a lot and build a small house on what would some day be Market Street. A few years later he moved the house to Post Street and it was there, on June 26, 1857, that Louisa Werder was born.

That same year Herman Werder was one of the people who helped form the Los Angeles Vineyard Society. They had encountered much sickness in San Francisco and felt that the life there was very decadent and not well suited for raising a family. These fifty families hired George Hansen to come to Southern California to purchase some land and create a wine-producing colony. Each family was to have a twenty acre plot, selected by lottery, and a town lot. 1,165 acres were purchased from Juan Pacifico Ontiveros. The land was divided into fifty twenty acre plots and 64 town lots, of which 14 were for commercial and public use. Streets were laid out, a canal-irrigation system was dug, a fence constructed around the perimeter of the town, and grape vines planted, before the colonists arrived.

The Werder family, including two year old Louisa, arrived in Anaheim on November 29, 1859. Their steamer arrived at the harbor at San Pedro where it was met by a smaller steamer. Rowboats took them the last three miles to be met by Indians who would carry them ashore on their shoulders. What an exciting adventure for a small child!

After traveling overland by wagon with their household goods, the families arrived in Anaheim, a dusty, deserty town, in the middle of nowhere. What a far cry from the lush green valleys and picturesque villages of their native Germany. The Werders settled on the property bounded by West, Citron, and South Streets, and the town lot on Elm and Los Angeles Street (Anaheim Boulevard) which they had drawn in the lottery. Their grapes did well and they established a winery.

Ferdinand Backs was born in Germany in 1844. After he finished his formal schooling, he learned the cabinet trade. He sailed to America in 1865, landing in San Francisco. He was sent to Los Angeles to help build a hotel and heard about the young, prospering community of Anaheim. He and his brother, Joseph, arrived here in 1867 and opened the first funeral parlor and furniture store. The business, called "Backs, Undertakers", was located on Los Angeles Street (now Anaheim Boulevard) near Chartres Street. The last remnant of the old buildings existed until 1978.

OLD BACKS HOUSE  
APPENDIX  
PAGE TWO

In 1873 Ferdinand Backs built a two-room house behind the furniture-undertaking parlor. In January, 1875, he and his new bride, Louisa Werder Backs, set up housekeeping in this small home. As the children began to arrive, the second story was added to the home. Meanwhile, Anaheim was developing into a commercial center for the area.

In the early 1880's disaster struck Anaheim in the form of a mysterious disease which killed nearly 40,000 grape vines. During this period, however, Anaheim was rapidly growing in other directions. The residents pooled their resources and made a substantial recovery. Sugar beets, walnuts, citrus and vegetable crops helped the ranchers to survive. The Southern Pacific Railway provided an access to market the colony's products. These factors, along with the strong commercial community, put Anaheim back on solid ground.

The original location of the Old Backs House was in the midst of Anaheim's small but thriving Chinatown. Fred Backs was a friend to the Chinese community and was often called upon to write letters for the Chinese people. The Backs family received many gifts, ranging from Chinese jewelry to delicacies such as candied coconut, ginger and lichee nuts. Although there were rumors of Tong wars and an occasional death, the Chinese took care of their own problems. Few townspeople penetrated past the store fronts. The children, however, liked to gather empty opium cans, as they were made of brass and very salable.

In 1885 the Old Backs House was moved to the corner of Claudina (then Hermione) and Cypress Streets. The land had been purchased from the estate of another Anaheim pioneer, Conrad Kuechel (now Kuchel). The move caused much interest, as is noted in the architectural description section of this application. Five weeks later the additions to the house were noted as being larger than the original house and "greatly improving its appearance".

The original Backs brothers' partnership continued for several years. Eventually the business was divided down the middle, along with the building on Los Angeles and Chartres Streets, and each brother went into business for himself. Many references to their well-rounded business activities may be found in old issues of the Anaheim Gazette. They not only provided undertaking services, but also made and sold furniture, did expert upholstering, ordered furniture for clients and laid linoleum and carpets. They made the mattresses for the Anaheim hotel in 1871. The business flourished and Ferdinand Backs became one of the most influential businessmen in the community.

He served on the City Council and was active in other civic affairs. According to the notes made by Anaheim's second mayor, Henry Kroeger, "In April of 1885, Mr. Backs presented a bill of the fire committee for \$18.81, but as they had no money in the treasury the trustees refused to pay".

The entire family was active in the Catholic Church and in musical circles. Mr. Backs belonged to the German Singing Society, one of the most exclusive groups in town.

In 1900 the house was moved to 215 North Claudina Street, 150 feet to the south, on additional land owned by the Backs family. It has had only one exterior alteration, a 3' X 5' shed on the back of the kitchen. In 1904 the Backs family moved into its elegant new home which had been built on the corner in the spot where this house had once stood. The Backs had spent twenty-five years of marriage in the old house.

Seven children were born in the Old Backs House. Five of them reached maturity and became influential members of the community. Fred Jr. (Ferdinand Jr.) took over the business and, in 1912, purchased it. The Backs family continued to be a part of the business until 1922. It is still called the Backs-Kaulbers Mortuary and is still located in Anaheim. Fred Jr. went into the building and loan business and continued to be active



OLD BACKS HOUSE  
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PAGE THREE

in the Elks, the Knights of Columbus, Chamber of Commerce, Library Board, City Council, Catholic Church and Kiwanis Club.

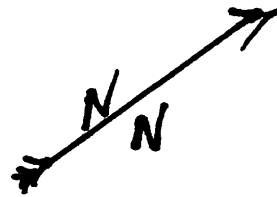
Herman Backs founded a truck and transfer business which eventually became Anaheim Truck and Transfer. Emilie married and moved to Santa Ana. Emma married and moved away, but in 1935 returned and went into the insurance business. Francis became a real estate agent.

Ferdinand Backs' obituary (July 6, 1922) states that "ever since his arrival here Mr. Backs has been considered one of the leading citizens of the town. He was an upright, square-dealing man and enjoyed the esteem of all with whom he came in contact". Mrs. Backs died in 1935. The house was rented for several years to various people.

In 1924 the home became the property of the Ashenfelder family who owned it until the early 1960's. It became the property of the Lieb family, who were raised two houses away at 207 North Claudina (now demolished). Mr. Lieb's father had the first electrical contracting business in Anaheim around the corner on Chartres Street.

OK

ORIGINAL LOCATION 1873-1885



ANAHEIM BLVD (LOS ANGELES ST.)

OLD BARKS HOUSE

- ① ORIGINAL SITE
- ② 2ND SITE ON CORNER OF CLAUDINA AND CYPRESS
- ③ FINAL SITE 45' X 94'

CHARLES ST.

E. CYPRESS

AUG 18 1990

← 45' →

94'

C.  
H.

③  
FINAL  
MOVE  
1900

NEW  
1902  
BARKS  
HOUSE

② 2ND LOCATION

MOVE NO 1 (1885)

NORTH CLAUDINA