



EVALUATION of  
MODIFICATIONS TO

# PIE RANCH

2080 Highway 1-CA  
San Mateo County, CA



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# PIE Ranch

## Introduction

The owners of the Pie Ranch, a 14-acre, not-for-profit educational working farm, have submitted a plan to build a new Bunkhouse building on the site of a previous bunkhouse that was destroyed, and to add a monitor (window lift) to the Market Stand (former packing shed). The property is associated with the I. C. Steele family and the Green Oaks Dairy. The family is identified as developing the commercial cheese-making industry of California with dairies in San Mateo County. This was documented in the National Register of Historic Places listing of the Green Oakes Ranch House.

Urban Programmers, consultant in historic preservation, was commissioned to evaluate the proposed changes to determine if they created an adverse impact to historic resources that were listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources.

Unfortunately, the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch house burned to ashes in the CZU Lightning Complex fire in April 2020.<sup>1</sup> A new house has been constructed that includes many ecological elements but is not a reconstruction of the landmark building.<sup>2</sup> The loss of the significant ranch house leaves only one significant structure, a 1860s-era horse barn remaining from the Green Oakes Dairy. While the land retains an association to the place where the dairy existed and where the I.C. Steele family lived, there is little remaining physical evidence to communicate that history.

## Methodology

Urban Programmer's staff involved was Bonnie Bamburg, principal, who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for professional qualifications through education and experience, and Maia Gendreau, AIA Historic Architect, who also meets the SIS standards for professional qualifications. Both evaluators visited the property and took photographs of the new farmhouse and other agricultural structures on the property. Research was conducted to understand the history of the Steele family and dairy operations on the parcel. Research also involved the dairy industry and later agricultural crops on the San Mateo County Coast. Interviews through email and phone conversations were held with the non-profit's co-founder, Jerad Lawson. US National Park Service and San Mateo County publications were consulted and are listed in the section of sources consulted. The Market Stand was evaluated for individual significance and as part of the agricultural complex not associated with the dairy operations of the Steele family.

## Background.

The San Mateo County coast was originally inhabited by the Quiroste, a tribe of the Ohlone people. They lived for centuries hunting, gathering, and fishing along the coast. Their way of

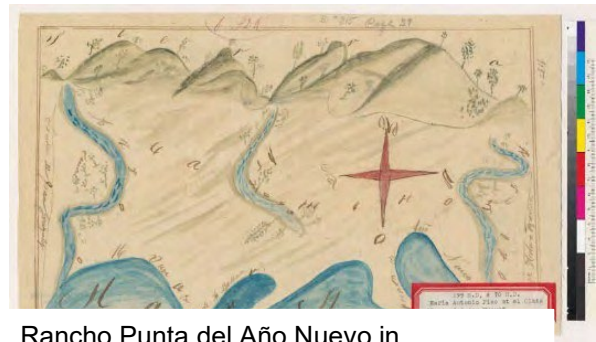
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<sup>1</sup> Hernández, Lauren , "Historic Pescadero Pie Ranch farmhouse, built in 1863, incinerated in CZU Complex fires", San Francisco Chronicle. Aug 22, 2020 12:41 a.m.

<sup>2</sup> Lawson, Jered, telephone interview

life was interrupted by the early Spanish explorers in the late eighteenth century and the Mission Santa Cruz, (Misión la Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz,) which was founded on August 28, 1791 by Father Fermín Francisco de Lasuén. This marked the beginning of European settlement in this area and a dramatic change in the lifestyle of the native population. This population was utilized as labor for building and caring for the mission cattle and crops and was converted to Christianity. It was also the period when European diseases decimated the indigenous people. The mission expanded north to Pescadero, using grasslands for grazing cattle. In 1821 the Mexican War of independence brought a new government to the coastal area of Alta California. The mission lands were secularized and throughout California large land grants were given to those loyal to Mexico and for their service. It was also a period where trade was encouraged. The Former Mission cattle ranches at Pescadero and Año Nuevo were ultimately divided into three separate Mexican Period land-grants deeded to Mexican citizens. These new land divisions included Rancho San Antonio (or Pescadero), Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo, and Rancho Butano.<sup>3</sup>

In 1842, Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo was granted to José Simeon Castro, the former Alcalde of Monterey. He had previously been granted Rancho Bolsa Nueva y Moro Cojo in 1822. A native of Santa Barbara, he was born in 1783, and married Maria Antonia Pico, who would later inherit his ranchos. José Simeon Castro died in 1842.



Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo in 1857 Courtesy of Bancroft Library UC Berkeley, CA

After California became a state in 1850, Maria Antonia Pico de Castro sold Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo to Issac Graham and petitioned the US Land Commission for title to the rancho that was granted to her husband and successors in 1857. Graham sold the Rancho to a San Francisco investment group, I Clark & Coburn in 1862. The investors (Cobrin eventually bought out Clark) and leased much of Rancho Butano and Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo land to the Steele Brothers for their dairy operations.

<sup>3</sup> Historic Properties Survey Report for San Mateo Co. PLN2021-00010, Mark Hylkema, February 2020, page 26

The Steel family, who originally settled along the east coast, were living in Ohio when the brothers, Edgar and Rensselaer, immigrated to California 1852; Isac Chapman Steel, wife Huldah Emeline Steele and his family came in 1857. The couple married in 1845 and had two children. This is the same year that the brothers, George, Rensselaer Edgar Willis and Isac C., leased land in Point Reyes and began their work in the dairy industry making cheese that sold in San Francisco. By 1862, they identified suitable coastal land and leased Rancho Punta de Año Nuevo in Santa Cruz County (later it became San Mateo County) and Rancho San Antonio Pescadero. The lease allowed for the purchase of a portion of the land.

The brothers began construction on five dairies - Green Oaks that Isac C. would operate, Pocket Dairy at Pebble Beach, Hill Dairy in Whitehouse Canyon; Cascade operated by Rensselaer; and Cloverdale run by E.W. In 1861, the Steel Brothers produced 45 tons of cheese, making them the largest producers in California.<sup>4</sup> When the original leases ran out in 1866, the lease holders did not renew and retained Pocket Dairy and Cloverdale Dairy. However, the brothers were able to purchase 7,000-acres along the coast and began purchasing land in San Louis Obispo County.<sup>5</sup> With the operations of the five dairies, the Steele Brothers are credited with establishing the first large-scale cheese manufacturing operations in California.<sup>6</sup> As the brothers separated, Isac C. Steele remained with the Green Oaks Dairy which was renamed Faiely Dairy before closing and the land returned to raising wheat and other crops. Isac C. Steele passed away in 1903 (1820-1903).

Prior to coming to California, the brothers and family members participated in the Civil War on the Union side. In honor of their service and ongoing care for other soldiers, the Steel Brothers produced a huge cheese, 21,800-pound Cheddar, 20 feet in circumference and 18 inches thick. After displaying the cheese, they donated it to the Sanitary Commission and pieces were sold for \$1.00 a pound; this received national attention. Following their success in the dairy industry, they individually entered politics and served on State Committees for banking and agriculture. Isac Steele served as a Santa Cruz County Supervisor and Grand Officer of the Grange.<sup>7</sup> The Green Oaks Dairy Ranch was not the first nor the largest of the family holdings, which appear to have been centered at Point Reys. However Green Oaks became the headquarters for the firm and remained the home of Isac Chapman Steele.<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.californiadairyroom.com/Press\\_Kit/Milestones](https://www.californiadairyroom.com/Press_Kit/Milestones)

<sup>5</sup> National Register Nomination, Dickerman-Steel Dairy Barn, 1980

<sup>6</sup> Hylkema, Mark, Historic Properties Survey Report for San Mateo Co. PLN2021-00010, February 2020, page 27

<sup>7</sup> I,C, Steel Grand Officer, Santa Cruz Sentinel, October 20, 1877

<sup>8</sup> Green Oaks Ranch House, National Register Nomination, February 3, 1976



*Green Oaks home of I.C. Steele c.1976*  
*US Department of the Interior, American Building Survey<sup>9</sup>*

After the dairy closed, the land was farmed in hay for a few years and leased for row crops, artichokes, Brussels sprouts and others. The land passed from Isac Steel to his son and grandson. In 1967, after the death of Will Steel, grandson of Isac, his wife, Catherine Steel, followed his wishes to preserve the 1862 house and donate the historic house and 13 acres to San Mateo County. The provision in the gift was a use revision that was exercised in 1977, and the land reverted to Catherine Steel who then sold the property.<sup>10</sup>

The privately-owned Pie Ranch occupies land where Isac C. Steel operated the Castings and constructed his home (California State Landmark 906 listed on February 8, 1977 and destroyed by fire in April 2020 ) The ranch land covered a larger parcel and the dairy barn is located in the Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo State Reserve where Isac C, Steel dairy barns have been rehabilitated and now serve as the education center. A house has been constructed to replace the historic home however it is not a historic resource building. Only the 1860s horse barn remains from the Steel era.

## **Description of the property**

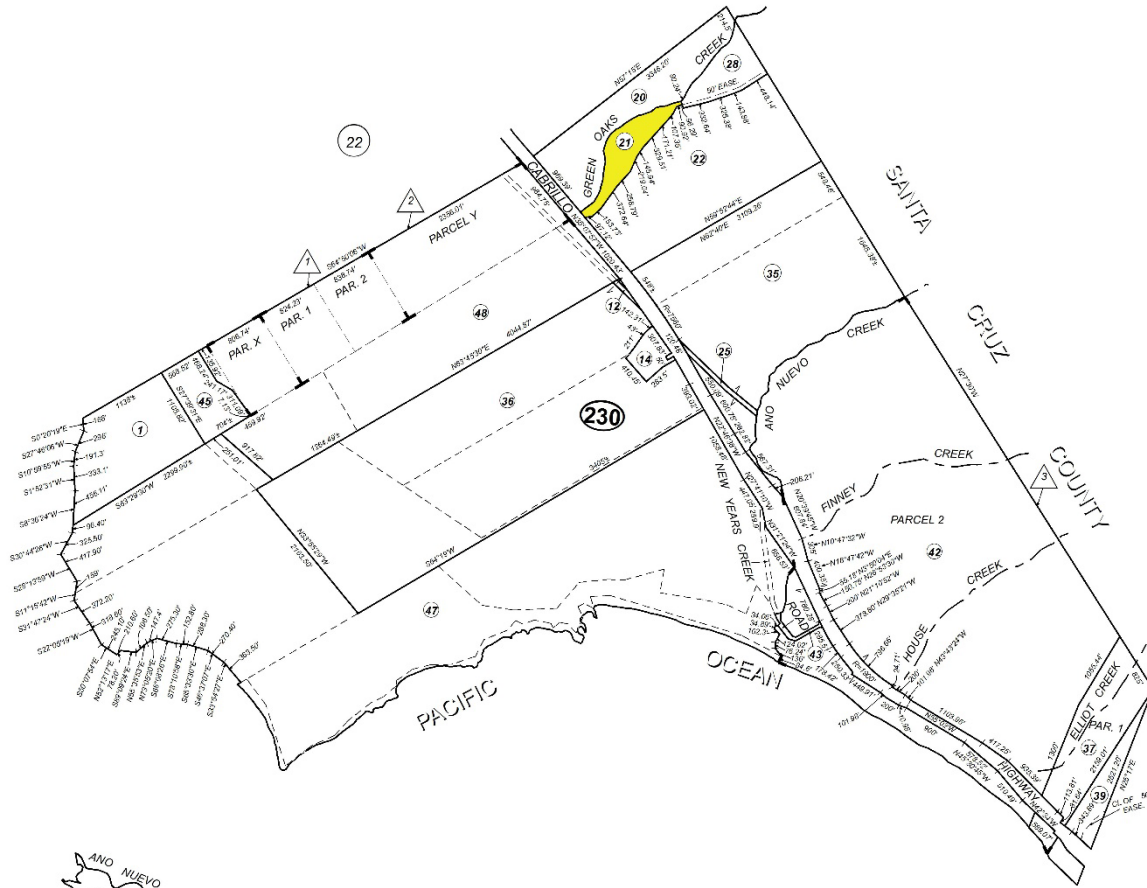
The 14-acre wedge-shaped property extends from the Cabrillo Highway toward the foothills and is a portion of the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch owned and operated by Isac Chapman Steele. The main building on the property is a two-story house constructed in 2002 and the 1860s barn and ancillary structures, including a former packing shed, as well as several small sheds, yurts and other small structures of various ages and uses. The owners have used natural materials for the new sheds and other structures built on the farm, maintaining a rustic and rural feeling to the complex.

<sup>9</sup>Library of Congress, Historic American Building Survey, Green Oaks, Pescadero, San Mateo County CA ,1976

<sup>10</sup> Koch, Margaret, Santa Cruz Sentinel, Volume 121, Number 219, 18 September1977 page 21

89-23

1" = 1200'

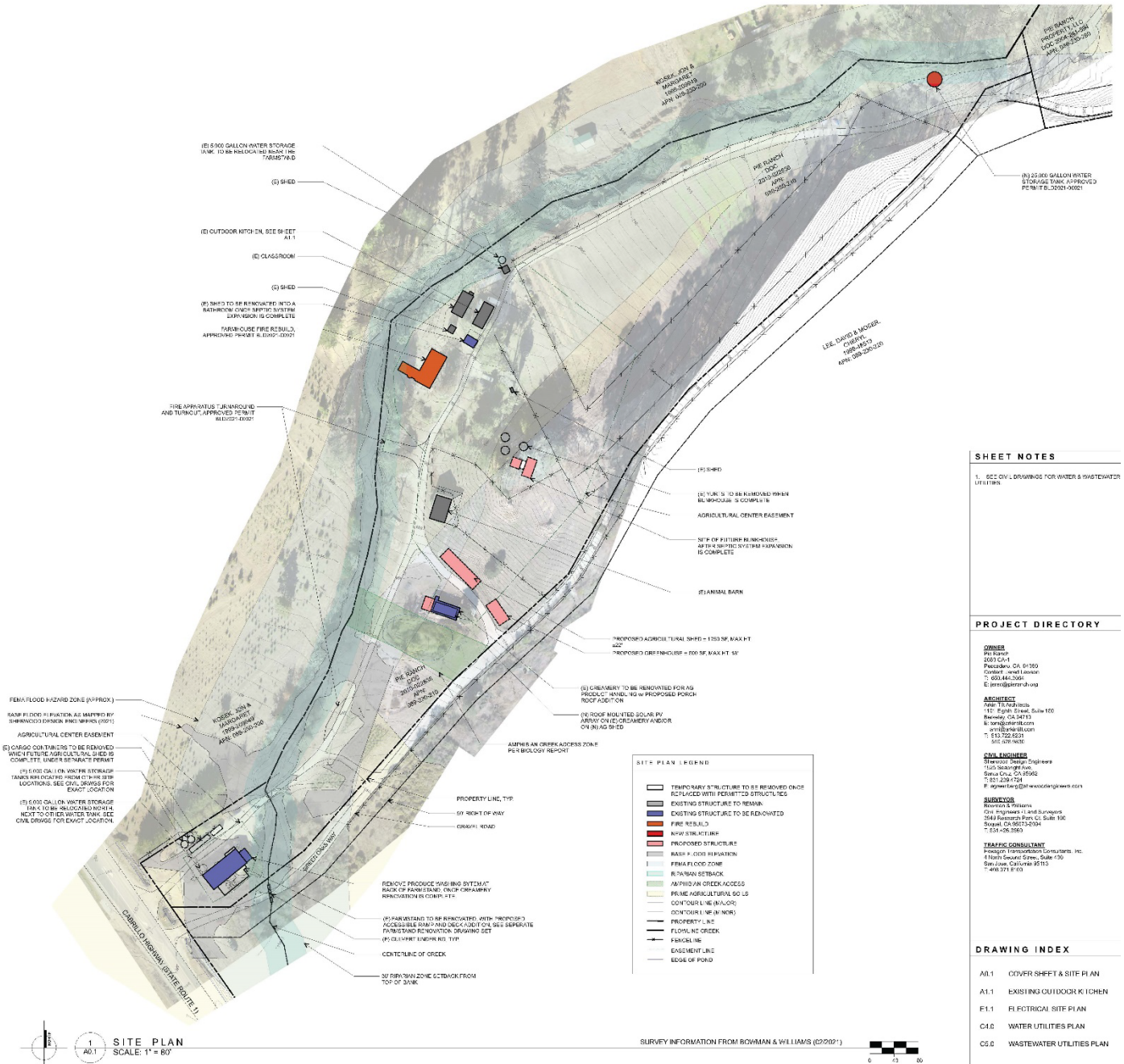


ASSESSOR'S MAP COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, CALIF.

- 3 PARCEL MAP VOL. 50/5-6
- 2 PARCEL MAP VOL. 35/44
- 1 PARCEL MAP VOL. 34/49

10/1/1984

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL MAP 089-23-021



## Site Map

Taken from plans prepared by ARKIN TILT ARCHITECTS, Berkeley, California  
Job PIE-MP dated 3-30-2022



West End

## CREAMERY

The building has a concrete foundation that rises 3-4 feet with horizontal board siding above. Doors are located on the long sides as are windows in a band on each side. The roof has been rebuilt and covered with seamed metal roofing. The building has had several alterations over time. The building appears to be in poor condition and is missing some siding.

The National Register Nomination for the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch House shows this building and identifies it as a house. There is no other description.



Northeast corner



Southwest corner



## REBUILT FARMHOUSE

The two-story wood-frame house is located up-hill away from the highway and is accessed by a driveway from the highway. Constructed after the 2020 CZU complex fire, the building is a model of environmental techniques including straw-bale insulation, earthen floor and much of the wood was from trees on the property. The style of the house is contemporary but includes double gables on the second floor as did the Steele house.

East side



North end



South side



West end



North end



East side



South end



West side

### Barn c.1860

The structure is located downhill from the main house on a relatively flat area. The barn is a typical form with a pitched roof and a shed roof addition supported by posts with knee braces. The siding is vertical board-and-batten. On the north side, two openings are above large openings on the lower level indicating a loft. The south side has an opening on the lower level. The west end has large sliding doors on the lower level and a closed opening (hay door) above. The roofing is composition shingles, a manufactured material. The barn is designated as the Animal Barn. This barn was described in the 1979 National Register nomination for the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch House. A photograph from that time shows the barn with a low-sloping roof over a side section with a large opening. This is a typical style for an equipment barn. This structure appears to have been reconstructed with a pitched roof and a shed roof covering an open area on two sides of the barn. This current configuration does not appear to have followed the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, resulting in a loss of integrity (1980).

## MARKET STAND

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Adjacent to Highway 1 and separated from other structures on the Pie Ranch, the Market Stand occupies a single-story c.1933 wood-frame shed that was not part of the Steele Dairy operation and was constructed when the land was leased to grow crops, likely Brussels sprouts and artichokes, crops still grown in the area. The structure has been rehabilitated, retaining much of the open design and was repaired with similar materials. Broad steps lead to the front and side entry to the market with space for community gatherings. The wood building does not exhibit unusual design or craftsmanship. Similar structures are found within the agricultural areas of the San Mateo Coast.

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Northeast end



Northwest side



Southwest end



Southeast side



## Site and landscaping

Pie Ranch is an active farm utilizing the parcel for farm animals and growing crops. Previous owners and tenants had additional structures; covered and open sheds were constructed. These are scattered on the parcel and do not have historical importance as they were often relocated or remodeled as needs dictated.

Looking south



Looking North



Looking East



Classroom east side



North end of classroom and outdoor kitchen



East side of outdoor kitchen and shed



South end classroom and side of shed



South end of kitchen



West side of kitchen



North ends of kitchen and classroom

## AGRICULTURAL SHED



Southwest side



Southeast end



Northwest end



Northeast side

### **Evaluation of Significance:**

For purposes of this study, the criteria used to evaluate the significance of potential historic resources is that of the California Register of Historical Resources and the San Mateo County Criteria for the Designation of County Historic Landmarks and Historic Districts (Section 7732). The National Register of Historic Places is more stringent than the California Register and both contain similar criteria. The National Register listing for Green Oaks Ranch House has not been removed although it is invalid because the primary building, the 1862 Steele ranch house, was destroyed by fire in 2020 and is no longer extant.

The San Mateo County Historic Preservation Ordinance does not contain a threshold age for a historic resource. The National Register of Historic Places and the California register of Historical Resources establish the threshold for historic resources as 50 years. Buildings less than 50 years old may be historic resources listed in the National Register of Historic Places if they meet Criteria Condition G, exhibiting exemplary architecture or have direct association with a very significant historical event. The new house at Pie Ranch does not meet this criteria and is not eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources.

The San Mateo County Criteria contains five categories:

7732.1 It exemplifies or reflects elements of the County's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural history; or

7732.2 It has special aesthetic or artistic interests or values; or

7732.3 It is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history; or

7732.4 It embodies distinctive architectural characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or

7732.5 It is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect.

While the categories do not specifically address the integrity of a historic resource, it is necessary to first consider integrity to evaluate potential resources. The National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources defines integrity to be the majority of seven aspects - location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association. A resource must be able to communicate the reason for its significance.

Section 7732.1. The property at Pie Ranch has a historical association with the development of the dairy industry in California. However, no significant buildings or improvements remain from the period when the dairy ranch operated. A barn to house horses does not convey the association with the dairy industry. As stated elsewhere, the main building, the significant dairy barn is preserved across Highway 1 in the Anno Nueva State Reserve not on the Pie Ranch property. The property has lost physical integrity of the Green Oaks Dairy.

The Pie Ranch continues the broad category of agricultural use. However, the primary building (house) and structures are contemporary for farming, and although agricultural use continues, it does not represent significant elements of the County's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural history.

Section 7732.2. The Pie Ranch complex does not have special artistic value. The house and assorted sheds are different in design and utilitarian in function. Work areas do not exhibit artistic value.

Section 7732.3. The main house and most structures on the property are associated with the Pie Ranch, an educational farm. The barn constructed in the 1860s is a structure associated with the I.C. Steele family who were significant in the history of San Mateo County. The 1860s barn appears to individually qualify for the association with the Steele family. The rest of the improvements are not identified with the Steele family or the Green Oaks Dairy. The working farm is not identified as individually contributing to the history of San Mateo County in a significant way.

Section 7732.4. The main building is the farmhouse constructed in 2002, and ancillary structures associated with crop farming, structures that have been rehabilitated for farm uses or are recent construction. The materials used are often from the land or recycled to maintain the sense of earlier hands-on farming. Most small sheds are of rough construction and collectively these elements do not qualify under the San Mateo County criteria. The Pie Ranch is not a historic resource exhibiting architectural characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, and is not a valuable example of the historic use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

Section 7732.5. The house and structures were not designed by a master architect.

In summary, the land at Pie Ranch has a history associated with the former owners, Isac C. Steele and family, who were important in the development of commercial cheese-making and the dairy industry in California. However, the main house is not associated with the Steele family nor is the Market Stand. The horse barn that may have been used by the Steele family does not represent the use as a dairy ranch or part of the dairy operations. The property is best described as the site of the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch and identified with signage and documentation. Additionally, the 1860s horse barn appears to be individually significant for its association with the I.C. Steele family and the common barn form of the period.

### **California Register of Historical Resources:**

The criteria for listing historical resources in the California Register of Historical Resources are consistent with those for listing resources in the National Register of Historic Places but have been modified for state use in order to include a range of historical resources which better reflect the history of California. The threshold age for a resource to be considered is 50 years without extraordinary conditions. The California Register eligibility or listing is the threshold for CEQA to consider a significant resource. A historical resource must retain integrity and be significant at the local, state, or national level under one or more of the following four criteria;

1. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

2. It is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history;
3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values; or
4. It has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

In addition, the resource must retain enough of its historic character or appearance to be recognizable as a historic property and to convey the reason for its significance.

The Farn Stand – Packing Shed was compared to the California Register of Historical Resources Criteria.

Criterion 1 The Farm Shed was constructed as a collection point for crops to be picked up for delivery elsewhere. It is not associated with a significant event.

Criterion 2 The Farm Stand was used by families leasing land and growing crops. They were not found to be significant in the history of San Mateo County or California. The property does not meet Criteria 2

Criterion 3 The Farm Stand is a rectangular wood-frame structure with vertical board siding and a metal roof. The structure has openings on one side and has been rehabilitated to include a porch and contemporary designed steps. The shed does not have a loading dock or other connection to its past. The simple structure does not meet Criteria 3.

Criterion 4 The parcel has been disturbed by various agricultural uses and construction of structures and buildings. A section of the parcel was surveyed for the potential of having significant archeological material and found to have a low probability. The property does not meet criteria 4

The Pie Ranch complex has several structures constructed for agricultural use; all appear to be less than 50 years old or have been altered for non-original uses. In the case of the structure known as the 1860s Horse Barn, the structure has been remodeled and reconstructed. In evaluating the importance of these structures, the criteria of the CRH was applied and no structures were found to meet the criteria. Most of the structures are common in agricultural use and found on farms along the San Mateo County coast. Some structures are modified from older versions and often use recycled wood. No structures were found to be unusual in design, materials or workmanship. Typical of continued agricultural use, the structures have been modified and adopted as the needs dictated. None of the structures were associated with individuals of significance or as part of a broad pattern; they are not individually or collectively significant. The Pie Ranch is not eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, except as a locally designated site of the Green Oaks Dairy and is not a historic resource as defined by CEQA.

### **Plans proposed for the Pie Ranch**

The Pie Ranch contains no buildings or structures meeting the criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources. Proposed changes do not create an adverse impact. There are two proposed changes for Pie Ranch listed below.

A new bunkhouse is proposed for a vacant area east of the main house. The site proposed has been surveyed and found to have a low potential for important archeological discovery, therefore, the site appears appropriate for the proposed new bunkhouse.

The Farm Stand, a former vegetable packing shed, is located adjacent to Highway 1. The Stand is not associated with the Green Oaks Dairy and is not a historic resource meeting the criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources. Buildings or structures that are not eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources are not historic resources as defined by CEQA. A proposal has been submitted to add a monitor-window band to the ridge of the roof.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

Plans submitted for modifications to the Pie Ranch, a new Bunkhouse building and alterations to the Farm Stand, do not create an adverse change to any structure meeting the criteria of the California Register of Historic Resources.

## **Recommendation.**

The National Register of historic places listing for the Green Oaks Dairy Ranch House should be removed. The significant building identified in the listing was destroyed by fire, and the 1860s Equipment Barn has been remodeled and has lost integrity.

## **Repositories Contacted or visited:**

San Mateo County Historical Society, Redwood City  
Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz. (Steele Family Collection)  
Stanford University, California Archive online, (Steele Family Archives)  
US Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places (online)  
US Department of the Interior, Historic American Building Survey (online)

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US Department of the Interior, National Register Nomination – Dickerman n- Steele Dairy Barn, Ano Nuevo Point State Park, October 1,1980

United States Department of the Interior, Historic American Building Survey, I.C. Steele ranch house, Library of Congress,

Periodicals are listed in the footnotes.