

CISTERN AND PUMP HOUSE

APN: N/A (Location to the northwest of the intersection of Palo Alto Avenue and Hale Street)

1997-2001 SURVEY UPDATE SUMMARY

Identified National Register Criteria of Significance: Criterion A (Events) and C (Architecture)

Identified Period of Significance: 1924

Summary of Significance: Under Criterion A, the Cistern and Pump House was deemed eligible as an important part of the Palo Alto municipal water system that was developed from wells beginning in 1887. Under Criterion C, the Pump House is significant as one of only two examples in Palo Alto of an important Northern California building type in the early 20th century: the decorated utility structure that reflects the City Beautiful movement and a sense of civic pride.

2023 RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY SUMMARY

Alterations Since 2001: No alterations identified.

Status in 2023: Extant, retains historic integrity.

Recommended Revisions to Significance: None.



Figure 1: 1997-2001 Survey Update photograph.



Figure 2: 2023 Reconnaissance Survey photograph.

RECOMMENDATION FOR LISTING IN THE PALO ALTO HISTORIC INVENTORY

Palo Alto Historic Inventory Criteria for Designation:

- Criterion 1 (The structure or site is identified with the lives of historic people or with important events in the city, state, or nation.)
- Criterion 2 (The structure is particularly representative of an architectural style or way of life important to the city, state, or nation.)

Statement of Significance: The subject building is significant as only one of two remaining early Palo Alto decorated utility structures and as an important part of the Palo Alto municipal water system that was developed from well sources beginning in 1887. The Cistern and Pump House also represents an important Northern California building typology that emerged from the City Beautiful Movement. It was designed to express pride in civic and public infrastructure.

Period of Significance: 1924

Palo Alto Historic Inventory Category: Category 2

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code 3S

Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

Page 1 of 5

*Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) Cistern and Pump House Hale and Palo Alto

- P1. Other Identifier: Cistern and Pump House at Hale and Palo Alto streets
P2. Location: ☐ Not for Publication ☒ Unrestricted *a: County Santa Clara
and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach Location Map as necessary.)
*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Palo Alto, CA Date 1991 T ____; R ____; ____ of ____ of Sec ____; B.M.
c. Address Cistern/Pump House Hale and Palo Alto City Palo Alto Zip 94301
d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone ____; ____ mE/ ____ mN
*e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate) APN None

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The Hale Street site of the city's water system includes two structures, a cistern and a pump house. The cistern is a circular reinforced concrete structure with a capacity of 300,000 gallons. It is covered by a roof and ventilated in the center by a hip roofed monitor. At the southern edge of the cistern, there is a gable-roofed shed that appears to be of more recent construction.

Several yards to the east of the cistern is a reinforced concrete pump house. This is a rectangular structure with stucco walls and a flat roof. The pump house is on axis with Hale Street and is designed to be seen by the public. The principal facade is a traditional composition from classical and Renaissance sources, with a large central arched entryway flanked by a single window on each side. The composition is provided with balance and completion at the top by means of three square openings and a red-tiled roof coping. Each of these elements is ornamented. The arched entry is filled by a paneled door. The flanking windows are screened by decorative iron grilles. The square openings at the top are fitted with glazed terra cotta grilles.

*P3b Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP11 Engineering Structure

*P4. Resources Present: ☐ Building ☒ Structure ☐ Object ☐ Site ☐ District ☐ Element of District ☐ Other (isolates, etc.)



P5b. Description of Photo:
(View, date, accession #) _____
Cistern/Hale Palo Alto Ave; view east;
09/13/99; by B. Vahey; roll BRV-77,
neg #15

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and
Source: ☒ Historic
☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both
1924; Live Oak

*P7. Owner and Address:
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Ave Palo Alto CA
94031

*P8. Recorded by: (Name,
affiliation, and address)
Michael Corbett, Dames & Moore
221 Main Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94105

*P9. Date Recorded:
May 12, 2000

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
Intensive

P11. Report Citation*: (Cite survey
report and other sources, or enter "none".) Palo Alto Historic Survey Update (Corbett and Bradley for Dames & Moore, 2000)

*Attachments: ☐ NONE ☒ Location Map ☐ Sketch Map ☒ Continuation Sheet ☒ Building, Structure and Object Record
☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record
☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List) _____

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Page 2 of 5

*NRHP Status Code 3S

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Cistern and Pump House Hale and Palo Alto

B1. Historic Name: _____

B2. Common Name: _____

B3. Original Use: _____ B4. Present Use: Engineering Structure

*B5. Architectural Style: Mediterranean

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
1924: Built (Live Oak)

*B7. Moved? ☒ No ☐ Yes ☐ Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

*B8. Related Features: _____

B9a. Architect: _____ b. Builder: City of Palo Alto

*B10. Significance: Theme A: Municipal water supply; C: Decorated utility structure Area Palo Alto

Period of Significance 1924-1962 Property Type Municipal Applicable Criteria A and C
(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

History

Site: This property is located on the southeast bank of San Francisquito Creek at the end of Hale Street.

Structure: The *Live Oak* reported, on 2 October 1924, that the City of Palo Alto was building a pump house at Palo Alto Avenue and Hale Street at a cost of \$700.

Use: The *Palo Alto Times* published, on 25 June 1935, an article, "Palo Alto Water Consumption Outgrows Underground Supply" in which it quoted the city engineer, J.F. Byxbee, who summarized the history of the supply of water to Palo Alto: "Palo Alto has depended entirely upon wells for its water supply since the town was first laid out in 1889. Prior to 1898 it was common practice for residents to construct hand dug wells or to bore shallow 'stovepipe' casting wells, 6 in. to 8 in. in diameter, and pump water from them either by hand or by windmill. At that time the natural ground water was very close to the surface so no drilling was encountered in procuring a supply at low cost."

"In 1887 the Palo Alto Municipal Water Works was constructed involving an initial outlay of some \$40,000 for mains and a steam pumping plant, which later was located at the present power and water plant site on Newell Road between Hopkins Avenue and Embarcadero Road. Additional wells and pumping plants, now of the deep-well, electrically-driven turbine-type,

See continuation sheet

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) _____

*B12. References: _____

See continuation sheet.

B13. Remarks: _____

(Sketch map with north arrow required)

*B14. Evaluator: Michael Corbett

Date of Evaluation: May 12, 2000

(This space reserved for official comments)

CONTINUATION SHEET

Page 3 of 5

Resource Identifier: Cistern and Pump House Hale and Palo Alto

Recorded by Michael Corbett/Steve Hardy (history)

*Date May 12, 2000

☒ Continuation

☐ Update

History (continued)

have been constructed in various parts of the city from time to time, since the original pumping station." The *Palo Alto Times* listed eight of these local wells in the article "Mains could serve city of 70,000" published on 17 October 1952: the Tower Well, located at Hawthorne and Alma; the Hale Well at Palo Alto and Hale; one in the 1100 block of Middlefield; one on Hopkins between Cedar and Pine; one in the 1600 block of Bryant; one at the corner of Alma and Oregon; and one on Park next to Fire Station no. 2. Mr. Byxbee gave his analysis of the water situation: "The production cost and fixed charges on production capital for procuring water from wells of the Palo Alto type and with the present depth and volume of ground water, are relatively quite low and make the supply from such sources attractive from the standpoint of cost. It appears, however, that the city is outgrowing this source of water supply; also that the quality of the ground water, while not detrimental to health, is complained of generally on account of its hardness and high mineral content."

"Since 1925 studies have been made by the board of other sources of water supply for Palo Alto, but no permanent satisfactory or adequate source of water has been found except the San Francisco-Hetch Hetchy water which is now available to this city."

The *Palo Alto Times* reported, on 26 January 1948, in the article "P.A. has enough water" that "Ten years ago last December the city made a contract with the San Francisco Water Department for the delivery of water, using the spur pipe line from the Atherton substation of the Hetch Hetchy system, in which Palo Alto has a 60 percent interest." The same article reported further: "Meanwhile, the nine Palo Alto wells are inactive, but at least some of them will be placed in operation later on." In 1952, the *Palo Alto Times*, on 17 October 1952, referred to the well at Palo Alto and Hale as one of the eight local wells that were then serving as the city's secondary source of water.

Since 1962, the city has relied on a mix of Hetch Hetchy and coast range water with its old system of wells serving only for backup purposes. Four wells are still part of the system: Hale, Rinconada, Peers, and Meadows (Winslow, p. 219-220).

Evaluation

Although additional research is necessary to understand how the pump house at Hale and Palo Alto streets functions within the system, and a complete survey of water system facilities is necessary to fully understand the context of this site, this property appears to meet the criteria of the NRHP. It appears significant under criteria A and C at the local level of significance. The period of significance is from 1924, when it was built, to 1962 when it went on standby status.

Under criterion A, this property represents the municipal water system developed by Palo Alto from wells beginning in 1887.

Under criterion C, the pump house is one of only two examples in Palo Alto of an important building type in Northern California in the early 20th century — the decorated utility structure. The other example is the Tower Wall at Alma and Hawthorne streets. The best known examples are electrical substations, but the decorated utility structures were built for water systems and other utilities as well. These structures were an aspect of the City Beautiful Movement, reflecting pride in modern technology and an effort to beautify utilitarian facilities for the benefit of the whole city.

References

California Office of Historic Preservation. *Instructions for Nominating Historical Resources to the California Register of Historic Resources*. Sacramento, CA. August 1997.

Live Oak. "City of Palo Alto Pump House." 2 October 1924.

Palo Alto Historic Survey Update. Property File.

Palo Alto Times. "Palo Alto Water Consumption Outgrows Underground Supply." 25 June 1935.

Palo Alto Times. "P.A. has enough water." 26 January 1948.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Page 4 of 5

Resource Identifier: Cistern and Pump House Hale and Palo Alto

Recorded by Michael Corbett

*Date May 12, 2000

☒ Continuation

☐ Update

References (continued)

Palo Alto Times. "Mains could serve city of 70,000 — but it takes work to keep 'em full." 17 October 1952.

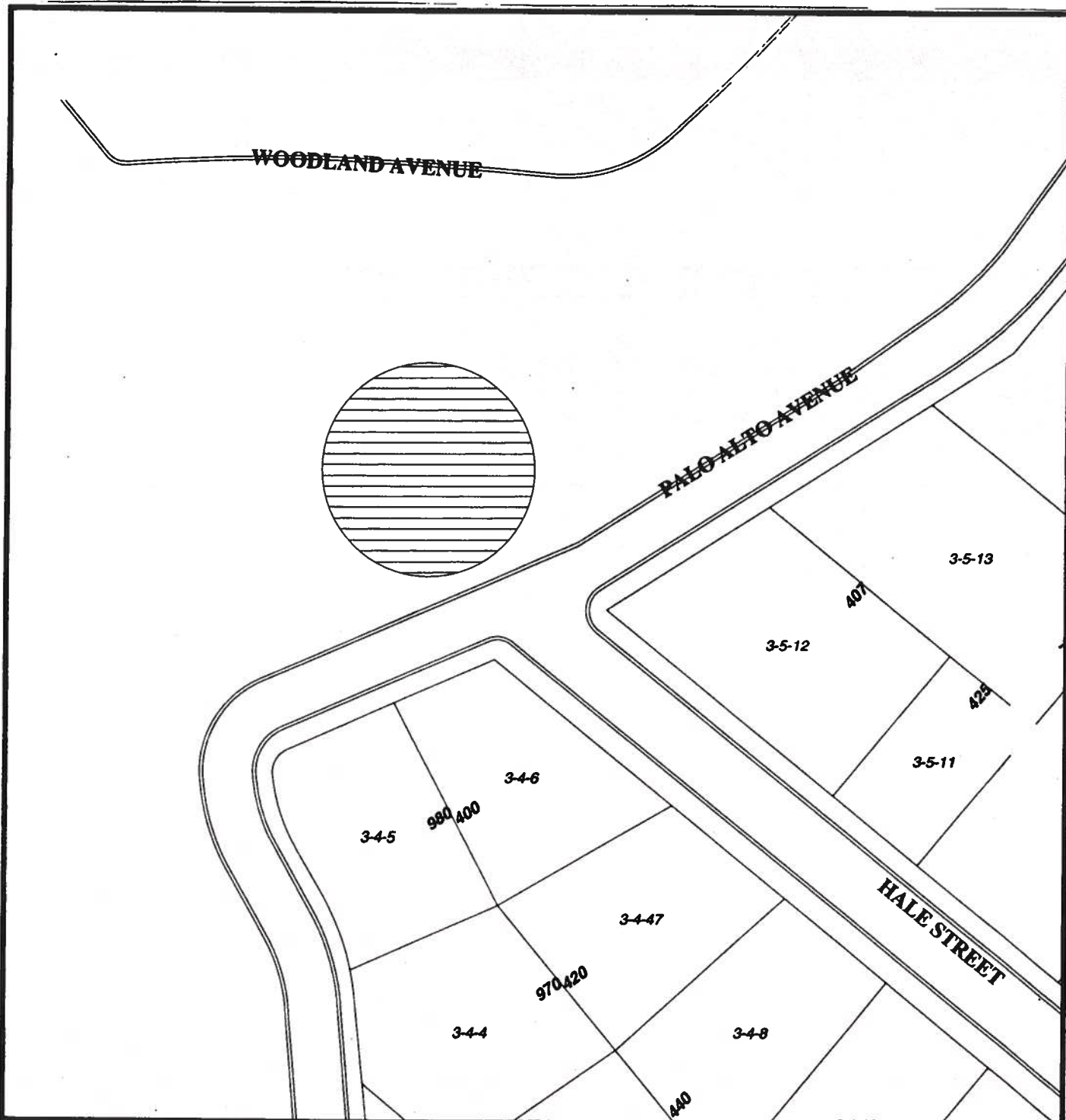
Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Palo Alto*. New York: 1924.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Palo Alto*. New York: 1924; revisions to 1949.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.

Winslow, Ward and the Palo Alto Historical Association. *Palo Alto: A Centennial History*. Palo Alto: Palo Alto Historical Association, 1993.

LOCATION MAP



The City of
Palo Alto



Cistern Hale/Palo Alto Ave

This map is a
product of the
City of Palo Alto GIS

