

Draft Historic Structure Report
11401 State Route 1
Point Reyes Station, California

circa 1948



2024



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Note: this information was requested by a community member and was not produced in coordination with the owners of the building and property. The author was not paid, and makes no judgements beyond those evaluating the historical integrity and significance of the building.

A Brief History and Evaluation of 11401 State Route 1, Point Reyes Station

The subject building, located at Fourth and A Streets in Point Reyes Station, has served as a gas dispensing station and auto repair shop, with non-associated businesses in the majority floor space of the building, for at least the past 82 years (auto repair ended approximately ten years ago). The core of the building is older, constructed in 1932 and moved to the current site before June 1942. This is the only gas station in the Point Reyes Station vicinity, and the only one on coastal Highway 1 (Shoreline Highway) between Tamalpais Valley in Marin County and Valley Ford in Sonoma County, a distance of 52 miles.

Description: The 5,650-square-foot building is a former barn/vegetable shed with a short office/repair bay extension on the west part of the façade facing Highway 1. It is clad in corrugated steel, with the exception of the gas station office extension, which is a combination of newer stucco and wood siding. The west façade is roughly half original corrugated steel siding and half stucco. Windows and doors are original wood frame double hung sash on the older section, while the gas station section, representing about 20% of the façade, has been updated with wood cove siding, modern doors and windows, and garage bay doors. A series of simple wood brackets support the eaves on the east and west sides.

Narrative History: Point Reyes Station was founded in 1874-75 with construction of the narrow gauge North Pacific Coast Railroad, which connected San Francisco with the redwood timber country of Sonoma County to the north. The railroad company established a depot called Olema Station, which originally served the residents of Olema (two miles distant to the south) and the Point Reyes Peninsula and Tomales Bay shore, all of which was a major California dairying region. The town grew in the 1880s to feature a mercantile, hotel, post office, school, blacksmith shop, and a small number of residences. In 1892 the name was changed to Point Reyes Station. The town continued to grow in the twentieth century, to include a large cooperative creamery, expanded mercantiles and hotels, saloons, a public hall, railroad infrastructure, livery stable, and more residences in new neighborhoods.

In the 1920s, hundreds of acres on the Point Reyes Peninsula were converted from dairy grazing to truck farms operated by newly arrived Italian and Japanese immigrants. The Italians tended to grow artichokes, and the Japanese grew peas. Prominent Point Reyes landowner Leland S. Murphy, who oversaw the farming operations on his

land, constructed a barn in 1932 next to the Northwestern Pacific Railroad tracks in Point Reyes Station as a storage and loading point for produce from his 10,000-acre ranch and farm. Murphy's ranch was formerly the historic Home Ranch owned by James McMillan Shafter. Rail service ended in 1933, so the barn was used for storage and also as a dance hall known as the "Pea Shed." The tracks were removed from the rail yards, opening up five blocks of town to commercial development.



At far right, Leland S. Murphy's "pea shed" in situ in the former railyards of Point Reyes Station, 1930s. Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History.

In December 1941 the United States declared war on Japan and Italy. The Issei and Nisei farmers were removed and interned, never to return. The Italian farmers were banned from traveling west of Highway 1, thus ending the artichoke and pea farming on Point Reyes.

Before June of 1942, the entire trackside barn was moved to its current location, across Mesa Road from the 1914 Point Reyes Cooperative Creamery, and, after interior walls were installed, began operating as M. Vonsen Company, a feed and hardware store, supplying Point Reyes ranchers and farmers. A gas station component was added at that time, originally an Associated “Flying A” station. It was the first modern gas station in the area; prior to that, local stores had gas pumps in front of their buildings on the main street. When the Flying A station opened, most of those pumps were removed.

The feed store closed in the 1960s and the building had a variety of tenants since then, with few physical changes. The gas station section was remodeled over the years, although the footprint remained the same.



Two views, taken on the same day circa 1948. The service station section has been remodeled, but most of the remaining building possesses a high level of integrity. Seth Wood photos, Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History.

Historical Integrity: Approximately 80% of the building's exterior possesses excellent integrity. It retains the original corrugated steel siding, windows, porch structure, roofline, and footprint. The west end of the building has been remodeled a number of times, but the footprint and general layout has not changed; only the surface fabric, and windows and doors of that section have been altered. It is this evaluator's opinion that the building possesses integrity despite the alterations of 20% of the building's exterior on the west side.



Property viewed to north, January 21, 2024.

Property viewed to northwest, January 21, 2024.



Historic window fabric and placement, January 21, 2024.



West end of building, showing stuccoed portion of exterior wall, January 21, 2024.



Statement of Historical Significance: The building is a rare intact example of an agricultural building that reflects the unique crop farming (not dairy) history of Point Reyes: the artichoke and pea farms out on the Point, operated by immigrant Issei and Nisei Japanese and Italians. At the start of World War II, the Japanese were interned and the Italians classified as enemy aliens and prohibited from traveling west of Highway 1. The cultural importance of these immigrant farmers has not been acknowledged to date, and this is the last extant building in the area associated with that theme.

The building is also locally significant as the first and only modern gas station in Point Reyes Station, established circa 1941.

In the context of its setting, the building is a fine example of vernacular architecture in a rural agriculture-based coastal town, with its corrugated steel siding and barn-based form and footprint. The building's design mirrors that of the Point Reyes Cooperative Creamery across Mesa Road, lending cohesiveness to the north end of town. While its architectural significance might not stand on its own, it is an important part of the cultural landscape of Point Reyes Station. The gas station falls within the boundaries of the historic district designated by the Board of Supervisors in 2001.

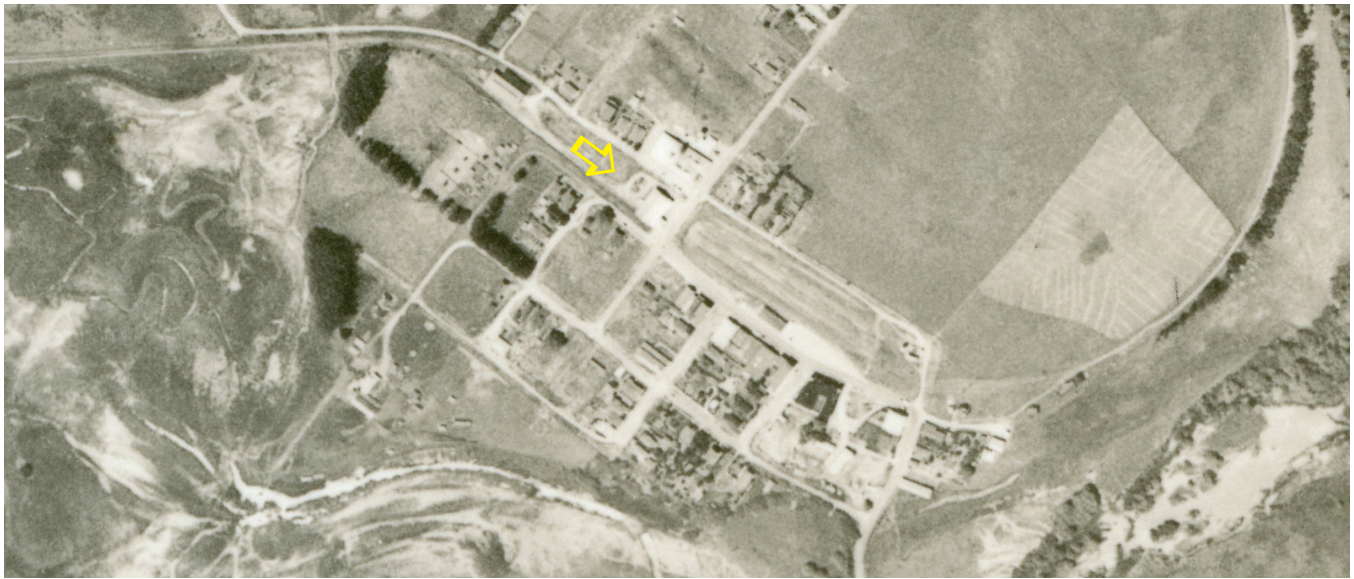
Discussion: From a district point of view, the Point Reyes Station gas station barn is certainly part of the historic fabric of the town, as much as the nearby Point Reyes Cooperative Creamery, Point Reyes Emporium, or the Grandi building. It retains its historic integrity, especially the open porch and corrugated metal exterior. Its core barn structure is 93 years old and the gas station version is about 82 years old, placing it among the older buildings in town.

In this evaluator's opinion, the building could qualify with local historical significance on the National Register of Historic Places as a component of a Point Reyes Station Historic District. Such a district would include all of the buildings on the west side of A Street, the gas station, and those facing Mesa Road north of Highway 1 including the former Point Reyes Cooperative Creamery. It is already part of the county-designated Point Reyes Station Historic District.

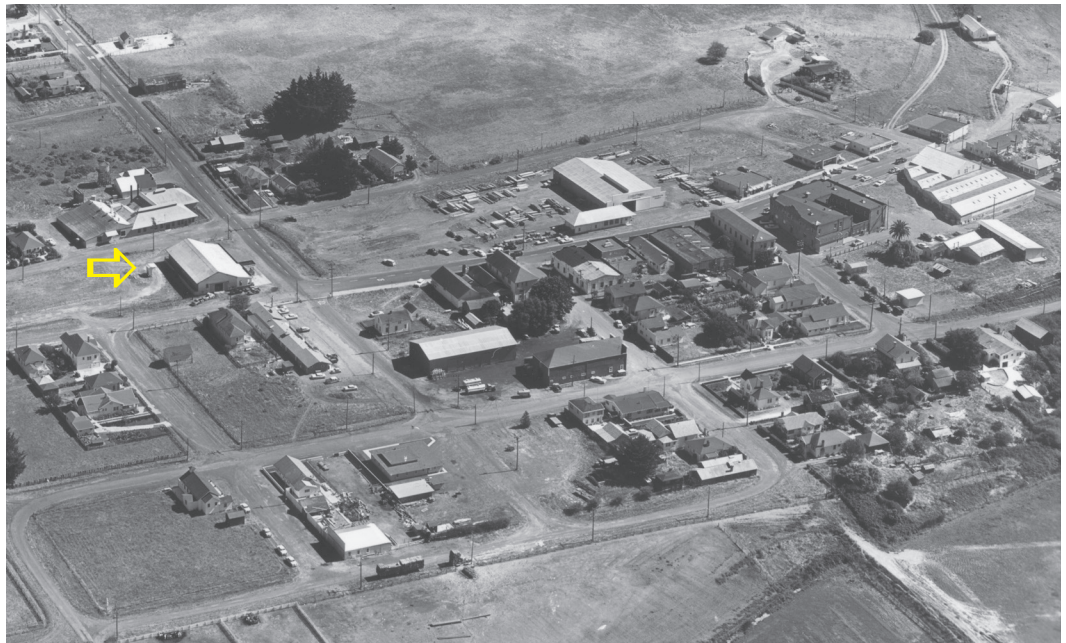
Character Defining Features: The building's historical integrity depends upon the following extant features:

1. Open porch on south façade;
2. Corrugated metal cladding;
3. Window placement and style (double hung wood sash);
4. Footprint;
5. Roof angle and eave brackets;
6. Loading dock and floor elevation;
7. Open garage bay.

Evaluator Qualifications: Dewey Livingston has been a professional cultural resources consultant for the past 25 years, specializing in rural buildings, agricultural structures, landscape features, and historic districts in the West. Before that, for ten years he was a National Park Service (NPS) historical technician, evaluating historic buildings and structures all over the Western Region of NPS. He has successfully listed more than 40 buildings and sites in California to the National Register of Historic Places. Dewey is the co-founder, archivist and chairman of the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History in Inverness, and a map archivist with the Anne T. California Room at Marin County Free Library.



Above, aerial view of Point Reyes Station on June 7, 1942. Feed store/gas station indicated with an arrow. Detail of COF-8-105, Anne T. Kent California Room Map and Special Collections Annex, Marin County Free Library.



Right: Aerial view of Point Reyes Station in 1960. Feed store/gas station indicated by arrow. CalTrans.

Sources:

Mason, Jack. *Earthquake Bay: A History of Tomales Bay, California*. Inverness: North Shore Books, 1976.

———. “Leland at New Albion.” *Point Reyes Historian*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Spring 1979.

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———. *Point Reyes and Tomales Bay: A History of the Land and Its People*. Inverness: Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History, 2024 (yet to be in print).

Petaluma Argus-Courier, 1932-33.

Oral History interviews with Loren Cheda, Evelyn Genazzi Gilardi, and Wilford “Bill” Scilacci.

Photographs on file at Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History, Inverness.

Aerial photographs on file at Anne T. Kent California Room Map and Special Collections Annex, Marin County Free Library.