

Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board

OAKLAND LANDMARK, S-7/S20 PRESERVATION COMBINING ZONE, AND HERITAGE PROPERTY APPLICATION FORM

This form is for use in requesting the City of Oakland pursuant to its Zoning Regulations to designate a Landmark or Heritage Property or to rezone one or more properties to the S-7 or S-20 Preservation Combining Zone.

1. **IDENTIFICATION**

Historic Name: Geiger (Dorthea)-Nisbet (George) house

and/or Common Name: N/A

2. **ADDRESS/LOCATION**

Street and number: 867 Willow Street Zip Code: 94607

Assessor's Parcel Number: 6-21-15

3. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**

Name: Kane Baccigalupi email: baccigalupi@gmail.com

Street/Number: 867 Willow Street Telephone 510-228-9669

City: Oakland State: CA Zip Code: 94607

4. **APPLICATION FOR**

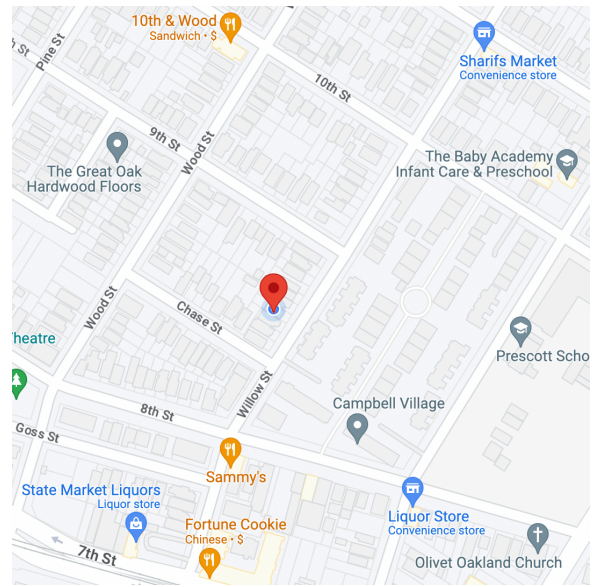
City Landmark Heritage Property S-7 District S-20 District

5. **SURVEY RATING** **NAME OF SURVEY** **DATE** **DEPOSITORY**
Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey Oakland City Planning Dept.

Photo



Location Map



7. **DESCRIPTION**

A. **Resource Type and Use: Present (P) and Historic (H)**

Building(s) ___ District ___ Structure ___ Site ___ Object
 Residential ___ Commercial ___ Industrial ___ Institutional
___ Other (specify): _____

B. **Condition:**

___ Excellent ___ Fair
 Good ___ Poor

C. **Alterations:**

Unaltered
___ Altered

D. **Site**

Original Site
___ Moved (Date _____)

E. **Style/Type:** Vernacular cottage, or informal cottage

F. **Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance:**

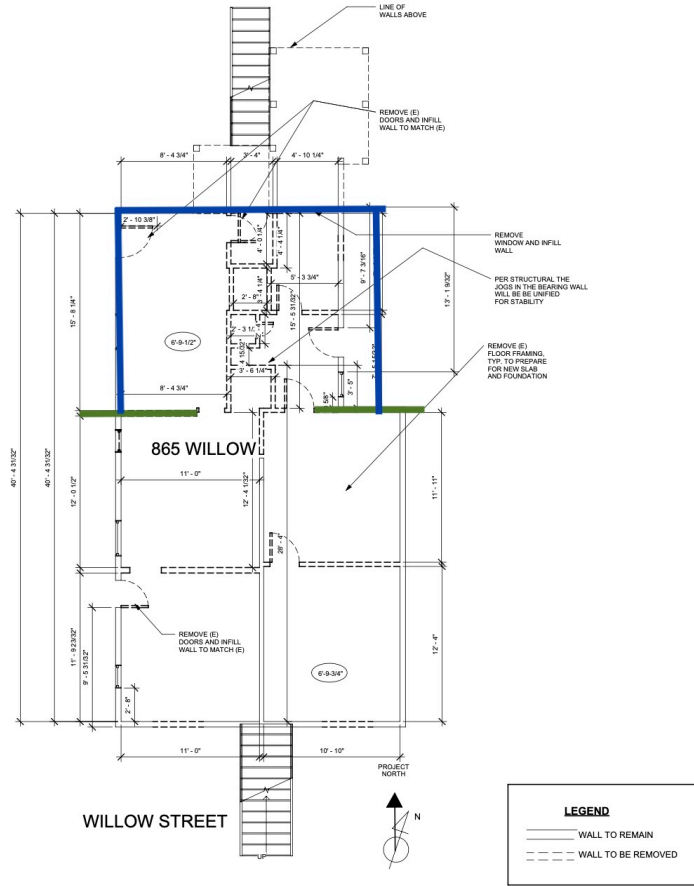
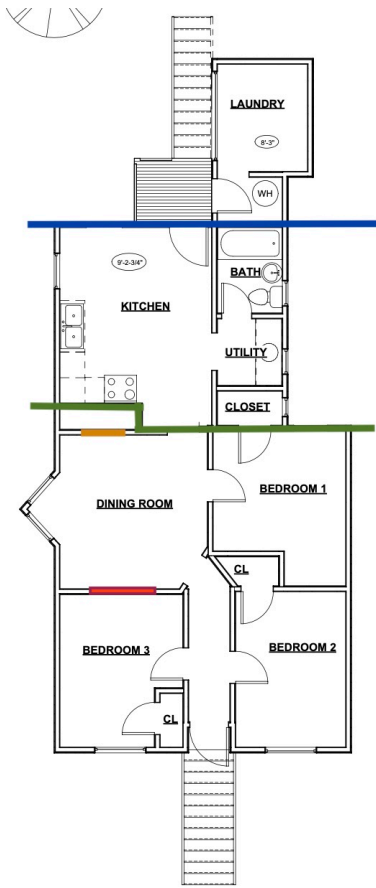
[See following pages for description](#)



The house is a raised basement cottage on a 25' x 110.8' lot on a block of similar-sized houses and lots. It was built between 1875 and 1876 and is an example of a vernacular cottage that the essay by Paul Groth and Marta Gutman in *Sights and Sounds: Essays in Celebration of West Oakland* terms an “informal cottage” and/or an “almost-polite cottage”. It has a low gabled roof. Its symmetrical facade has two windows with small Italianate brackets and molded decorative hoods. The centered doorway is inset in a shallow vestibule with paneled walls, a larger hood and full brackets. Trim and siding is mostly the original redwood with additional brackets and small returns at the corners of the gabled roof. There are plain corner boards, eave frieze, and water table line. There is a slightly off-center vent in the gable end.



Originally the main floor was a four room house with only 525 square feet. It had a hallway separating the bedrooms on one side of the house from the more public spaces. As happened with most Victorian era architecture, plumbing was added via a “tail” extension. This first extension added another 250 square feet to the back of the house both on the main floor and basement level. Both the kitchen and bathroom of the main floor are currently located in this section. It’s unclear from records when this extension was added, but siding and other details make this extension indistinguishable from the original structure except in the attic where the end of the original house still divides that space.



The images above show the floor plans for the main floor left and basement floor right. Green line indicates the original bounds of the building. The blue boundary shows the first extension. On the main floor, there are two other annotations: The red line is where trim patterns in the oak flooring seem to indicate the two southern rooms had a large passageway between them. The orange line is where the fireplace opened into the house. Those both make it likely that the room marked in the drawing as the dining room, was also the original kitchen, and the third bedroom was a living room or parlor.



There are no setbacks on the Northern side of the house for the original four room house. That pre-tail section of the building is against the neighboring building, and is attached to the neighbor near the roofline. The first tail extension was built with a setback of five and a half feet to the north. The southern boundary has a three foot setback that acts as a passage from the front to the backyard. The main floor has a triangular bay window cantilevered over that Southern passage. While the corner of the bay roof does not touch the neighboring building, which has no setback, there are only a couple inches of gap at that location. An interesting architectural detail to the bay window is that its triangular shape reflects the angled entry from the hall into that main living space. See drawings and photo of the window.



A second extension to the main floor only is cantilevered off the back of the house. Based on the double ogee clapboard-look siding, this extension was added in the late 19th or early 20th century when that style of siding was most popular. This addition is odd. It is a full foot lower than the main floor and is a narrow shape with a low slanting ceiling. It's a bit like a historic shed on stilts. Currently this extension houses the laundry and water heater, but previous tenants still living nearby said they used it as a bedroom.



Photos of the last tail: overview, structural elements, and details of the siding. Siding details show original redwood channel rustic on the left, ogee on the right around the extension and transitional vertical board siding, possibly from a porch built in between the two tail extensions.

The basement floor which encompasses the footprint of the original and first extension was likely converted to two units between 1900 and 1910. Census records show three resident households by 1910. The basement units were apparently each composed of three rooms chained together without specialization around usage or the affordance of privacy. Photos of the house from the late 1980's show the basement's street front as having a single door on the left

side of the house and a window on the right side. Changes since then have eliminated both the front facing door and window, replacing them with siding that matches the original siding.

The alterations to the exterior front of the basement unit comprise the most significant change to the original design. It's very unclear what the front of the house looked like in 1910. Window trim style and redwood material indicate that the location of windows on the side and back have changed little since they were created.

The original windows were replaced with vinyl sash. The window recesses with the new windows are close to the original styling, however existing front windows have unequal sized sashes and panes. Also since the 1987 photo small molded trim pieces below the ends of the windowsills have been removed.

Overall and compared to neighboring buildings, the building has few alterations. There were a few additional alterations noted in the 1989 evaluation for the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey: the front door, steps and railings. The front door remains an issue. It currently has a metal security gate in front of a door that is old, but definitely not original. The door is asymmetrical as though someone cut off part of it to get it to fit in the door opening, and despite that there is a gap. The stairs and railings were rebuilt after this report, probably in preparation for sale in 2019. The industrial metal railings were replaced with wood railings and spindles that are not as ornate as a Stick or Queen Anne version, but fit well with the simple vernacular style of the house.

8. **SIGNIFICANCE**

A. **Construction date(s):** 1875-1876

B. **Architect/Builder/Designer:** Unknown

C. **Statement of Significance** (*include summary statement of significance as first paragraph*):

The Geiger-Nisbet house is a beautiful example of Victorian working class architecture. It is a raised basement cottage that was built in 1875-1876 in the railroad boom that transformed the Oakland Point District. At least two of the early residents worked for the railroad. In addition to its ties to the railroad, the house was owned early in its history by two women. The first person associated with the property, Dorothea Geiger, seems to have used the property as a boarding house, renting furnished rooms. In addition to the house having a long and interesting history, it is rare in that it has few alterations to the original design, and has been well maintained. According to the 1987-89 Historic Resources Inventory: "This building contributes to the character of the Oakland Point District." The district was formally determined eligible for the National Register in Caltrans' environmental review for the Cypress Freeway replacement after the 1989 earthquake.

The architecture of the house falls into many overlapping categories. The Historic Resources Inventory calls it a "rare example of a 19th century vernacular-Greek Revival cottage". The presence of a main floor above a full, raised basement qualifies it as a "raised basement cottage". The essay "Workers' Houses in West Oakland" by Paul Groth and Marta Gutman posits two categories of working class housing, the "almost-polite house" and the "informal workers' cottage". Based on the interior layout, which has also changed little over the years, the house falls into both these categories. The main distinctions between an "informal cottage" and "almost-polite house" is the specialization of rooms and the presence of halls to direct circulation within the living space. The original "Workers' Houses in West Oakland" states "The informal cottage was for many immigrants and urban migrants an important and valued entry into homeownership ...". This was likely even more true for working class women. The first two identified owners of the house were women: Dorothea Geiger and Mrs D. Steiner, which was unexpectedly common in 19th century West Oakland.

While the Oakland Point area by virtue of its origin had many working people's houses, and in particular vernacular cottages, it was a mixed neighborhood that also had large and elegant two story houses and ornate small houses, in contrast to all-cottages South Prescott "below the tracks." Houses were altered into a better class of architecture. The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey of Oakland Point notes: "From the beginning, houses in the district were enlarged and updated, often by adding a new front - tiny vernacular cottages incorporated into Italianates and Sticks a decade after original construction ...". The Geiger-Nisbet house is distinctive because it grew yet maintained its original architectural class with few alterations.

The railroad was central to the development of West Oakland. Central Pacific Railroad (later called Southern Pacific) arrived in 1869 transforming what was a suburb of San Francisco, into a working class economic center in its own right. The 1870's saw a massive expansion in West Oakland of freight and overland train infrastructure at the Yards and Shops below 7th Street. Along with that the nearby wharfs and pier expanded with an increase in transportation and freight ferries. The Point with an increase of local support business saw a massive increase in local housing. At least two residents of 867 Willow worked for the Central Pacific Railroad: brakeman John A. Jones who resided in the Geiger-Nisbet house circa 1882, and Robert Blackwell who was a resident in 1900 and worked as a railroad car repairer. Even George Nisbet, who was a resident during the last decades of railroad dominance in West Oakland, was a tailor and landlord providing support services to the railroad workers.

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9. Sources

West Oakland Survey, Volume 28A of Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, Oakland Point, Oakland City Planning Department

Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey Evaluation Sheet and research file for 867 Willow Street

Sights and Sounds, Essays in Celebration of West Oakland, edited by Suzanne Stewart and Mary Praetzellis, Anthropological Studies Center, Sonoma State University, 1997 - includes “Workers’ Houses in West Oakland” by Paul Groth and Marta Gutman.

10. FORM PREPARED BY

Name: Kane Baccigalupi

Organization/Title (if any): _____ Date: 04/30/2023

Address: 867 Willow Street Telephone: 510-228-9669

City/Town: Oakland State: CA Zip: 94607 Email baccigalupi@gmail.com

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rev.

1/10/2020

A. Accepted by: _____ Date: _____

B. Action by Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board

(1) ___ Recommended ___ Not recommended for Landmark/ S-7/S-20 designation

Date: _____ Resolution number: _____

(2) ___ Designated as Heritage Property Date: _____

C. Action by City Planning Commission Date: _____

___ Recommended ___ Not recommended for Landmark/ S-7/S-20 designation

D. Action by City Council Date: _____

___ Designated: Ordinance No: _____ ___ Not Designated