

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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

DEC -9 1987
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RECEIVED
received FEB 5 1987
date entered
OHP

1. Name

historic Fern Cottage Historic District

and/or common Fern Cottage

2. Location

street & number 2099 Centerville Road N/A not for publication

city, town Ferndale ☒ vicinity of

state California code 06 county Humboldt code 023

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
☒ district	☐ public	☒ occupied	☒ agriculture	☐ museum
☐ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial	☐ park
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational	☒ private residence
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment	☐ religious
☐ object	☐ in process	☒ yes: restricted	☐ government	☐ scientific
	☐ being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial	☐ transportation
	☒ N/A	☐ no	☐ military	☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Fern Cottage, Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 36

city, town Ferndale NA vicinity of state CA 95536

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Humboldt County Courthouse

street & number 825 Fifth Street

city, town Eureka state CA 95501

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 state

7. Description

Condition☐ excellent☒ good☐ fair☐ deteriorated☐ ruins☐ unexposed**Check one**☐ unaltered☒ altered**Check one**☒ original site☐ moved

date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Fern Cottage Historic District is located in coastal northern California, two-and-a-half miles west of the village of Ferndale. The 160-acre District, which encompasses the original land patent issued in 1866 to Joseph Russ, includes Eel River bottomland and some forested land within two miles of the Pacific Ocean. The focal point of the District is Fern Cottage, a settlement-period farmhouse whose architectural and historical integrity are without compromise. A one-and-a-half story, center-gable house with end gables, Fern Cottage has modellioned eaves, multi-paned windows with slightly-peaked lintels, front facade bays, and several major additions which faithfully repeat the gabled architecture of the original house. The additions, which occurred prior to 1900, and the alterations are not intrusive to the character of the Cottage. On the contrary, they enhance that unique character by reflecting the normal course of a family's history, its growth, extension, and emergence into the modern world. The Cottage's interior and furnishings recall a 19th-century and early 20th-century rural life as lived by a large and extended family. Some rooms underwent limited change prior to 1930; others remain virtually as they were, such as the kitchen where the wood-burning range still heats the room and cooks the food as it has for more than a century. Essential to the historic value of the District are the structures and sites associated with the farmstead--sheds, barns, gardens, orchards--the necessities of a self-sustaining agrarian life. The bottomlands supported livestock and produced feed; the gardens, orchards, and chicken house filled the larder; and the forested hillsides provided fuelwood. Embracing both the land and the structures, Fern Cottage Historic District is worthy of listing on the National Register of Historic Places as an exceptional representative of a settlement-period farmstead in northcoast California.

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Fern Cottage Historic District is located two-and-a-half miles west of the rural, northern California village of Ferndale within two miles of the Pacific Ocean and about three miles south of the Eel River delta. The nominated acreage consists of the original 160-acre land patent issued in 1866 to Joseph Russ and includes the west half of the northwest quarter and the west half of the southwest quarter of Section 4, T.2N,R.2W. All of the nominated land north of the Centerville Road is flat, open, bottomland; that portion of the 160 acres south of the road is forested and hilly, the road being the topographic boundary between these two landscapes. As it has for the past 120 or so years, the bottomlands are used for livestock pasture and feed production. In the past, the forested lands were slashed and burned, but today provide for a fuelwood operation.

For the sixty years following its construction in 1866, the house underwent a kind of ongoing architectural evolution with several major additions, exterior alterations, and interior changes. All of these changes, however, are integral parts of the present house and are significant in their own right as evidence of the Russ family's growth and extension, and efforts to participate in the modernizing world of the early 20th century. Two points are noteworthy regarding these changes: exterior alterations and additions are in the same style as the original farmhouse of 1866 and interior modernizing was very limited and terminated in the 1920's.

The original house consisted of a front, center-gable section of one-and-a-half stories containing two bedrooms and a living room downstairs and four bedrooms upstairs, and a single-story rear extension containing the kitchen, pantry, woodshed, etc. The original plans do not indicate rooms over the one-story extension, but it is thought that this attic space, as indicated by two gabled dormers on the east, was finished for small bedrooms either at the time of construction or soon afterwards.

Dates for the additions were difficult to determine, but it is thought that all were completed prior to 1900. The first addition on the east side to the rear of the extension was made in 1878 as noted in the Ferndale Enterprise of November 29, 1878: "Mr. Joseph Russ has subjoined a large fine two-story addition to his residence." An 1882 lithograph which appeared in Elliott's History of Humboldt County California shows this 1878 addition with a shed-style attachment at the rear, a woodshed perhaps. This rear shed gave way to a more substantial one-story addition with a gable roof and 6/6 windows in 1892 as reported in the Ferndale Enterprise of August 12, 1892: "The carpenter work at Fern Cottage has been finished and the Cottage looms up fine." On September 16, 1892, the Enterprise announced that the work of painting Fern Cottage was completed and it "now presents a handsome appearance." The third addition, which includes the upper story of the second addition plus the third gabled section, appears to have been made in 1897 to accommodate a growing family of adult children and spouses, grandchildren, and guests, who spent extended periods at the Cottage. Letters from Russ daughters who were studying in Europe in 1897-98 make reference to the construction of the "Grandchildren's Wing," believed to be this final addition.

A wood-frame house with clapboard siding, gabled rooflines, brick chimneys, multi-paned windows and modillioned eaves, Fern Cottage is a picturesque farmhouse of exceptional historical character and architectural integrity. Notable among early Humboldt County farmhouses as an architect-designed house, Fern Cottage is an end-gable house with a large center gable on the front facade above the entrance. The plans for this

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part of the house, drawn by George Fairfield, show a Palladian window in the gable, but presently there is a single, 1/1 window which replaced a multi-paned, pointed-arch window flanked by shutters. The plans also show an open verandah across the front. This verandah with lovely split posts appears in an early photograph of the house, but the east end of the porch is enclosed with multi-paned windows as shown in the 1882 Elliott lithograph. The present five-window square bays flanking the central porch and entrance were constructed in 1884. Dainty brackets line the cornice above the bays and the porch, which has two turned posts mounted on brick bases; the posts date to the 1884 remodeling and the brick work to about 1914. A transom and sidelights with wavy and bubble glass surround the front door which has a single pane of square glass above wood panels.

Although the original plans show a Palladian window in the upper story of the east wall, it was not built and instead there are two, 2/2 windows. The lower story has two, 4/4 windows and all are covered with a slightly-peaked lintel, a theme repeated throughout the house. The original one-story rear extension had an open verandah, but very early, a portion was enclosed for an office and gabled dormers added in the roof above to provide light and room for the tiny bedrooms built in this attic space. Construction of the shed dormer which fits between these two gabled dormers occurred circa 1920. There are two, 2/2 windows in the wall of the office enclosure and two, 4/4 windows in the original porch wall.

The first addition, made in 1878 on the east side, is a gabled-roof section which repeats the clapboard siding and modillioned eaves of the main house. There are two, 2/2 windows in the upper story and two, 4/4 windows in the lower, each covered with the slightly-peaked lintel of the main house. A door opens off the original side verandah into this addition. Downstairs it contains what was originally the master bedroom but is now a sitting room with a fireplace; upstairs is the trunk room. This room was built for the school room before the family built a separate building across the creek to the west where the children attended school. Later the room was used by the women and the seamstress who came from the Bay area each year to do the sewing for the family. Today, it holds the family's travel trunks, containing clothing and personal items belonging to the various members of the family.

The second addition was a one-story, gable-roofed section, recessed behind the first addition and thought to have been made in 1892. The last addition, made in 1897, includes an upper story on the second addition, plus the third gabled section at the southeast corner of the house. These sections repeat the gable roofline, clapboard siding, and modillioned eaves of the main house and first addition. Each has two, 2/2 windows in the upper story and two, 4/4 windows in the lower story on the east wall. The corner section has another 4/4 window in the south wall of the lower story, a brick exterior chimney on its north wall and a panelled door in the east wall at the very rear of the building. This leads to the quilt room which has a fireplace and one entire wall of cabinets. It was originally used, however, as men's room and included a wood mantel piece decorated with wild game carvings. In this room and the adjoining room in the second addition, the family's papers, correspondence, photographs, books and personal things are stored. Hundreds of pieces of correspondence dating to the 1840's and including both personal and business items, have been carefully arranged by years and identified by correspondents. This archival material is a record of the Russ family;

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more importantly, however, it is a chronicle of Humboldt County settlement and life and the emergence of not only this family, but the region into the 20th century. It is an invaluable collection.

The northwest corner of the house represents several different periods of change made to accommodate the changing needs of the family. On the west wall of the rear section where Mrs. Russ' bedroom was located is a four-window bay, supported by large wall brackets. A little gabled, one-story building with a porch houses the laundryroom and storage shelves where the canning was put away each year. The laundryroom is particularly notable as it contains the stationary laundry tubs with their hand-cranked wringer and the brick fireplace with tub where the clothes were boiled.

Except for the original front section of the house, the west side presents a very different view than that of the additions on the east side. At the northern end of the west side, there is a small, gabled section which contains the kitchen with the cook's room above. A sun porch was added to the west wall of the kitchen about 1920. A small porch on the south leads to the kitchen door, which has four panes of glass below a divided transom. The original kitchen was located in the one-story rear extension, but was moved to the present location in the early 1870's. It is a wonderful farmhouse room, heated by the wood-burning range identified as a French Range No. 2, Geo. H. Tay, & Co. San Francisco, Cal, and, unlike most old-house kitchens, has not been modernized. There are no cabinets since the adjoining pantry provides work space, storage and the refrigerator; the wood box still stands against the interior wall; and a wooden drainboard surrounds the single sink. Narrow horizontal boards cover the walls above the wainscoting, doors are panelled, and an early 6/6 window along with a small, square, four-pane window in the west wall lights the area.

Moving southward on the west wall, there is a set of three, 2/2 windows which lights the diningroom, thought to have been built in 1880. The center window was added as indicated by an early photograph which shows only two windows with shutters. The diningroom space was originally an open verandah containing a sink where the hired men washed-up before meals which were served in what is now the backhall. Eating arrangements changed in 1880 with construction of the diningroom for the family and the Sanctum for the hired help. The present dining room has a china closet where Mrs. Russ' dishes are still stored, burlap panels on the walls almost to the tops of the door with wall-paper above, and a pass closet connected to the kitchen. Above the diningroom is a small, gabled dormer with a pair of casement windows. This is a wonderful 1920 bathroom, in dazzling white and filled with afternoon sun. The west wall of the main house has a large, exterior brick chimney flanked by two, 2/2 windows in the upper story and two, 4/4 windows in the lower, all covered by the slightly-peaked lintel found elsewhere.

The interior of Fern Cottage is amazingly intact, and despite efforts by the daughters to keep the family in the mainstream of interior decoration and furnishings, time seems to have stopped for some rooms in the 19th century and for others, in the 1920's. The fireplace in the east living room was modernized into the Craftsman style in the 1920's, but the old, vertical-board wainscoting remains as does Mrs. Russ' chair in its accustomed place beside the fireplace. The parlor on the west side was created from a billiard room, which had originally been the two downstairs bedrooms. It is a more formal room than the living room and includes marble-topped tables, stuffed chairs and sofa, and an old square pianoforte.

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Other interior, lower-floor changes include the backhall sitting area where the original kitchen was located and which was used as a dining area before construction of the diningroom and the Sanctum in 1880, and Mr. Russ' office, created out of a corner of the kitchen and the east-side verandah. The 1892 construction added a new stairway, rear hall, laundry room, pantry to the rear of the kitchen, storeroom (ironing room) and a room to the rear of the 1878 master bedroom. The third addition included the men's room (quilt room) at the northeast corner of the house.

In the upstairs, the four bedrooms of the main house are pleasant, simply-furnished rooms of another era. Nooks and crannies, bedrooms and baths in the attic of the one-story extension and the various additions create a labyrinth which takes time to understand and remember. And even then, it is difficult to know what changes occurred and when they occurred. Remembering, however, that Zipporah and Joseph Russ had their first child in 1855 and their 13th in 1879, that married daughters returned with their large families for extended periods to live at Fern Cottage, that some married children lived at the Cottage, and that guests were a normal part of the household routine gives meaning to this labyrinth. They needed lots of rooms for all these people. There are three small bedrooms and a bath in the attic of the extension. Added upstairs spaces include: the trunk room of the 1878 addition, plus a cook's room over the kitchen; a new stairway built as part of the 1892 addition; a bedroom with bath across the hall, dressing room and nurse's room (finished about 1920 for Mrs. Russ' attendant during her later years), and two more bedrooms, all part of the last addition in 1897.

Surrounding Fern Cottage is a spacious yard, fenced off from the orchards and agricultural lands, and bordered by several tree species including elms brought to Humboldt County by Joseph Russ after a visit to his native Maine in 1876. In addition, there are flower beds against the house, a rose garden, a large vegetable garden area, and the orchards. Structures associated with the house include the old clothes reel and platform and a separate woodshed behind the house along with two poultry houses, a footbridge across Russ Creek, a barn and the garage across the road.

Also south of the road are located the barns and sheds used in the ranching operation, and a dwelling, currently occupied by the lessee of the land. Associated with this house are two outbuildings and the wooden footbridge across Russ Creek. Within this immediate area of the garage are the truck shed, equipment barn with a little storehouse for fuels, and the large horse barn, along with a loading chute and dog kennels. Further up the creek are a sheep barn and hay shed.

Structures and sites contributing to the character of the District:

1. Woodshed. Located directly to the rear of Fern Cottage, this structure has a shed roof and two, angled openings on the south where the wood is stored. On the north side of this building is a covered area with shelves and ventilated boxes for storage of apples. Construction date unknown.
2. Clothes reel and platform. Also located at the rear of the house, this wonderful structure recalls an earlier time when clothes were washed in tubs and wrung out with hand-cranked wringers. They are found throughout Humboldt County in association with turn-of-the-century and earlier houses. Construction date unknown.
3. Goose house. This building, used for plucking the down from the geese for the feather beds and pillows, has large, multi-paned windows on the south, little wire cages below the windows, a shed roof and board-and-batten siding. Construction date unknown.
4. Chicken house. Located somewhat to the northwest of the goose house, this building appears to be only a portion of a larger, two-story affair. It has wide, vertical board

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siding, slanting shed roof, horizontal boards on the ends, multi-paned windows, and opened areas covered with chicken wire.

5. Barn. Located outside the yard and to the west of the orchard is the household's milk barn, later used as a bull barn. It has a steep gable roof which extends on the north to cover a side shed. The barn is covered with wide, vertical boards and has a shake roof on the south and a corrugated metal roof on the north. Square nails indicate a construction date in the 1870's.

6. Orchard. Located within a fenced area north of the house yard, the orchard is the remaining one of two--a cherry and an apple orchard. These trees provided fruits to the household for both eating and canning. Sheep and bees share this apple orchard today.

7. Fence. Extending across the front of the yard along the road is a beautiful wooden fence consisting of solid top and bottom pieces connected by slats interspersed with arrow-head shaped decoratives extending from both top and bottom boards. The fence curves inward to the gate to provide a drive and parking area off the road. The wide gate leading to the front sidewalk has squared, flat-topped posts. A fence of the same description appears in the 1882 Elliott lithograph and is shown extending along the east side of the yard and partially across the north side.

8. Garage. Located on the south side of the road, the garage has a sloping shed-type roofline with a shingled mansard front above sliding doors on the east facade. On the south end there were originally three large, 9/9 windows, one of which is now boarded up; across the west wall are three pairs of 6/6 windows which do not open; the south wall has three, 9/9 windows and the east facade has large, sliding doors. Siding is shiplap. Estimated construction date is c. 1910.

9. Sanctum and outbuildings. Located south of the road and west of the creek, the Sanctum is a one-and-a-half story, gabled-roof farmhouse with a one-story extension at the rear. It appears to have been built in 1892 after fire destroyed the original Sanctum, built in 1880 "for the exclusive use as a camping ground for the men folks...(to) separate the sheep from the goats" (Ferndale Enterprise, 25 Nov. 1880). As its name implies, the Sanctum housed the hired men and the cook who provided their meals--a place of their own. The house recently underwent interior remodeling to provide comfortable living for the family which presently leases the land. To the rear of the house are two outbuildings, both single-storied and gable-roofed. The larger one, which is a woodshed, has a corrugated metal roof and the smaller, a shingle roof. This smaller building contained the freezer for the cook house.

10. Truck shed. This building is south of the garage and is a long, low structure with a gable roof covered with corrugated metal. The ends are covered with wide, vertical boards and the sides with horizontal boards. Across the east are large sliding doors. The north end of the shed has two square windows of six panes each and a double-hung 6/6 window in the upper part of the gable above a smaller sliding door. Construction date unknown.

11. Storehouse. To the south of the truck shed is a small, gabled building with exposed rafter ends and wide, vertical board siding. It is used to store fuels for the ranching operation. Date of construction unknown.

12. Equipment barn. Adjacent to the little storehouse is another long, low gable-roofed building with sliding doors on the north side. The ends are covered with board-and-batten siding, the sides with horizontal boards and there are exposed rafter ends under the eaves. There are two pairs of square windows each with six panes on the west end and a double-hung window on the east end. Estimated construction date is the 1940's.

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13. Horse barn. The large, gabled portion of the barn dates to the early days of the farmstead. Loft construction is mortise and tenon with hand-hewn timbers, pole rafters, and wooden pegs. A sloping-roof shed on the west has sliding doors along the west wall where the horse-drawn equipment was stored and a single sliding door on the south leading to the tie stalls where the draft horses were stabled. The worn-down boards of the mangers and chewed feed boxes attest to the many horses which stood in these wood-floored stalls over the decades. This is a wonderful structure whose interior calls to mind all the simple associations of an agrarian life--land, livestock, feed...

14. Sheep barn. Located about one-fourth of a mile up the creek from the horse barn, this building which has a steeply-sloping shed roof, sliding door on the north end, wide vertical board siding, and a small attached shed at the northwest corner is a portion of a cow barn, whose roof fell in some years ago. The wooden stanchions and mangers still line the wall, but it is now used for sheep. A large, circular concrete wall below ground level and outside the present barn, but which would have been within the original barn, may have been the base of a silo. Ferndale Enterprise notes in 1899 and 1900 indicated that large barns with silos were being built by the Russ family. Construction date circa 1900.

15. Hay shed. Located just to the south of the sheep barn, this structure has a gable roofline, corrugated metal roof, exposed rafter ends under the eaves and a fence-style wall on the west which is open at the top. This building was originally used for curing and storing firewood. A cabin nearby (no longer standing) housed the hired man whose job it was to cut and store 100 cords of wood a year for the stoves in Fern Cottage and the Sanctum. Construction date unknown.

Resource Count

Contributing:	15
Non-Contributing:	1
Total	16

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1866-1929 **Builder/Architect** George Fairfield. architect, original house

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Fern Cottage Historic District is nominated to the National Register as an exceptional example of a Humboldt County settlement-period farmstead whose architectural components and historic fabric survive totally intact. This 160-acre District, the center-piece of which is the picturesque, 19th-century farmhouse known as Fern Cottage, represents the home place of an extensive, family-run ranching operation of dairies, sheep, and cattle. It was, however, the immediate environs of orchards, kitchen gardens, poultry houses, sheds, and barns that provided the sustenance for this self-sufficient household. Retaining a high degree of architectural and historic integrity, Fern Cottage is significant for its simple but gracious vernacular architecture which was carefully preserved throughout historic periods of expansion and alteration. Still in the ownership of the heirs of Zipporah and Joseph Russ, who patented the land in 1866 and who occupied a place of substantial influence in the business, agricultural and political life of the area, the District is not only a record of that family's history, but also, through that record, a history of Humboldt County--settlement, land ownership, agricultural development, life styles, and emergence into the modern world. The District is unparalleled in Humboldt County as a working ranch whose physical and historic character has been preserved so completely that its roots have remained clear and enduring. The interaction of a special natural environment of ocean, river, forest, and bottomland; a built environment of an earlier agrarian period; and the cultural identity of the people who participated in these environments has created, in the Fern Cottage Historic District, a strong and vibrant "sense of place," which makes the District remarkably worthy of recognition on the National Register of Historic Places.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Elliott, W.W. History of Humboldt County California, W.W. Elliott & Co., S.F. 1882.
Ferndale Enterprise, 4 May 1878-1 June 1906; 15 Nov. 1929. Ferndale, CA.
Humboldt Times, 2 Sept. 1854-4 May 1878. Eureka, CA.
Irvine, Leigh. History of Humboldt County California. Historic Record Co., L.A. 1915.
Muessig, Brian. Rt. 1, Box 81B, Ferndale, CA 95536. Personal Communication, 31 Jan. 1987.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 160 acres

Quadrangle name Ferndale

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	0
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3	8	9	0	2	0
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4	4	9	4	0	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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4	4	9	2	4	5	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification Portion AP# 100-141-01 and all AP# 101-021-08
The West half of the Northwest quarter and the West half of the Southwest quarter of
Section 4, T.2N,R.2W, Humboldt Base and Meridian, running one-quarter mile east and
west and one mile north and south. The original 160 acre land patent.

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

state	None	code	county	None	code
-------	------	------	--------	------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susie Van Kirk

organization

date 1 February 1987

street & number 1162 C Street

telephone (707) 822-6066

city or town Arcata

state CA 95521

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Kathryn Guethen

title

date 11/30/87

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in 11/30/87
National Register

date 1-7-88

for *Delores Byer*
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The significance of Fern Cottage Historic District is found in the vernacular farmhouse architecture of Fern Cottage, supported by contributing farm structures and sites, and in the agricultural operations associated with this 160-acre home place. A history of the District--house, buildings, and ranch--is essentially a history of the Joseph Russ family and provides a perspective for understanding Humboldt County's history.

In Leigh Irvine's 1915 book, History of Humboldt County California, Joseph Russ was described as "perhaps the most extensive cattleman and land owner who has ever lived in the county; a miner, freighter, stockman, merchant, and lumber manufacturer, having risen from a young man without means to the opulent estate of a millionaire cattleman and land owner..." Joseph Russ' story epitomizes the American dream as realized in the 19th-century westward settlement of this country. The land and its resources were virgin and essentially there for the taking. Joseph Russ participated freely in the settlement of public lands as well as purchase of tracts from earlier claimants. From a landless immigrant to Humboldt County in 1852, Russ rose rapidly to a man of political power and wealth, amassing land holdings of more than 50,000 acres. At the time of his death in 1886, he owned 21 dairy ranches, thousands of head of livestock, a lumber mill and timber lands, and a number of businesses, including a meat market, general merchandise store and retail lumber yards. This success was, according to Irvine, the result of "taking advantage of the low price of grazing lands in Humboldt County and by attending personally to the details of his business."

Joseph Russ was born in Lincoln County, Maine on December 19, 1825. With little formal education, he engaged, as a young man, in the teaming and merchandising business, but soon became involved in the operation of a sawmill. Three years later he sailed for San Francisco, arriving in the spring of 1850. The lure of gold was an irresistible force that drew men from around the world to California, but Joseph Russ saw another opportunity. He brought with him, not miners' gear, but a prefab building, merchandise, and bags of flour which he promptly sold on his arrival five months after setting out, and with the profit bought a boat in which he traveled up the Sacramento. After selling the boat, for a profit no doubt, he took a job managing a sawmill. This led to a contract for construction of a bridge across the American River. By the summer of 1850, he had opened a store with a partner in Amador County. This venture proved unsuccessful and he entered into the cattle business, an enterprise which his grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to this day. Purchasing a herd of cattle, he drove it to the Yuba River to sell to the miners. Realizing a profit, he bought more cattle and this led to his opening a hay and feed yard in the Sacramento Valley and the establishment of a freighting business between Colusa and Shasta. In the fall of 1852, he drove cattle from Placerville to Humboldt County, pasturing them on the remote Bear River ridge above Cape Mendocino, a rugged, wind-swept region that remains sparsely-settled and isolated today. He was among the first white men to venture into the lower Eel River valley, wintering with the Shaw Brothers at Ferndale. Returning to Sacramento, he and a partner purchased a large herd of beef cattle which they brought to Humboldt County, opening a meat market in Eureka. This initial enterprise was short-lived, but one that Russ would return to within a few years.

In December 1854, Russ married Zipporah Patrick, 16-year-old daughter of Nehemiah and Jane Patrick, who came overland to the Sacramento Valley in 1852 and the following year to Humboldt County. The Patrick House still stands near Ferndale in the ownership of Zipporah's granddaughter. The young couple left the area for two years, residing at

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Forks of Salmon in Siskiyou County, where Russ had a meat business. It was here that the first of their thirteen children was born in November 1855. Zipporah recalled to her children in later years that tiny Edward cried all the time during his brief, few days of life, a sad and trying time for a young girl far from the support of her family. Baby James made his appearance a year later and the following spring, the family returned to Humboldt County with a herd of cattle purchased in Oregon. Another meat market was opened in Eureka, beginning a long-time business carried on by the family for many years.

The family settled on Bear River ridge on a place Zipporah named Spicy Breezes, apropos the cold wind which sweeps up from the ocean along this ridge. Four babies were born while the family lived here, although Zipporah made the long ride over the mountains to Ferndale to stay with her mother for each "confinement." Mary was born in December 1858; Margaret, December 1860; Ira, October 1863; and Annie, October 1865.

During the decade of the 1860's, Joseph Russ was intensely involved in land acquisition. The 1860 census listed an assessed real estate value of only \$636 along with a personal property value of \$8,000. This second value certainly reflected his livestock holdings. However, at the time of the 1870 census, Russ' real estate holdings were valued at \$50,000 and his personal property at \$100,000. Elliott's History of Humboldt County California, published in 1882, noted that Russ, a man who had come from "difficulty to triumph, from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to prominence by the sole aid of his own energy," owned 3,500 cattle of which 2,000 were milk cows, 13,000 sheep, 400 hogs, 50 horses and 25 mules. His land was divided into 21 dairy ranches and he was considered "one of the largest landowners and wealthy men of California." Humboldt County assessments for 1881 ranked Joseph Russ as the County's richest man based on an assessed value of \$231,274, far in excess of the \$35,394 assessment for lumber baron William Carson of Carson Mansion fame. Research of land-ownership records in the Humboldt County Recorder's Office revealed incredible land-acquisition activity by Joseph Russ, unmatched by any other Humboldt County land owner. From the first deed to Russ and a partner in December 1857 through 1887, there are approximately 300 deeds and 44 patents for public lands recorded for Joseph Russ or Russ and partners or Zipporah Russ, or the Russ Estate.

Until the 1870's when decimation and demoralization of the native peoples "resolved" conflicts created by white incursion into lands used by Indian people, there were periods in Humboldt County's history of violent episodes between the two peoples. The Russ family experienced that conflict during their residency on Bear River, particularly during the early 1860's when Bear River and Mattole Indian people found themselves faced with increasing occupation of their lands by livestock, many of which had been brought into the area from other locations where white-Indian conflicts were raging. Newspaper accounts of the early 1860's record the conflicts from the white perspective. A February 6, 1864 note in the Humboldt Times stated that the "premises of Mr. Joseph Russ on Bear River were entered last week by the Indians and robbed of everything valuable." Property taken consisted of a good rifle, bullet moulds, eleven pairs of blankets, three hair mattresses and nearly all the clothing belonging to the family. They were apparently not home; perhaps, Zipporah was still at her parents in Ferndale after the birth of Ira that fall.

In the February 10, 1866 issue of the Humboldt Times, a notice was published of Joseph Russ' intention to apply for a patent to the west half of the northwest quarter and the west half of the southwest quarter of Section 4, T.2N,R.2W, containing 160.26 acres. The patent, issued on September 5, 1866, is for the land included in this District and upon which Fern Cottage was constructed that same year. Plans for the house were

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drawn by Architect George Fairfield and, according to the family, the builder was John Fairchild of Kentucky. A copy of the plans for the original house hangs in the Fern Cottage entrance hall. It shows the front, center-gable, one-and-a-half story house with an open verandah and a rear, one-story extension. The plans are identified as a "Farm House for Jos. Russ, Esq., Humboldt County," indicating that George Fairfield was from outside the County, probably San Francisco. It is noteworthy that this house was designed by an architect, since during this early settlement period, Humboldt County houses were mostly a reflection of culture--people building the kinds of houses they remembered from back home--and rarely architect-commissioned houses or ones from plan books.

The first Russ baby born in the new house was William December 1867. He was followed by Georgia in April 1870; Edith, March 1872; Bertha, Oct. 1874; Joseph, Nov. 1876; Winnifred, March 1878; and Zipporah, Nov. 1879. A growing family and changing needs prompted the first addition on the east side in 1878. Later additions, thought to have occurred in 1892 and 1897, were made to accommodate a grown-up family which included spouses and grandchildren, some of whom lived at Fern Cottage permanently; others came for extended periods to visit.

Zipporah Russ presided over the large household as a strong mother figure, enduring the problems, illnesses, and deaths with strength and compassion. Son James drowned in 1875 at age 18; baby Winnifred died in December 1879 at 21 months; and her beloved namesake Zipporah, for whom every cure was sought, died of TB in 1900 at age 20.

Joseph Russ' enterprises continued to expand and diversify. His ranching operations, including dairies (he was given great credit by Irvine for inaugurating the dairy industry in the region), sheep, and cattle, spread throughout the County, his Eureka meat market flourished as did his store in Ferndale. In the spring of 1869, he and several partners built a sawmill on Indian Island in Humboldt Bay. This operation led to the establishment of lumberyards in San Diego, National City, and Sacramento plus the building and ownership of lumber schooners which carried the finished products of the Indian Island mill to markets outside the area. Russ was also a member of the Board of Directors for the Humboldt County Bank which opened in Eureka on May 1, 1873.

Because, as Irvine stated, it was Russ' "belief that business men should participate in public affairs, giving the benefit of their ability and experience in directing government into the best channels," he ran for the State Assembly in 1871, winning by 574 votes and taking his seat in the 19th Assembly in December 1871. He was defeated in the Republican primary of 1873, but elected in 1877 to serve in the 22nd Assembly and again in 1885 for the 26th Assembly. He was a delegate from California to the 1880 Republican convention in Chicago and in 1882 the Republican delegation from Humboldt County to the state convention was instructed to support Russ for governor of the state, but this support was not sufficient to win the nomination.

The Delegates to the State Convention were instructed for Hon. Jos. Russ for Governor. We can only hope Humboldt may be able to sit at the head of the political table for the coming four years. No man in the state can fill the Gubernatorial chair so acceptably to the whole people and particularly so to the wage class, as our own honored citizen, Joseph Russ. He is probably the strongest candidate in the Republican ranks. His record is unimpeachable, he is clear on the Temperance question and is the friend of the working man...(Ferndale Enterprise, 18 Aug. 1882).

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Elliott's description of the Russ mill on Indian Island included a speech, made by Joseph Russ on the occasion of the reopening of the mill in 1881 after remodeling and re-building:

I want every man that works for me to have just as good a room and just as good a bed to sleep in as I have myself...I have arranged for the men to have as much time to eat their meals as I have to eat mine... There must be capital and there must be labor. Without capital, labor is useless and without labor, the greatest capitalist is but a helpless man at most. So capital should cherish labor because it is its hands and feet, its eyes and ears, and the strong arm of labor should always be ready to defend capital, for without it, labor is but a body without breath in its lungs or blood in its veins.

Joseph Russ was generous in donating towards the construction of the Congregational Church in Ferndale, in his support of the Humboldt Seminary in Eureka where his daughters attended school, and in donating lumber for the construction of a San Diego school which bore his name. He was generous with his family, and, although they did not exhibit a lifestyle which his wealth could have provided, they, nonetheless, lived well and his children were educated and traveled. His many enterprises provided employment for local people; the dairies, alone, employed three hundred people in the various activities required to run 21 ranches in remote areas. Brian Muessig, who lived at Fern Cottage on two occasions and had the opportunity to know one of the Russ daughters and to read Joseph Russ' papers, sees Russ as an enterpriser and believer in useful work. Unquestionably very successful in his undertakings, Russ was also a caring man and a writer of poetry who had strong visionary feelings about his community.

Joseph Russ died in Alameda on October 8, 1886 after several years of illness.

The painful though not unexpected news crossed the wire last Friday afternoon announcing the death that day at Alameda of the Hon. Joseph Russ. In penning these lines which tell of this departure of Joseph Russ from this world to that one beyond the mysterious river, we do so knowing that as they are read by those who knew him in life, the same feelings will encompass them that possess us-- those feelings which tell us that Humboldt County has suffered an irreparable loss, that society has lost an honored member, that the poor have lost a helping friend, that a wife has lost a devoted husband, and a large family of children, a kind and loving father. Mr. Russ' life has been made up of kind and philanthropic deeds, for charity was his greatest virtue. Although a wealthy man, the poor received an equal consideration at his hands with the rich. The hundreds of men in this county who have labored under his employ will learn of his death with the deepest regret...

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now that this span of life has been broken, they can but realize how great is their loss. In all walks of life, Jos. Russ was highly esteemed and respected. He bore the ill will of none but the friendship of all. Mr. Russ was born in Maine in the year 1825, came to California in 1850 and to Humboldt County in 1852. By industry and perserverance he accumulated his present large estate, but in doing so he never neglected his duty to his country or fellow man. He has served the people of this county faithfully and well in the legislative halls, having been elected to the position of Assemblyman twice (sic). To the family he leaves behind, our deepest sympathies are extended. The life of the devoted husband and father, although prematurely ceased by the Devine Hand, has been a success. True business sagacity, honorable dealings and strict application to the affairs of life, gained for him that position among men which brought him honor and admiration. This county was the scene of his success in life, Humboldt was proud to own him, and today she mourns for her departed dead. (Ferndale Enterprise, 15 Oct. 1886)

Final distribution of the Russ Estate was made in March 1889 with the ranches and livestock divided among Zipporah and the ten surviving children. William, Ira, and Zipporah formed a partnership known as Z. Russ & Sons Co. for the transaction of business. Newspaper notes in the spring of 1889 give some insight into the size of the operations being run by this family. At Bertha's Mountain Glen ranch, 95 cows were milked daily; 95 cows at Zipporah's Mazeppa ranch, where 114 pounds of butter were made each day; 74 cows at Georgia's Green Pond ranch; 100 cows at Miss Zipporah's Seattle ranch and another 83 at her Bonanza ranch; 90 cows at Edith's What Cheer ranch; 96 cows at William's Spicy Breezes ranch; and 86 cows at Maggie's Ocean View ranch. Each ranch had a resident manager plus the workers and families. In addition there were extensive beef cattle ranges and thousands of head of sheep. Hundreds of cattle were continually being moved from one range to another for pasturing or being brought to Fern Cottage for fattening or heading to the markets in Eureka, Ferndale or San Francisco. In August 1891, for example, Z. Russ & Sons. Co. began shipping 3,000 mutton sheep to San Francisco on the steamer, 300 head at a time. The tons of feed needed to support such operations were raised on the Russ lands; in the summer of 1892, 900 tons of hay were cut. Continual expansion of the dairy herds resulted in construction of a creamery in 1894 at the Bunker Hill ranch where milk from 1,000 cows could be processed. Much of that original land remains in family ownership today under the management of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Fern Cottage was home to a large family of children, their spouses, and their children. They often came for extended visits at Fern Cottage, the children spending their summer vacations with grandmother Zipporah. Georgia and her husband Frank Williams lived at the Cottage and Bertha spent her entire life there from her birth in October 1874 until her death in October 1972. The door was always open to family and visitors.

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In the summer of 1892, Zipporah built a resort which became known as Idlewild on her land at Bear River. It was a favorite "rusticating" place for the family and their guests. A traveling family, the men took business trips to purchase ranching equipment and livestock and the girls went off by steamer to attend school or visit family and friends. Monied, educated, and traveled, members of the Russ family felt comfortable any place and in any social situation, yet they were unassuming people who were generous to those less fortunate than they and never afraid of hard work. A personal estate of \$1,600,000 in the late 1910's did not change Zipporah's strong relationship to and understanding of the land. She knew "where milk came from," never losing touch with her farm, chickens, and gardens. Bertha, Edith, and Georgia went to Europe in 1897, where Edith and Bertha stayed, studying art in Berlin until 1898. They were a cosmopolitan family, interested in the world beyond the bounds of Humboldt County and eager to participate in the modern happenings of that world. But the roots at Fern Cottage were deep and unyielding. Even after marriage and children, the daughters returned again and again with their families. And some never really left.

Zipporah Russ died in November 1929 at the age of 91. Her obituary which appeared in the Ferndale Enterprise, 15 Nov. 1929, paid tribute to this strong and generous pioneer woman:

Mrs. Russ, during her long and eventful life, had gained for herself the love and respect of all who knew her. Braving the hardships of the early pioneer days in California as a bride, she has seen this community develop from a virtual wilderness into one of the leading agricultural and stock raising centers of the state, in this development work her husband having been a leading factor.

Her home, Fern Cottage, became famed for its hospitality in the best meaning of the word and its hostess was universally beloved. Her many acts of benevolence and charity were unostentatious but liberal. Some years ago she gave to the state a splendid grove of redwoods in the northern part of the County as a memorial to her deceased husband, Pioneer Joseph Russ (a memorial grove at Prairie Creek State Park within Redwood National Park). Russ Park, Ferndale, was also a gift from Mrs. Russ. Charities of a worthy nature never appealed for her assistance in vain.

In the declining years of her life, surrounded by her loving children and grandchildren, she had spent a peaceful existence living over again in memory those stirring days when as a bride she and her young husband had labored side by side in carving out for themselves a home in the then rugged surroundings of the early days of Humboldt County. It was her delight to entertain all who called as her guests and she was a charming type and the truly

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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hospitable hostess until the last.

Fern Cottage was the center of Russ family life. It recalls that family and that life in its architecture, setting and character. It is a house filled with the memories of that family; a house filled with the tangible effects of their lives--furnishings, papers, pictures, clothing, personal items, books, dishes--an incredible array, all of which poignantly recalls each family member. As one approaches the house from the east, topping the last rise and emerging from the last bend in the road--as returning family members did again and again over the years--Fern Cottage "looms up," a secure refuge, a special place, home to those whose roots were planted so deeply there. Fern Cottage Historic District embodies that character in its natural environment, architecture and cultural identity, making it worthy, perhaps as no other local property, of listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

32 33

5 4

Plus 80 acres

Boundaries — —

Russ Lane

see detail A



**Fern
Cottage**

Centerville Road

see detail B

Russ

Creek

SHEEP BARN
152 x 21

HAY SHED
67 x 21

North



0 100 200 300
feet

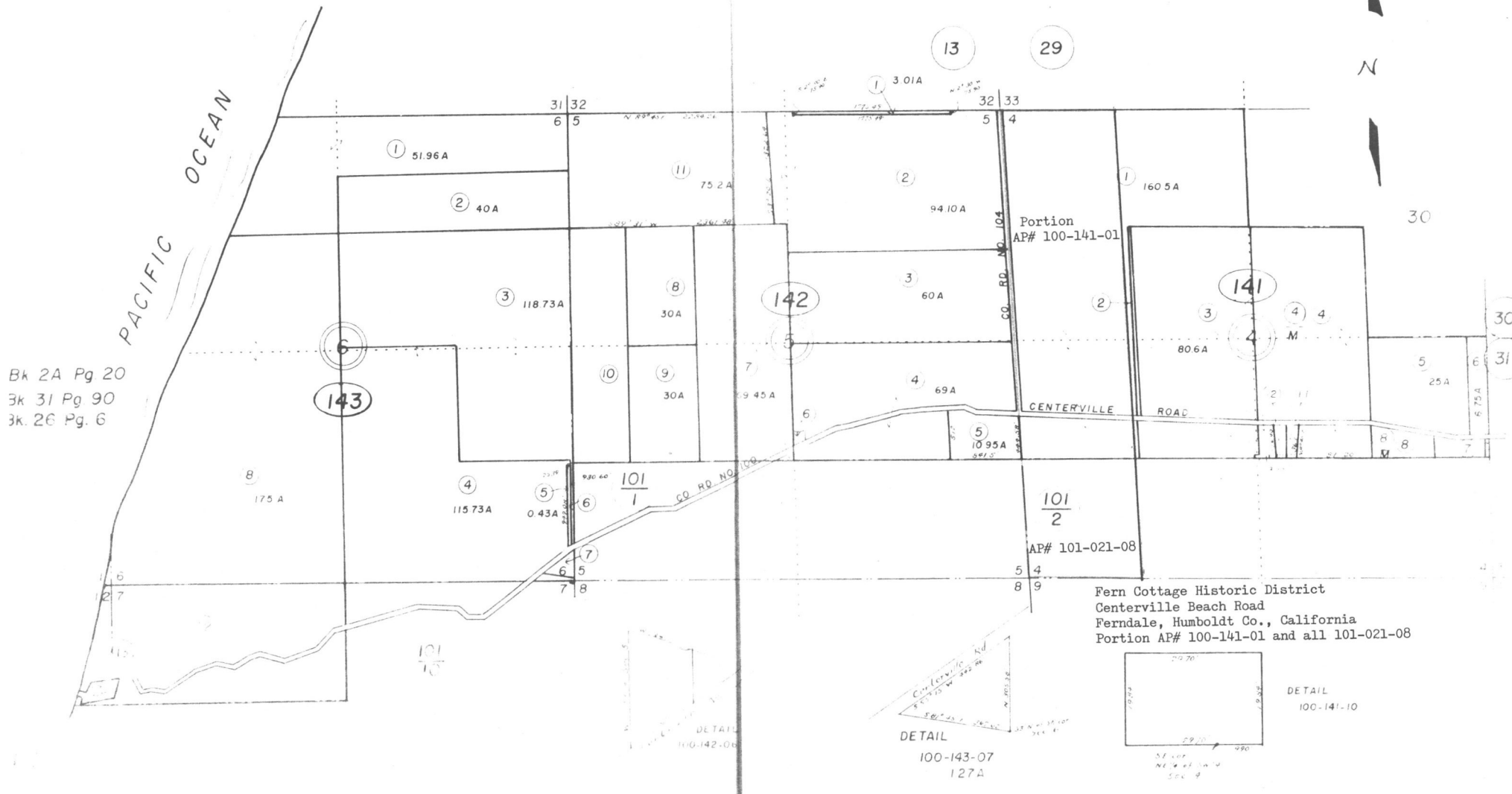
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Fern Cottage Historic District
Centerville Beach Road
Ferndale, Humboldt Co., California

PTN SECS 4,5,6 & 7, 2N, 2W
& SECS 1 & 12, 2N, 3W

100-14

1" = 1,000'



87002294

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Fern Cottage Historic District
Humboldt County
CALIFORNIA

DEC - 9 1987

Working No. _____

Fed. Reg. Date: 2/2/89

Date Due: 1/2/88 - 1/23/88

Action: ☒ ACCEPT 1-7-88

☐ RETURN

☐ REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

Entered in the
National Register

- ☐ resubmission
☐ nomination by person or local government
☐ owner objection
☐ appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____

Reviewer _____

Discipline _____

Date _____

_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

Condition	Check one	Check one
☐ excellent	☐ deteriorated	☐ original site
☐ good	☐ ruins	☐ moved
☐ fair	☐ unexposed	date _____
	☐ unaltered	
	☐ altered	

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- ☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ alterations/integrity
☐ dates
☐ boundary selection

8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☐ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____















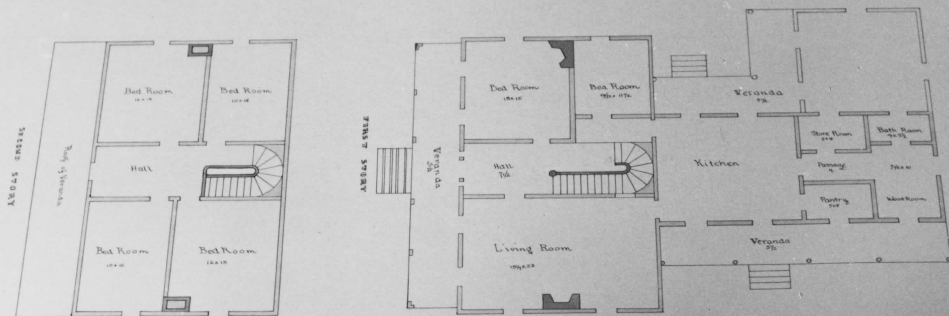












FRONT AND SIDE ELEVATIONS FOR A FARM HOUSE FOR JES. RUSS ESQ. HUMBOLDT COUNTY



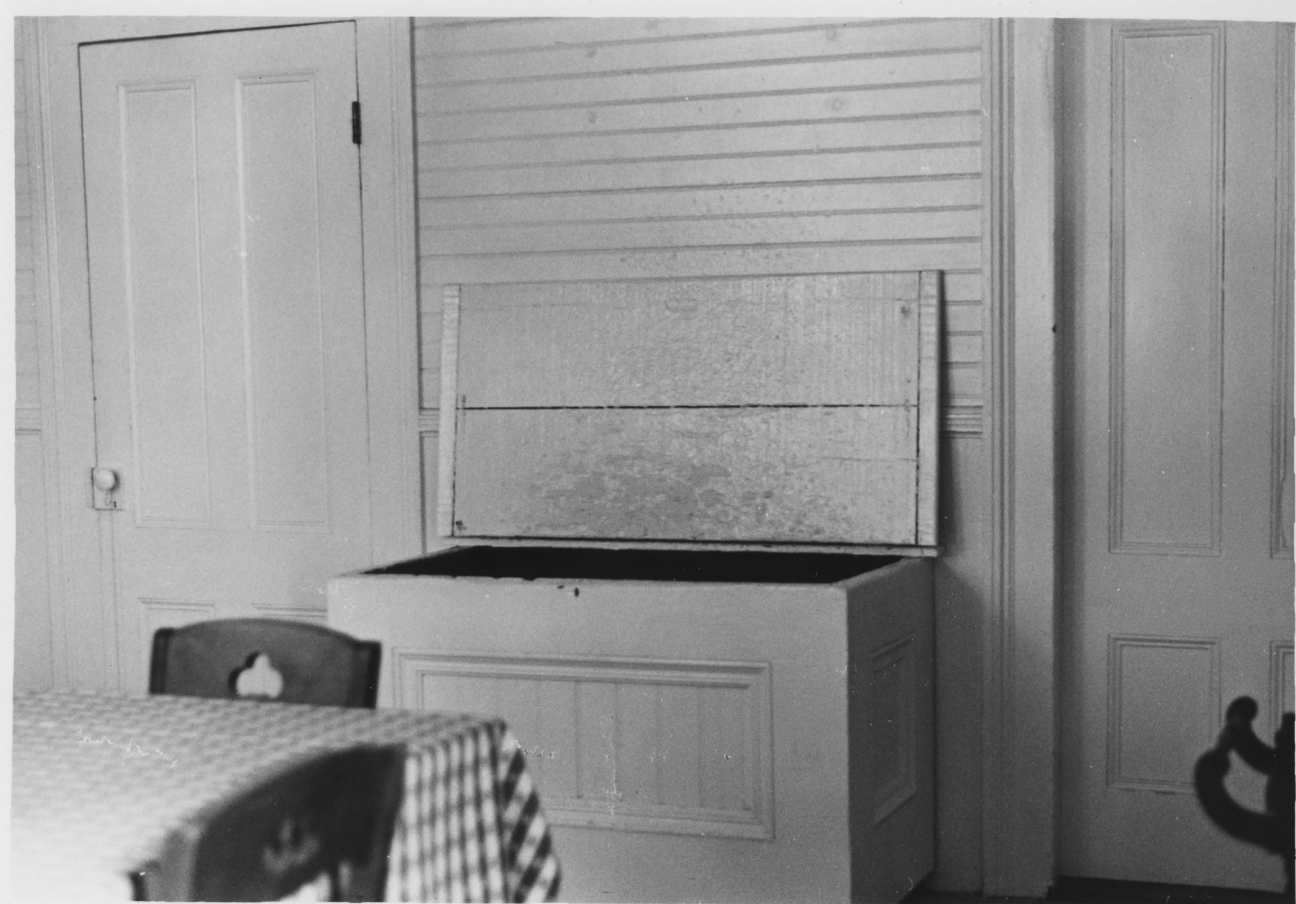
























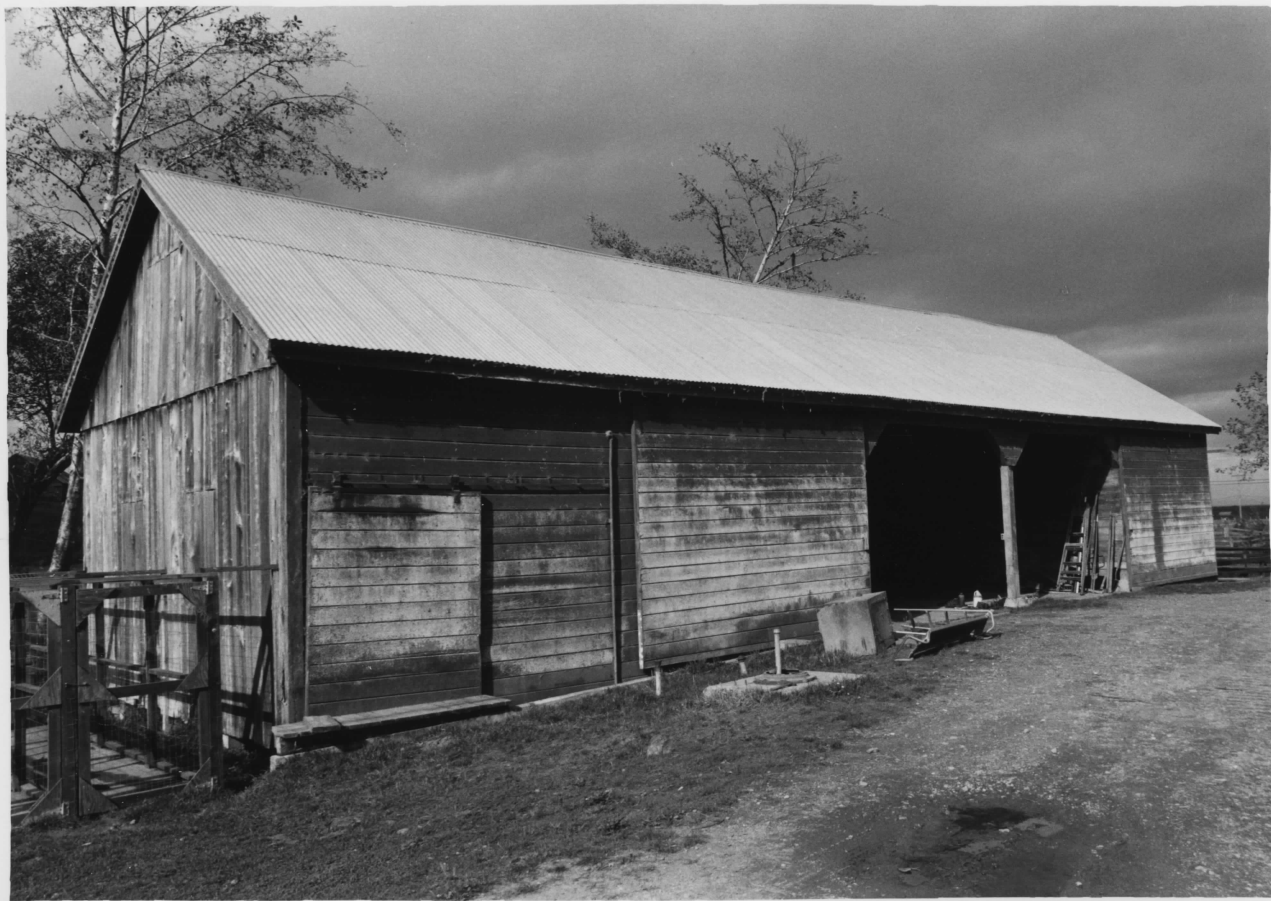












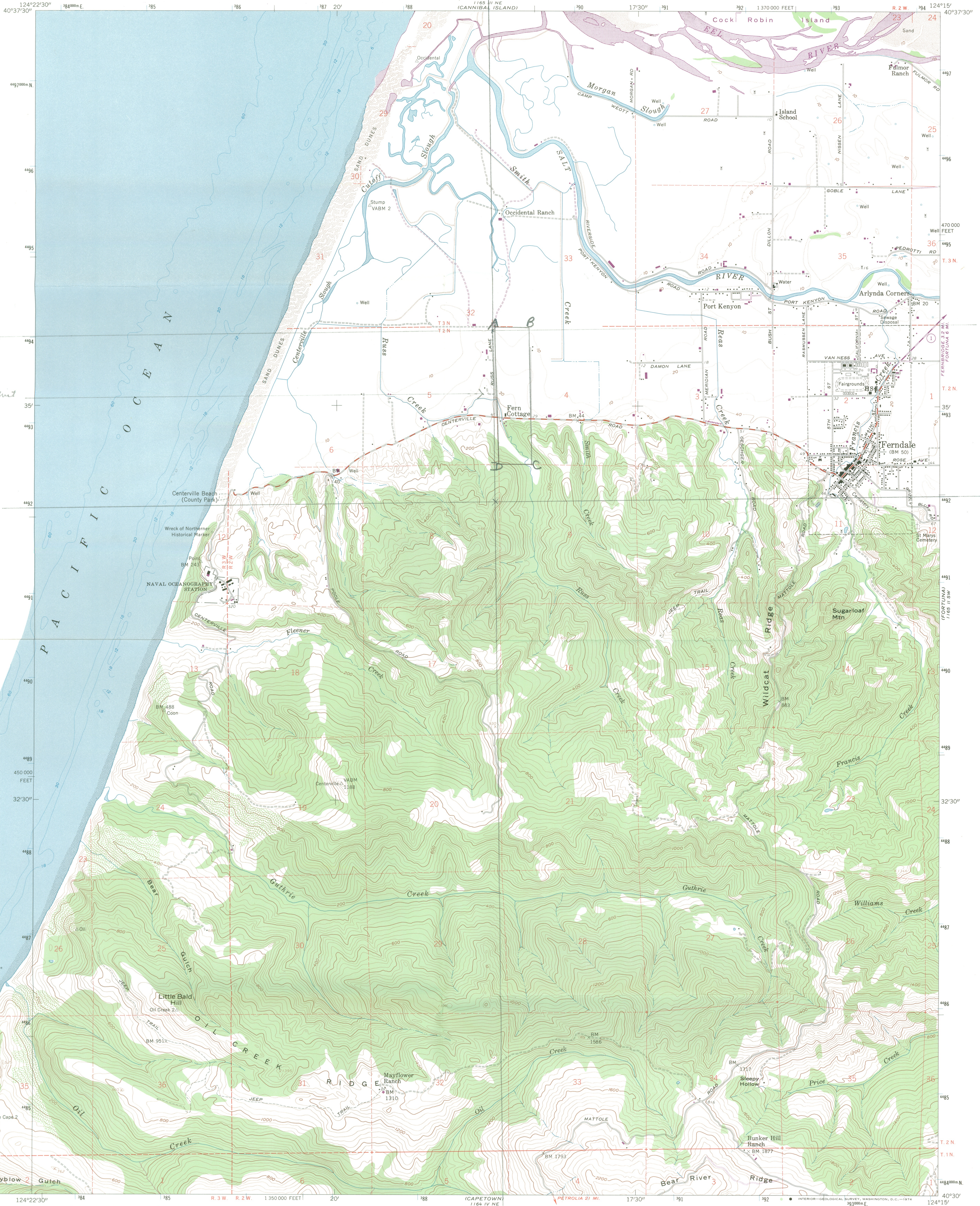








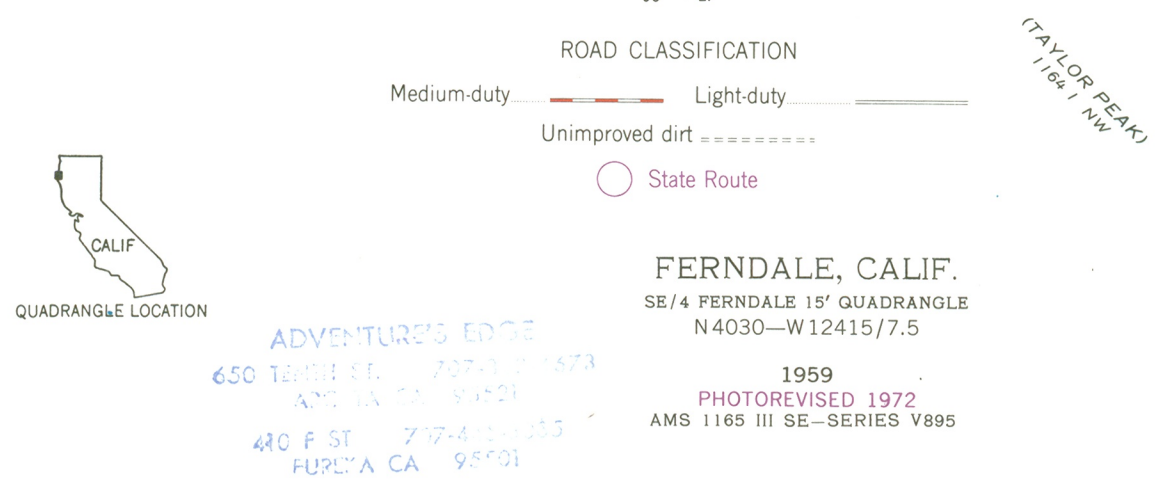
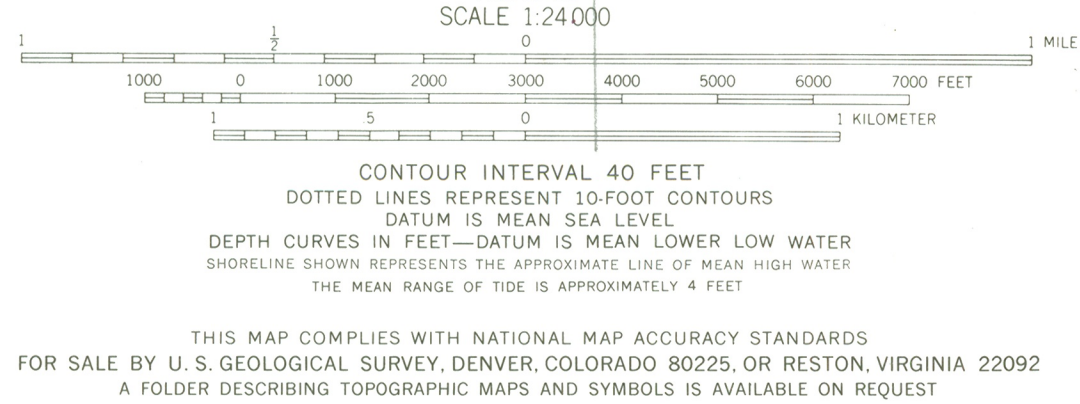
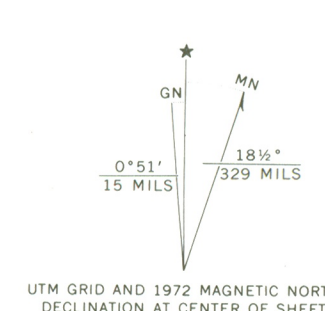




*Fern Cottage Historic District
2099 Centerville Rd.
UTM:
A: 10-389020-4494020
B: 10-389420-4494020
C: 10-389440-4492450
D: 10-389020-4492450*

*Ferndale,
Humboldt Co., CA*

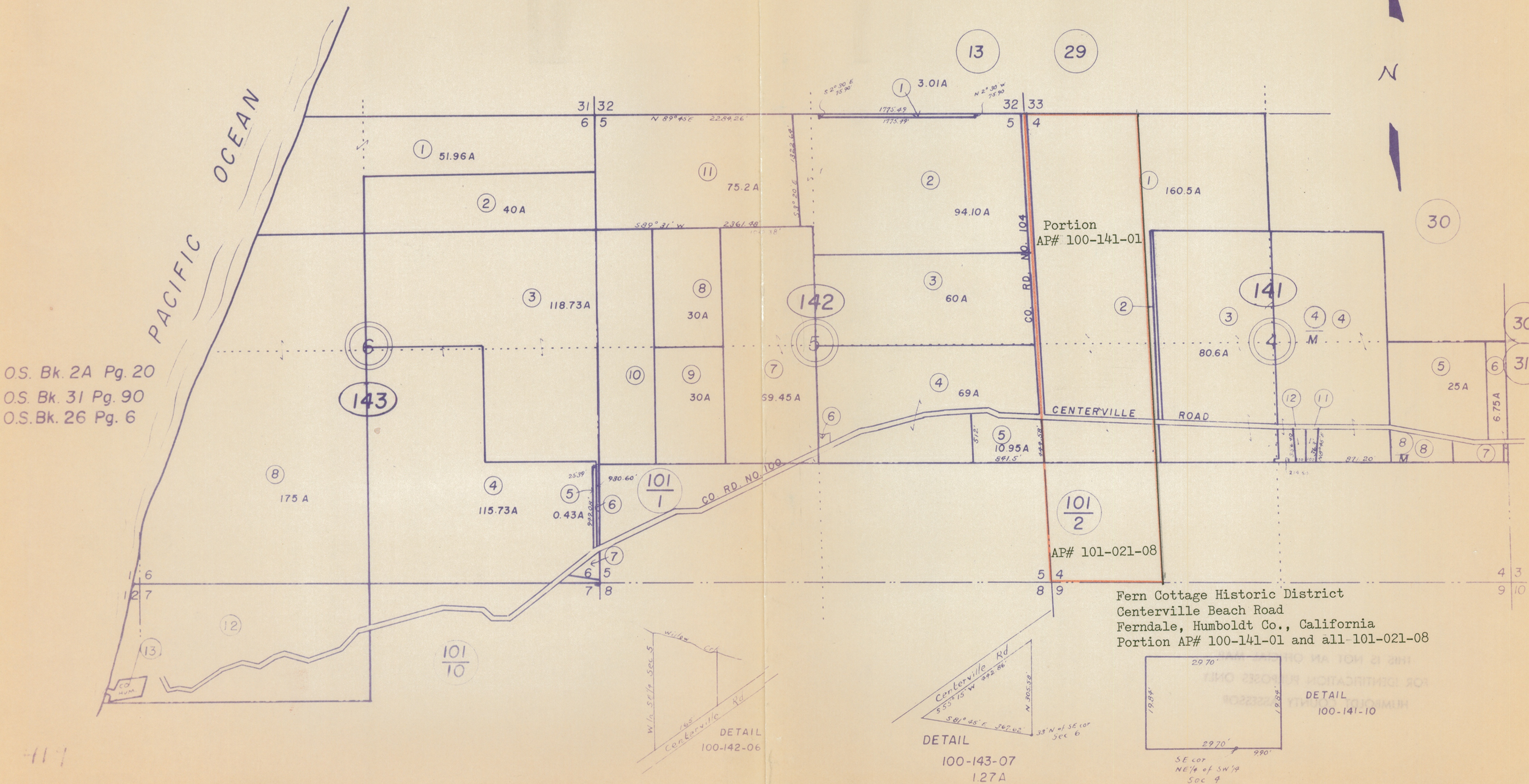
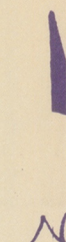
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and USC&GS
Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods
and by planetable surveys 1959. Aerial photographs taken 1956
Hydrography compiled from USC&GS chart 5795 (1957)
and hydrographic surveys (1937-38)
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on California coordinate system, zone 1
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 10, shown in blue
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1972. This information not field checked



PTN SECS 4,5,6 & 7, 2N, 2W
& SECS 1 & 12, 2N, 3W

100-14

1" = 1,000'





THIS IS NOT AN OFFICIAL MAP
FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES ONLY
HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSESSOR

OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

POST OFFICE BOX 942896
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 94296-0001
(916) 445-8006



November 25, 1987

Mr. Jerry Rogers, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

Dear Mr. Rogers:

We are submitting the Fern Cottage Historic District for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The property is located in the City of Ferndale, Humboldt County, California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Gualtieri".

Kathryn Gualtieri
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures

DEC -9 1987