

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

6

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

MAY 11 1992

OHP

1. Name of Property

historic name: Yount, Eliza G., House

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number: 423 Seminary Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Napa

vicinity: N/A

state: CA county: Napa

code: 055

zip code: 94559

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.      See continuation sheet.

Stade R. Crump  
Signature of certifying official

August 19, 1992  
Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.      See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

entered in the  
National Register

Delores Byers 9/24/92

for Signature of Keeper      Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current : DOMESTIC  
COMMERCE

Sub: single dwelling  
business

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Late Victorian

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation brick roof asphalt  
walls wood other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: local level.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1884

Significant Dates : 1884

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Curtis, John M.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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 Buildings 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: City of Napa Cultural Heritage Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>10</u>	<u>562000</u>	<u>4238180</u>	B	_____	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The southeast part of Napa County Assessor's parcel 005-021-11 as shown on the enclosed map.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary, which includes that part of the city lot that largely retains its historic appearance, corresponds to the historic preservation zone designated by the City of Napa.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Donald S. Napoli

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: July 10, 1992

Street & Number: 1614 26th Street Telephone: (916) 455-4541

City or Town: Sacramento State: CA ZIP: 95816

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Description

The Eliza G. Yount House is a two-and-a-half story wood-frame building with multi-planed roof, board siding, and brick foundation. The overall shape of the building is square, but each facade has one or more projections. The most dramatic of these is a front-facing, two-story bay with a pyramidal roof. Decorative elements include oversized brackets, large chimneys, and ornamented panels. In addition, the front porch and porte-cochere both have spindle courses below the cornices. The building's main alteration is the second story sleeping porch added to the south wing around 1905. The Yount House has large front and side lawns and retains some of its original landscaping. The interior, however, has lost much of its original fabric. Overall, the Eliza G. Yount House possesses a high degree of integrity in all aspects.

The roof features several shapes and many planes. Covering most of the house is a two-part shallow-pitched hipped roof that has an L-shape. The roof is pierced in the front by a dormer with a wide base and hipped gable roof, on the north by a large gable-roofed dormer near the front and a shed-roofed dormer topped by a full pediment near the rear, and on the rear by another gable-roofed dormer. On the south near the rear is a recently installed skylight. In the center of the front elevation is a steeply pitched pyramidal roof that rises above the main roof and tops a projecting bay. To the left (south) a flat roof covers the building's south wing. Behind the wing a steeply pitched gable roof dominates the south elevation and cuts into the second story on the rear.

Penetrating the roof are five brick chimneys, three on the south and one each on the west and north. The smallest, near the front of the south elevation, is almost square and topped by a circular spark arrester. The others are broad and topped by banded caps. Three of the chimneys are visible below the roofline. Each is decorated with brick panels of various shapes. Each pierces the roof at the apex of a gable--the main roof on the south elevation and dormer roofs on the north and west--but none is symmetrically placed. All the chimneys have a plaster siding above the roofline.

The cornice has two or three plain bands except where replaced by a single flat board. Beneath it are large scroll brackets that extend half-way down the second story and define window openings. Directly below the cornice the siding is vertical board, except in the gable end on the south, which has small square panels. Elsewhere on the building the siding is wide horizontal board. A wide, curved belt course with narrow bands at the bottom wraps around the building and separates first and second stories. On the front bay this band is decorated with a scalloped medallion.

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The building has more than 50 windows. Most are narrow, one-over-one, and double-hung. Many are arranged in groups of two or three. Window surrounds are usually plain except for banded hood molding. Windows on the first floor have panels with floral ornament above and undecorated panels below. On the second story of the south wing the windows are nearly square and set in plain casing. In the rear some windows have curved hoods and sill decoration.

The front porch, located on the north side of the east elevation, has a shed roof with a centered false gable. Beneath the cornice is a spindle course, and below that three sets of cut-out wood panels divided by long, curved brackets. The brackets rest atop short, bulging fluted columns with tall bases. The double swinging front door is topped by a transom and fronted by a double swinging screen door. Leading to the porch is a short flight of brick stairs, a replacement for the original, which is the same height as the brick foundation.

A porte-cochere projects from the rear of the north side of the building. The roof has intersecting gables. The one leading to the house covers a small side porch. The other gable, which faces front and rear, has vertical board below the cornice in both gable ends. Below that a spindle course, similar to the one on the front porch, wraps around the entire structure. Supporting the roof are four tall curved brackets that rest atop square Tuscan pillars with raised pedestals.

The building remains substantially unaltered. The most important modification is the second-story sleeping porch, which was added in the early 1900s, probably taking the place of an open balcony, and displays much simpler window treatment than the rest of the building. On the rear one of the original porches has been enclosed and the other replaced by an oriel window. The front staircase, though dating perhaps from ca. 1960, matches the foundation and may replicate the original stairs. The interior, which has been divided into apartments, retains some of the original spaces and details but has lost its nineteenth-century feeling.

The property includes about a quarter of the original parcel. Early features included are an expansive front lawn, a driveway (now paved in asphalt) leading through the porte cochere, and a walkway to the front stairs which is flanked by two palms. The front lawn extends beyond the property boundary to the edge of the parcel. The house once had an extensive set of auxiliary structures in the rear which included three garages, a guest house, several sheds, and a "swimming tank." These have all been replaced by a modern (ca. 1960) apartment complex and its parking lot, which now occupy the rest of the original parcel. One of the new structures is only a few feet from the rear of the porte-cochere. The

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property boundary is clipped at its northwest corner to exclude the structure. Despite the changes, the building's setting, especially when viewed from the front, retains much of its nineteenth-century appearance.

Although the Eliza G. Yount House is only in fair condition, it retains almost all of its original design features and details. The building has undergone only relatively minor changes since its construction in 1884 and displays a high degree of architectural integrity.

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The Eliza G. Yount House is one of Napa's most architecturally significant residences from the late Victorian era. The building reflects its period of construction through eccentric design and lavish detailing. In particular, it represents an abandonment of classical precedent and an interest in vernacular English antecedents. The building's large size and ample setback add to its prominence. Its lack of alteration helps to maintain its links to the past. Napa has hundreds of other late nineteenth-century residences, but none represents the late Victorian quest for architectural reform as clearly as the Yount House.

Classical motifs, especially in residential construction, began to lose favor in the United States in the late 1870s. The reaction to classicism allowed much room for experimentation, especially in the use of vernacular English precedent. One of the primary goals of the anti-classical movement was to create, in the words of Walter C. Kidney, "something marginally original." In Napa, as in other small California cities, the shift away from the Italianate and Second Empire styles began in the mid-1880s. The latter half of the decade saw the construction of dozens of houses that reflected the new Queen Anne and Stick/Eastlake styles. Many of these buildings, however, merely used the newer detailing on standard vernacular house types. Others followed designs in pattern books. Not more than a handful of Napa houses sought originality. The earliest example that remains essentially unaltered today is the Yount House.

The building matched the prominence of its first owner. Eliza G. Yount was the widow of one of Napa County's most successful pioneers. When she commissioned the building in 1884, she was clearly seeking a grand and fashionable residence. She understandably looked to San Francisco for an architect and selected the well-known firm of Curtis and Bennett. The younger partner, John M. Curtis, was responsible for the design. He was best known for his work on public buildings in Northern California. Most of these have since disappeared; the foremost remaining example is the Placer County Courthouse in Auburn. Curtis had an active practice designing homes as well. He considered the Yount House one of his half-dozen most noteworthy residential commissions.

The building thoroughly reflected the late Victorian spirit of innovation. Curtis made sure that nothing about the house conformed to previous standards of classical orderliness. The three elements of the main elevation--low east wing, large center bay window, and long west section--have an asymmetrical arrangement. Roof shapes--hipped, gable, pyramidal, and shed--are a major design feature and offer dramatic contrasts. The four dormers all have gable roofs, yet each is different from the others. Chimneys are prominent but placed peculiarly. Each of the three main visible chimneys penetrates a gabled dormer but none is centered in the



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gable end. The arrangement of the windows is also irregular. They stand alone, are loosely or tightly paired, or are grouped in threes and fours.

Curtis relied on detailing to emphasize the eccentricity of the design. He used classical details, but he did not use them in a classical manner. The scroll brackets are over-sized and extend far down the side of the building. The pudgy, pear-shaped porch columns are almost parodies of their Doric forebears. The porch roof has a pediment, but it does not mark the entryway. Unclassical details are present too, especially the square shingles in the main (east-facing) gable and the stickwork beneath the porch handrail. Sometimes the details vary within their types. Two kinds of floral ornamentation appear in the panels above windows, and each of the decorative brick chimney panels has a design of its own.

The Yount House represented the trend in Napa toward informal and picturesque residential designs. In the late 1870s the grand houses of Napa were still constructed in the Italianate and Second Empire styles. Architects in San Francisco, meanwhile, were beginning to experiment with anti-classical designs. Their influence, through commissions and published designs, spread to smaller towns in the next few years. It is not known when the first of the "modern" houses was constructed in Napa. A survey of the city's historic buildings documented no earlier remaining example than the Yount House. Other representatives followed in the mid-1880s. By 1890 informal designs had replaced classical styles.

The Yount House, built before anti-classical conventions took hold, illustrates no style itself. The irregularity of design may owe something to the Stick Style, but the main roof is hipped rather than gabled, and the detailing gives no sense of trying to symbolize the structure's wood frame. It has elements of the Queen Anne (asymmetricality, differing roof shapes, uncommon use of classical details), but it lacks the surface variety of typical Queen Annes. Further, its front elevation, roughly half again as wide as it is high, has a sprawling quality seldom seen in the style. Indeed, the usual California version of the Queen Anne, more buoyant than its East Coast counterparts because of the use of redwood, did not yet exist when the Yount House was constructed. The building represents late Victorian architectural reform without definitively illustrating any style of the period.

The building made a big impression. As a large, well-sited residence of one of the town's most prominent residents, it was bound to receive notice. Construction costs, which neared \$18,000, made it one of the most expensive houses built in Napa up to that time. It was "very imposing," said a local newspaper, and "one of the finest and most beautiful places in the county." But the unusual nature of the design received notice too. The style was

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beyond contemporary definition. The paper labeled it "half Swiss and half Gothic," and concluded "there is no other house like it" in the Napa Valley. The tone of approval in that judgment indicated that uniqueness, or at least marginal originality, would become a new aesthetic standard for residences in Napa. For the next twenty years designs for large houses commissioned by important people attempted to show not merely competence but imagination as well. If the Yount House did not initiate Napa's rejection of rigid classicism (and it may have), it at least provided an early and impressive example of the trend.

The Yount House retains strong links to the past. It is largely unaltered. The main elements of the original design--contrasting roof shapes, asymmetricality of the front elevation, projecting central bay with pyramidal roof--are readily apparent. Only the sleeping porch atop the east wing obscures Curtis's original intention. The detailing, a critical aspect of the overall design, is almost completely intact. The building's deep setback from the streets adds to its imposing appearance. It is thus likely to inspire the same reaction today--bewildered admiration--that it did over a century ago. The Yount House clearly represents notions of residential design during its era of construction. It continues to be one of Napa's most architecturally significant buildings.

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Additional Documentation

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Property Owner

William R. and Dorothy C. Keller  
P. O. Box 546  
Napa, California 94559

Photographs

Photographs 1-3 have the following information in common:

3. Donald S. Napoli, Photographer
4. May, 1992
5. Napa City Planning Department  
1600 First Street  
Napa, CA 94559

Photo No. 1

6. View from the East

Photo No. 2

6. View from the Northeast

Photo No. 3

6. North Section, Front Elevation

Photographs 4-7 have the following information in common:

3. Thomas Schardt, Photographer
4. July, 1991
5. Napa City Planning Department  
1600 First Street  
Napa, CA 94559

Photo No. 4

6. View from the southeast

Photo No. 5

6. View from the South

Photo No. 6

6. View from the North

Photo No. 7

6. View from the West

Yount House  
423 Seminary Street  
Napa, Napa Co., California

