NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Piedras Blancas Light Station
other names/site number: Piedras Blancas Light Station

2. Location

street & number: Highway 1 — N/A — [ ] not for publication
city, town: San Simeon — [X] vicinity
state: CA code: CA county: San Luis Obispo code: 079 zip code: 93452

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
[ ] private	[ ] building(s)	2	7 buildings
[ ] public-local	[X] district		sites
[ ] public-State	[ ] site	1	1 structures
[X] public-Federal	[ ] structure		objects
	[ ] object	3	8 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Light Stations in California

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

Kathryn Gualtieri — 11-5-90
Signature of certifying official — Date

California Office for Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Robert Reuss HPO — 7/19/91
Signature of commenting or other official — Date

U.S. Department of Transportation
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

[X] entered in the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet. — Antoinette J. Lee — 9/3/91
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
[ ] other, (explain:) _____

for Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Transportation: water related.	Transportation: water related.
Domestic: institutional housing.	Education: research facility.
	Domestic: institutional housing.

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Materials (enter categories from instructions)
	foundation Brick
Victorian Gothic	walls Brick
Neo Classical	
Romanesque Revival	roof
	other Wood shake
	Concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Piedras Blancas Light Station is located 13 miles north of Cambria at the northern entrance to San Simeon Bay. The tall, cylindrical lighthouse tower -- located on a rocky knoll in the rolling coastal grasslands -- is quite visible from Highway 1. It can also be seen from Hearst Castle. This visibility plus its scenic location near the offshore rock formation, "Piedras Blancas", makes it one of the most photographed lighthouses in California. The light station surrounding the lighthouse contains 11 buildings and structures -- three historic contributing and eight non-contributing. The station formerly contained a landing and a Victorian era Keeper's quarters as well. The integrity of the tower is not whole. A storm in 1949 dislodged the lens and scattered the cast iron lantern room throughout the fields. Normally, there would be severe reservations about placing a truncated lighthouse for consideration to the National Register. In this case, however, the architectural character of the remaining portion is so distinguished and the historical association of the lighthouse is so strong that a National Register nomination would be entirely appropriate. The architectural integrity of the other historical buildings -- the Fog-Signal building and the Oil House -- is intact. A modern light still shines from the lighthouse tower, but the remainder of the site is used as a biological research station of the Federal Department of Fish and Wildlife.

1. LIGHTHOUSE TOWER (1875) -- STRUCTURE:

A 70 foot tall lighthouse tower constructed primarily of white-painted brick. At the top of the structure a circular concrete metal-railed platform supports a variety of modern electronic aids to navigation devices. The conical shaped shaft is pierced by four recessed windows. Each window is surrounded by a semi-circular hooded brick arch with stone trim. The base of the structure is a one story brick octagon with a gabled, Victorian Gothic brick portico projecting from the north side of the building. The depth of the walls at the base of the structure are several feet thick. An interior wooden, four panel double door is located at the inner wall. An exterior, wooden, two panel double door is located at the the outer wall. The interior door is surmounted by a glass semi-circular transom; the exterior door by a Gothic arch metal plate displaying the 1875 construction date in bold relief Roman Numerals. A continuous decorative band of stone and corbeled bricks surrounds the top of the structure base. The structure rests on a small knoll. Access is gained by a single-run flight of cement stairs terminating at the entrance portico. The stairway's railings are unadorned iron tubes, but the newel posts are decorative cast iron.

The integrity of the structure is incomplete. The lantern room was destroyed by a storm in 1949. The original 1st order Fresnel lens is on display in the nearby town of Cambria. Everything else in the structure appears to be original and in very good condition. Outstanding features include the elaborate Gothic stone and brick work (with Romanesque elements),

☒ See continuation sheet

the original massive paneled doors, and the interior circular cast iron stairway. Piedras Blancas was the most ornately Gothic lighthouse to be built in California.

2. FOG-SIGNAL BUILDING (1906) -- CONTRIBUTING BUILDING:

A one story, gable roof, rectangular building made primarily of brick. The exterior walls are made entirely of brick, from the foundation to the roof. The foundation is made of brick as well (with concrete repairs). The roof is covered in red-stain wood shakes. Three 4/4 double hung windows are found on the north and south facades. Two similar styled windows are found on the western side. Each window has a semi-circular 3-light transom directly above it. The east facade, the "front" of the building, contains no windows but it is pierced by a double door entranceway surmounted by a 6-light eliptical transom. The brick arches that are built around the curved transoms form a decorative pattern on the sides of the building. Brick work is also used to create a decorative water table line and a cornice with corbeled dentils. Stylistically, this structure is a curious hybrid of several styles popular at the turn of the century. Most specifically, the arched brick windows recall a Romanesque Revival, while the brick "pediment" formed by the triangular gable ends and the dentil cornice line place it squarely within the Neo-Classical tradition. The architect has even included a vestigal "lunette" of recessed brick in the center of the would-be pediment. All these stylistic influences are particularly noteworthy because most fog-signal buildings were unadorned, utilitarian structures. The Piedras Blancas fog-signal building is arguably the most architecturally interesting such building in California. The interior reflects a similar concern with style. Although the interior is essentially just one large room built to contain the fog-signal mechanical equipment, its massive open beams and roof trusses have been varnished to a high sheen. Furthermore, large decorative wooden "teardrops" are located at the midpoint of crossbeams. The building retains its intact architectural integrity and, except for one noticeable exterior crack, is in very good condition.

3. OIL HOUSE (1906) -- CONTRIBUTING BUILDING:

A small one story, flat-roofed building constructed of concrete with an iron door. It is similar or identical to most other such oil houses built in the early part of this century. Its unadorned design reflects its utilitarian function.

4. KEEPER'S QUARTERS (1960) -- NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS:

Four ranch style Keeper's quarters constructed in 1960. These replaced a Victorian-era Keeper's quarters and Assistant Keeper's duplex. These are non-contributing due to their recent construction and character.

5. OLD COAST GUARD OFFICE (1940'S) -- NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDING:

A one story, wood-frame, peaked roof building, historically used as an office. This is non-contributing due to its recent construction and character.

6. PUMP HOUSE (1940'S) -- NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDING:

A one story, wood-frame, peaked roof building presently housing a decaying, unused water tank. This is non-contributing due to its recent construction and character.

7. WATER TANK (1940'S) -- NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE:

A 20,000 gallon redwood water storage tank which probably dates from the 1930s. It is non-contributing due to its recent construction and character.

8. NAVY BUILDING (1940'S) -- NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDING:

During the 1940's the Navy constructed a large metal industrial style building to the southwest of the lighthouse. It is presently used for offices and laboratories. It is non-contributing due to its recent construction and character.

The Piedras Blancas Light Station consists of one contributing structure, two contributing buildings, seven non-contributing buildings, and one non-contributing structure.

8. Statement of Significance

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

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☐A ☐B ☐C ☐D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐A ☐B ☐C ☐D ☐E ☐F ☐G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Maritime History	1875-1940	1875, 1906
Transportation		
Architecture		
Commerce		

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Significant Person: N/A

Architect/Builder: Captain Ashley, builder.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Piedras Blancas Light Station meets the requirements for registration as defined in the multiple property submission "Light Stations in California." The station's significance is evaluated with respect to the historic context "Maritime Transportation in California 1842-1940." The station derives significance under Criteria A and C. Criteria A is satisfied by the association of the complex with California's critical reliance on maritime transportation and the aids that made navigation possible. Criteria C is met by the outstanding examples of late 19th Century/early 20th Century architectural styles at the station.

The station fully meets registration requirements for its property type. Although the lighthouse tower has lost its lantern room to a storm, the remaining 70' portion is indeed noteworthy of design and still quite identifiable as a lighthouse. Associated historical buildings on the site include the fog-signal building (1906) and the oil house (1906). Their integrity is intact. Normally, there would be strong reservations about placing a truncated lighthouse for consideration for the National Register. In this case, however, the architectural character of the remaining portion is so distinguished and the historical association of the lightouse so strong that a National Register nomination is entirely appropriate. The architectural character of the fog-signal building is likewise outstanding. The integrity of it and the oil house is intact. Buildings and structures no longer standing include: a landing, a Keeper's quarters, and a duplex.

The Piedras Blancas Light Station was established to assist and promote coastal trading and navigation. It also served to guide ships into San Simeon Bay, a once thriving commercial port. The lighthouse itself dates from 1875; the fog-signal structure from 1906.[1] Prior to its construction there were no lighthouses on the coast between Point Pinos (Monterey) and Point Conception -- a long distance of some 145 miles. Even before San Simeon was a commercially viable port, the Bay provided a natural refuge for smaller trading schooners and brigs in times of storms and heavy northwest winds.[2] Many perils lay offshore, though, in the form of submerged and jagged rocks. In 1868 the wreck of the Harlech Castle on a jagged rock (subsequently called the "Harlech Castle Rock") served as the impetus for acquiring a light at Piedras Blancas.[3] By the early 1870's San Simeon Bay was a thriving whaling port. In addition, large quantities of lumber, farm produce, and mining equipment for the newly discovered cinnebar fields above Cambria were creating the beginnings of a very active port commerce.[4] The 1873 Annual Lighthouse Board Report told the Congressional Appropriations Committee that Piedras Blancas

☒ See continuation sheet

was one of the most important points to light on the California coast. An appropriation of $75,000 was requested and received.[5] The construction of the lighthouse in 1875 together with the construction of George Hearst's 1000 foot pier in 1878 further increased the port activity and promoted settlement of the interior valleys.[6] Coastwise shipping was extremely important to the region for the next several decades as overland access remained extremely primative. The Carmel-San Simeon Highway was not even begun until 1919 and not completed until 1937.[7] The economic importance of the San Simeon port has declined over the years. The whaling began dying out in the 1890's and the Twentieth Century saw the port serving mostly the ranch needs of the vast holdings of the Hearst properties. The 1930's and 40's saw improved road connections to other parts of California and the tapering off of construction activity at William Randolph Hearst's hilltop estate.[8] For nearly 65 years, though, the region relied heavily on coastal shipping and on the aids to navigation provided by the Piedras Blancas Light Station. The lighthouse is still active today (though with modern aero-beacon) and still provides important navigational aid to California maritime interests.

A massive storm in 1949 destroyed the lantern room of the tower. At that time the 1st order Fresenl lens was replaced with the modern aero-beacon. The original Fresnel lens is now on display at Rotary Park in nearby Cambria.[9]

The particular significance of the individual buildings and structures on the site are as follows:

LIGHTHOUSE TOWER (1875)

The lighthouse tower is of significance as the principal element of the lighthouse complex. Even though the top lantern room was destroyed in a 1949 storm, the remaining portion of the structure exhibits a high degree of architectural sophistication and its integrity is intact.[10] Outstanding features include the elaborate Gothic stone and brick work, the original massive paneled doors, and the interior cast iron circular stairway. Piedras Blancas was the most ornately Gothic lighthouse to be built in California. Its tall, cylindrical shape is more reminiscent of the classic "New England" lighthouse than the more typically squat California lighthouses located on bluffs or headlands. Its setting atop a knoll in the rolling coastal grasslands near the offshore "Piedras Blancas" rock formation makes for a memorable sight from Highway 1.

FOG-SIGNAL BUILDING (1906)

The fog-signal building is significant as a contributing element of the light station complex. The building meets the requirements for registration of its property type. It is similar to most other fog-signal buildings in California in that it is essentially one large industrial room that was basically built to contain mechanical equipment. And like other fog-signal buildings, it has an exposed beam attic area and double doors on the front facade. It is very different from other California fog-signal buildings, however, in its outstanding level of architectural sophistication. Most fog-signal buildings were largely unadorned, reflecting their more or less utilitarian usage.

The Piedras Blancas fog-signal building on the other hand is a careful and studied blend of Romanesque Revival and Neo-Classical themes that were popular at the turn of the century. The many semi-circular arches recall a Romanesque influence while the "pediment" formed by the gable ends and the brick cornice definitely shows a sensitivity to Neo-Classical forms. The architect even included a vestigal "lunette" of recessed brick in the center of the would-be pediment. Other outstanding exterior architectural features include the brick cornice with corbeled dentils and the brick water table along the building's base. The interior likewise displays a concern for aesthetics rarely found in California fog-signal buildings. The massive exposed attic beams are varnished to a high sheen and each cross beam is bisected by a large wooden "teardrop" ornament. This building is arguably the most architecturally interesting fog-signal building in California if not the entire country. It is in very good condition and its integrity is intact.

OIL HOUSE (1906)

The oil house building is significant as a contributing element of the light station complex. The building meets registration requirements for its property type. It is structurally and functionally similar to other early 20th century oil houses. It is located 50 yards from the lighthouse -- close enough to be convenient but far enough away to prevent hazards. The integrity of the building is intact and it appears to be in very good condition.

Since its establishment in 1875, this station has had continued significance and importance. Significance has not been shown to be exceptional in the last 50 years, however, although the light station continues to play a role in maritime transportation and navigation.

NOTES

1. U.S. Lighthouse Board, Annual Report 1875 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1876), p. 73; idem, Annual Report 1906 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), pp. 125-131.

2. Geneva Hamilton, Where the Highway Ends (San Luis Obispo, CA: Padre Productions), p. 163.

3. Ibid., p. 164; also see Myron Angel, History of San Luis Obispo County, California (Oakland, CA: Thompson & West, 1883; reprint San Luis Obispo: Valley Publishers, 1979), p. 326.

4. Hamilton, p. 164; Angel, p. 331.

5. U.S. Lighthouse Board, Annual Report 1873 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), p. 56.

6. Hamilton, p. 164; Angel, pp. 331-333.

7. Robert Pavlick, State Historian, San Simeon Region. Interview by author, 2 August 1989, Piedras Blancas, CA.

8. Sara Holmes Boutelle, Julia Morgan, Architect (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 214; Hamilton, p. 170.

9. Jim Gibbs, Lighthouses of the Pacific (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing), pp. 66-67.

10. Ibid.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Angel, Myron. A History Of San Luis Obispo County. Oakland: Thompson and West, 1883; reprint San Luis Obispo: Valley Publishers, 1979.

Boutelle, Sara. Julia Morgan, Architect. New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1988.

Chase, J. Soncaton. California Coast Trails 1913. Reprint Palo Alto: Tioga Publishers, 1981.

Gibbs, Jim. Lighthouses of the Pacific. West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1986.

Hamilton, Geneva. Where the Highway Ends. San Luis Obispo: Padre Productions, 1974.

Holland, F. Ross. America's Lighthouses, Their Illustrated History Since 1716. Brattleboro: 1972.

Pavlick, Robert, State Historian, San Simeon Region. Interview by author. August 2, 1989.

San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune, various dates.

U.S. Lighthouse Board, Annual Report, (various dates). Washington, D.C.: GPO.

☐ 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 20 acres

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	10	655365	3948240
B	10	655460	3947900
C	10	655200	3947960
D			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

20 acres of Piedras Blancas bounded on the north by an east-west line drawn from the coast so runs as to include the most prominent part of the point or cape.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the Piedras Blancas Light Station embraces the buildings and immediate setting historically associated with this complex.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jack Bookwalter

organization Sonoma State University date October 6, 1989

street & number 767 Southwood Dr. telephone (707) 526-3197

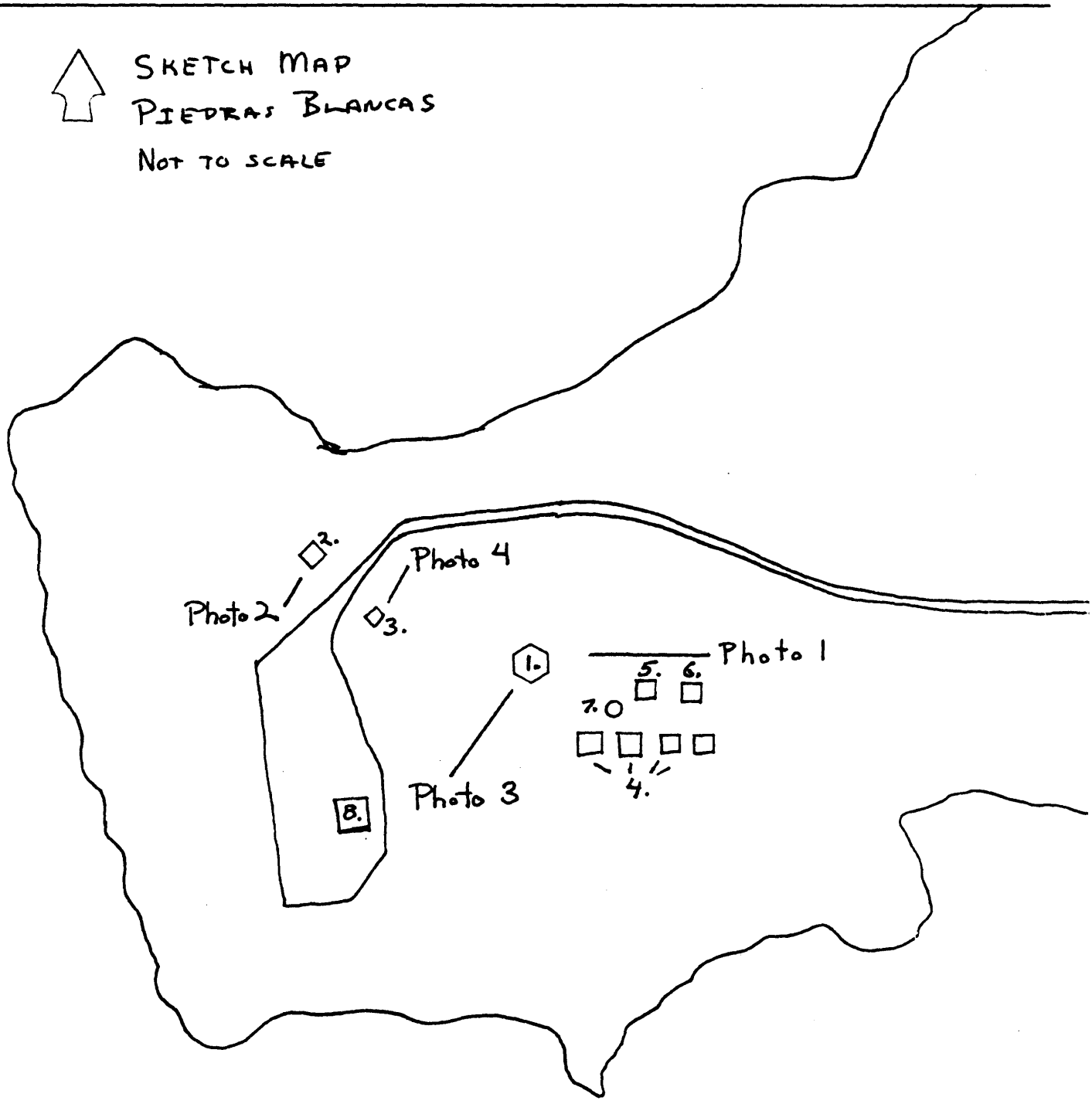
city or town Santa Rosa state CA zip code 95407

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Piedras Blancas Light Station
Highway 1
San Simeon, CA
San Luis Obispo County

Section number _____ Page _____



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OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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NATIONAL REGISTER

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91001095 Date Listed: 9/3/91

Piedras Blancas Light Station	San Luis Obispo	CA
Property Name	County	State

Light Stations of California MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for Patricia Parker — 9/3/91

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

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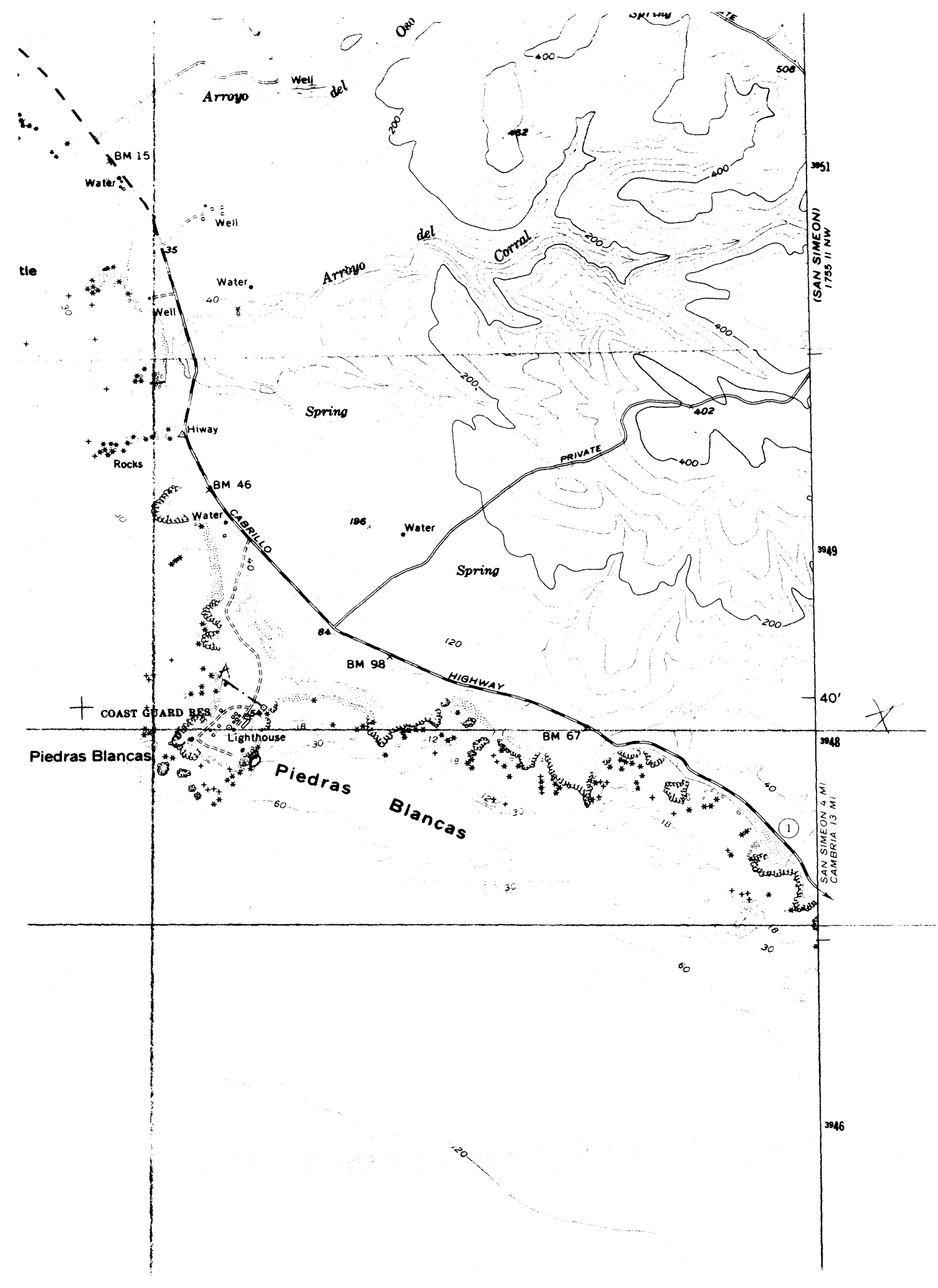
Amended Items in Nomination:

Statement of Significance: Under Applicable National Register Criteria, A and C should be checked.

This information was comfirmed with David Reece of the U.S. Coast Guard.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)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Lighthouse
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Piedras Blancas
Piedras Blancas
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