HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL REVIEW:
PRESENTATION HIGH SCHOOL PROPERTY,
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

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1. Site History

The Presentation High School site occupies 2.87 acres of gently southward-sloping land on the north bank of Strawberry Creek in the City of Berkeley. The presence of any prehistoric (i.e., pre-European) habitation on this site is uncertain, although since at least three archeological sites have been documented elsewhere along the course of the Creek, there is some possibility that such settlement did exist here as well.¹ Subsequently, the property lay within the northern quarter of the 48,000-acre Rancho San Antonio land grant, given to Luis Maria Peralta by the Governor of New Spain in 1820; in 1842 Peralta divided this grant (which included the land stretching from present-day San Leandro north to Albany) among his sons, and Jose Domingo Peralta became the owner of this northernmost portion.

The younger Peralta, enmired in the complicated land claims issues that plagued Hispanic settlers after the arrival of American administration in California, began to dispose of his property shortly after his father’s death in 1851. In the quarter-century that followed, land speculation on the site of his former holdings was considerable. Much of it centered around the community known as Ocean View, which stretched along the bayshore west of what is now San Pablo Avenue, while a second -- and less urbanized -- community began to take shape around the hillside land donated to the new University of California in the late 1860s. Midway between these clustered settlements was the farmland property of the Irish-born James McGee, whose 115-acre estate made him, as of 1876, one of the largest landholders in the area.² This property, which included the land between what later became Addison Street, Dwight Way, Martin Luther King, Jr. Way and California
Street, appears from contemporary photographs to have been relatively flat and treeless and, well into the 1870s, undeveloped. (Fig. 1)

Land ownership records from the 1870s show that, in addition to McGee, a number of apparently Irish (and, presumably, Catholic) property owners occupied the partially-subdivided lands that stretched from the Bay up to the University. McGee's neighbors included, among others, families with the names of Curtis, Duffy, Dunnigan, and O'Neal (Fig. 2) Nevertheless, the formal institutions of Catholic culture -- parish churches and religious schools -- were notably absent from this portion of the East Bay; worshippers who planned to attend church found themselves faced either with the prospect of travelling to St. Mary's, on 7th Street in Oakland, or of waiting for the makeshift mass offered by itinerant priests at Michael Curtis' farm, near the later intersection of San Pablo and University Avenues.

Further, for those who sought to avoid what they saw as the Protestant bias of the emergent public school system, no Catholic education of any kind was available in the East Bay until 1868, the year that the Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart established its school at the north end of Lake Merritt. 3

In 1877, Mother Mary Teresa Comerford, of the Irish-based Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, had begun to search for land on which to erect an additional convent for her Order. Comerford had arrived in San Francisco from Ireland in 1854; in the intervening years she had established convent schools at the corners of Powell and Greenwich Streets (1856) and Taylor and Ellis Streets (1868). Her rationale in seeking a non-urban site for the third convent is subject to some conjecture: among the possible contributing factors were her own advancing age and ill health, as
well as the recent spate of deaths by tuberculosis that had victimized the
Sisters in San Francisco.⁴ Reportedly through the efforts of the father of
one of the Sisters in the Order, a Berkeley resident by the name of Maguire,
Comerford was placed in contact with several Berkeley landowners, at least
three of whom -- Michael Curtis, Peter Matthews, and James McGee -- offered
in March, 1877 to make land available for the construction of a convent.⁵

Comerford settled on a large portion of Block 6 of McGee's recently
subdivided land tract. The property offered a directly accessible water
supply with its frontage on Strawberry Creek, as well as the convenience of
a location equally accessible to the new routes of the Central and Southern
Pacific Railroads, which ran through Ocean View and along Shattuck
Avenue, respectively. On March 20, McGee, signing his name with a simple
"X," deeded the property to Comerford for the token sum of five dollars.
(Fig.3) The Archbishop, displeased at seeing Church-related property deeded
in any name other than his own, ordered Comerford to make an additional
deed to him -- one that would remain unrecorded in County record books --
ceeding title on the property to the Church, in return for the Archbishop's
promise to reserve it for the Sisters' use. This maneuver set into motion
nearly a century of ownership disputes between the Order and the Diocese;
disputes that touched at the heart of Church administrative practices.⁶ For
the time being, however, responsibility for the improvement of the property
rested with the Order. Almost immediately, the Sisters were reported to have
begun raising funds for the construction of their new convent;⁷ by the end
of May they had laid the cornerstone for the new building.
The convent, dedicated the following year, was a two-story, hipped-roofed, frame structure with central entrances on its east and west facades. (Fig.4) In its elongated proportions and in the simple, thin milled detail work around the windows and under the cornice, it represented a fairly typical example of the Italianate design vocabulary then common to Bay Area buildings. Nevertheless, the building, in its scale and pretentions, was at the time of its completion the most prominent architectural landmark in the open region that stretched between the University and the Ocean View settlement. Built at an estimated cost of $10,000, it boasted a view "finer than any point in the vicinity of San Francisco," and served the simultaneous function of school, convent, and chapel at a time when religious buildings of any denomination were virtually unknown in the newly chartered city of Berkeley.8 In its close mix of religious and educational functions, the building reflected the outlook not only of Comerford but of American Catholic officials generally, prior to the 1890s. Like the Presentation Sisters, who were "obliged, reluctantly, to submit to [the] public examinations" required for students in their San Francisco convent school, Catholic educators saw their proper role as preparing their students for moral and religious maturity, rather than for professional or vocational success.9 The subsequent architectural history of the convent would in some measure be a reflection of the late-19th and early-20th-century evolution in Catholic schooling as it began to depart from this traditional approach.

The institutional importance of the convent property increased immensely in the following year, when San Francisco Archbishop Alemany ordered the formation of a new parish for Berkeley -- St. Joseph's -- at last
providing the town's Catholic community with autonomy from the distant St. Mary's parish in Oakland. The new parish extended from Russell Street on the south to the city limits on the north, and included all the land from the Bay east to the hills. At its heart was the convent. Comerford's brother, the Rev. Pierce M. Comerford, had recently retired after thirty years of international missionary work; she convinced him to come to Berkeley to take over the new parish. When he arrived in 1879, Rev. Comerford erected a home across the street from the convent, on the site of the current St. Joseph's Church, and began to plan for expansion in conjunction with his sister's Order.

The first building project sponsored by the new parish was a school for boys -- St. Peter's -- which, while administered and financed parochially, was placed under the charge of the Presentation nuns. This small, one-story structure was placed approximately 100' south of the convent, facing the line of what was then named St. Joseph -- and eventually became Jefferson -- Street. It remained at that location until 1912, when it was moved across the street, where it was placed in the rear of a new and much larger boys' school (see below).

In August, 1881, Mary Teresa Comerford died. Hers may have been the first grave in the small cemetery that the Sisters laid out in the southwest corner of their property, beside the Creek. (Fig. 5) The cemetery (the contents of which were later removed to St. Mary's Cemetery in Oakland, in response to a Berkeley ordinance forbidding interment within the city limits) was one portion of a series of landscape improvements that seem to
have commenced almost immediately after McGee's donation. These improvements are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this report.

With Comerford's passing, the Archbishop seized the opportunity to record officially her cession of the property to the Diocese. The most immediate evidence of his new control was the construction, beginning in March of 1883, of St. Joseph's Church on the southwest corner of St. Joseph and Addison Streets, beside the convent. (Fig.6) The design of the Church, a single-story, gable-roofed Gothic Revival structure distinguished by its narrow lancet windows and ornamental buttresses, has been attributed to Bryan Clinch, who appears from area building records to have been either the official architect -- or simply the architect most favored with commissions -- of the San Francisco Diocese. With the church's dedication in September of the same year, Mass was at last moved from its makeshift home in the convent building.

In spite of the additional space offered by the new church, a number of factors soon coincided to necessitate still further architectural additions to the property. In 1884, the Catholic Church's Third Plenary Council, held in Baltimore, had ordered the establishment of religious schools and had advised that "[a]ll Catholic parents are bound to send their children to the parish school," rather than to local public schools. At the same time, parochial schools had begun to make increasing efforts to offer a level and manner of education more comparable to public education than had previously been the case; included in this trend was the introduction of a stricter and academic curriculum, as well as a relative loosening, in girls' schools, of what a recent historian has described as their earlier orientation toward "either convent
life," on one hand, or "pious, cultured motherhood," on the other. These combined trends fostered the need -- in Berkeley as elsewhere -- for school facilities capable of handling both more students and a more formal educational setting. In Berkeley, the former problem was particularly acute. Combined enrollment in the boys' and girls' schools jumped from the level of approximately 60 students maintained through the 1880s to a figure of closer to 100 students by 1889. The need for new classroom space was heightened further by the 1888 decision to move the Novitiate of the Presentation Sisters of California into the Berkeley convent. Rooms once used for the school would now be taken to house an influx of new residents.

The result of this crisis was a decision to construct a separate building to house the convent school, by then known as St. Joseph's Academy. The new building, completed in July, 1892 at an estimated cost of $5000, stood between the convent and the St. Peter's School for boys, facing St. Joseph Street. In its placement, it created a forecourt in front of the convent, which was now set back between the church, on one side, and the new school, on the other. In its interior arrangement, the school was called "one of the . . . best equipped school buildings in Berkeley"; it offered separate spaces for classrooms, assembly areas, and library. Architecturally, it closely corresponded to the general norm represented by other area schools constructed at around the same time, with its distinctive hipped roof, central gable and prominent bell tower. The appearance of the building contrasted sharply, however, with the Presentation Convent, both in the emphasized horizontality of its proportions and, more importantly, in the increased prominence and scale of its decorative millwork. While the
building has been altered -- possibly irreparably -- by its later enclosure within the larger building erected to house the Academy in 1924, an important remnant of this millwork is found in the banister of the interior staircase, which remains intact as of the date of this report.

Further administrative and educational reorganization within the Order led to additional construction on the site in 1901. At this time, the decision was made to return the Sisters' novitiate to their mother house, in San Francisco, and to expand the capacity of the school by taking in boarding students. These students were quartered in an addition made to the western end of the original convent. (Figs. 9, 10) Where the original building had contained only two floors within its 36' height, the addition (which maintained the same cornice line and extended the older hipped roof) was built with three. Where the earlier structure had been designed with little ornament, the addition was embellished with a pedimented, rooftop aedicule above its central entrance; as well as a prominent, Baroque-derived cupola at the crest of the roof and a two-story portico on the south facade. It is probable (though conclusive visual evidence has not been found) that the rough-hewn sandstone gateposts, inscribed with the words "St. Joseph's Presentation Academy," which still stand on the California Street edge of the site, date from the time of this addition.18

In 1905 Fr. Francis X. Morrison assumed charge of St. Joseph's Parish. Morrison took seriously the responsibility of attending to what he called the "cultured and enlightened town" of Berkeley, and seems to have considered the construction of a new and larger church as one of his primary duties in this regard.19 While church lore has recorded that the new St. Joseph's was
built in response to an influx of worshippers from San Francisco following the earthquake and fire of April 18, 1906, evidence in Diocesan and Convent archives indicates that the idea existed before the calamity, and that the Archbishop had already agreed to return control of the original church site to the Sisters after another had been built elsewhere. The site that Morrison chose was that occupied by the pastor's house, at the southeast corner of Addison and St. Joseph (now Jefferson) Streets. This house was moved east from its original location, and the cornerstone of the new church was laid on June 17, 1907. The architectural firm of Frank Shea and John Lofquist, responsible for the design of a number of major Catholic Church buildings at the time, was commissioned to design the new structure, which remains not only one of the best examples of their work but one of the most prominent religious structures in the East Bay. (Fig.11)

The old Gothic Revival church was left on its site and used as the convent chapel for five more years after the completion of the new building. In 1912, the layout of the Church/Convent complex was substantially reconfigured with the demolition of the old church and the placement on its site of a large, three-story convent addition. (Fig.12) At the same time, the architect for the convent addition (John J. Foley) also designed a large new building for St. Peter's School across the street from the existing building, just south of the new church. The old school was then moved to the rear of this structure, and its height was increased to two stories.

The convent addition (Figs.13, 14) was marked by a scale and ornamental elaboration that had far more in common with the new church across the street than with the convent to which it was physically attached. Its
stuccoed facade was distinguished by a rusticated ground floor supporting a
giant order of pilasters that terminated under a richly detailed entablature
and projecting cornice. Its eastern elevation was lined with a row of high,
stained-glass windows that illuminated an interior chapel nearly as large, in
itself, as the entire original convent.

It was this larger scale that was echoed in what became the most
important architectural addition to the site, from the standpoint of the
present time: the school building that still stands on the west side of
Jefferson Street. As the construction of a new church had been a high
priority for Morrison when he assumed leadership of the parish, so did the
planning of a new school building occupy the early labors of Morrison's
successor, Fr. Thomas Brennan. The Academy's commitment to academic
modernization had already been proven, four years before his arrival, with
the successful effort of school officials to gain accreditation from the
University of California; with this recognition, Academy graduates were at
last granted the right to apply directly for admission to the University.
Brennan pushed to continue in the direction of academic improvement. It
was from him, rather than the Sisters, that the decision to greatly enlarge
the Academy upon its earlier site originated. In response to the Order's
objections to this assumption of parish -- rather than convent -- control
over the original landgrant, Brennan agreed to buy that land on McGee's
Block 6 that lay to the south of Strawberry Creek, and to deed this property
formally to the Sisters for their exclusive use. In 1922, this land was
purchased; in conjunction with this expansion, Jefferson Street was
improved and Strawberry Creek was culverted.²²
In June, 1923, the Archbishop obtained a building permit for the construction of a three-story, frame school building, to be built for a projected cost of $60,000. The architect, John Lofquist, incorporated the 1892 building into the new structure, although nothing but its original outline remained evident in Lofquist's exterior design. Instead, the earlier building -- shorn of its original facade and roofline -- formed one of two slightly projecting wings that flanked a long, central structure punctuated in its center by a pedimented entryway. (Fig.15) The entire structure appears to rest on a raised basement faced in a tan-colored brick; in the case of the older segment, however, this brick merely masks the building's foundation, which was laid at grade level. The building as designed was as devoid of exterior ornament as had been the original convent; the sole exception was the rusticated brick entryway in the center of the eastern elevation, and the simple, flat pilasters and crowning pediment that enframed it -- an echo of the grandiose facade of Lofquist's own church across the street. The school, dedicated on February 24, 1924, was divided between grammar school classrooms on the first floor and high school rooms on the second; the basement was occupied principally by a cafeteria and auditorium.

The school remained essentially unaltered into the 1940s, after which time it witnessed a fairly steady, but architecturally unimportant, series of alterations. At the same time, however, little maintenance was done to the convent. In 1963, Mother Mary Ursula, of the Presentation Sisters, wrote to Bishop Begin of the Oakland Diocese (which had recently assumed control of East Bay parishes from the San Francisco Diocese), of her concern over the
condition of the 1879/1901 structure, advising him of her opinion that "it would be foolish to invest money in such an old building," particularly given the substantial debt incurred by the Order for the recent construction of a new high school in San Jose. Instead, she suggested that the convent be razed immediately and, further, that the future of the school itself be studied in light of the recent establishment of Catholic schools in Richmond and Concord -- communities in which a number of St. Joseph's students lived.  

The Sisters were allowed to rebuild their convent. It was completed three years later, at the northwest corner of Allston Way and Jefferson Street, on the property purchased for them in 1922. A week after their move into the new building, on the night of June 8, 1966, the original convent, its 1901 extension, and the 1913 addition were all destroyed by fire. The school (renamed Presentation High two years earlier) was undamaged. The fire and the new convent represented the last major physical changes to the site until 1983, when the architectural firm of Gillis, Judson and Wade was retained to undertake a near-total renovation of the school. While retaining much of the original floor plan, the architects reinforced the building structurally and replaced most of the finish materials on the interior, although the 1892 staircase remains, as do the central and south stairs of the 1924 design and the built-in furnishings contained in the second-floor science laboratory. The primary exterior alteration dating from this job was the removal of the main entry from its original location on the east elevation to the north end of the building, where a formerly secondary entry, corresponding to the location of the front door of the original 1892 structure, was embellished with a one-story, projecting
concrete *porte-cochere*. The brick detail work surrounding the former main entry was also removed at this time.

In 1985, Presentation High School received an Exemplary School Award from the United States Department of Education. Already, though, it had begun to suffer, with other Diocese schools, from declining enrollment; further, it had sacrificed some of its earlier independence when the Diocese agreed to help offset the debts incurred in the 1983 renovations. These troubles worsened in the following years, until the continued operation of the school appeared to its administrators to be untenable. On December 15, 1987, convent and Church officials agreed to close the school at the end of the academic year. Since that time, while the interior of the building has been fully cleared of its furniture, etc., no major changes have occurred on the site.
2. **Historical/Architectural Importance of the Site**

In addition to the specific items of potential significance outlined below, the entire site -- together with the Church property one block to the east -- should be considered of local or areawide importance, both for its long historical associations with the development of the Catholic Church in the East Bay, and for its role in the early urban development of Berkeley. As the site of the first post-Hispanic parish church, convent, and Catholic school north of Oakland, and as the oldest remaining California property (until the pending sale of the portion in question) of a pioneering religious order, this block has a historical importance that should be respected and recognized by anyone contemplating its future development. Further, it stands as a testimonial to the early growth of central Berkeley. Together with the City's incorporation and the extension of passenger railroad lines from Oakland, the formation of the St. Joseph's parish was an important step in the transformation of a once-rural landscape in the late 1870s. James McGee's donation may have been an act of piety, but it was also an effective real estate promotion. Further study may reveal the extent to which the development of the convent and church not only responded to an existing community, but helped to create the conditions in which that community grew and prospered. In terms of existing, institutional properties, perhaps only the University itself is a more important reminder of this early period of the city's growth.

It is questionable, nevertheless, whether the entire site would be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, since so many
of the features that characterized it during the period of its importance have been destroyed. Because of the large number of changes made through the years, it does not appear to meet the National Park Service's criterion that "the majority of the property must be intact or undisturbed."
a. Archeological Importance

The prehistoric archeological value of the site is, for the time being, a point for conjecture. Any realistic evaluation of the possibility of finding Native American remains here should await further research or excavation.

The historical-archeological value of the site, however, is potentially great. The earlier presence of five different structures on the property (original convent, original church, 1901 convent addition, 1913 convent addition, St. Peter's School) makes the prospect of artifactual discoveries highly likely. Already, a single soil sample taken from the northeast corner of the site, under the former location of the 1913 convent and the 1883 church, has yielded material that seems to come from one or both of these earlier structures. Building materials or incidental artifacts related to household, educational or religious functions may remain beneath the sites of the structures listed above, as well as under the cemetery and the incidental buildings once located both along Addison Street and beside the water pump, north of the Creek. (See Fig.12).

b. The School Building

The importance of the existing school building can be measured in both architectural and historical terms. Historically, it is a reminder of one of the East Bay's pioneer educational institutions -- although this association is indirect, owing to the relatively late date of the actual structure. Presentation High School seems to be representative of a fairly active period of Catholic school-building in the East Bay in the 1920s, and is therefore
historically comparable to a number of other contemporary structures -- among them, St. Elizabeth's School in Oakland, as well as St. Augustine School and the School of the Madeleine, both in Berkeley. Like these other structures, its substantial size and "institutional" design (which is not altogether distinguishable from that of public schools built around the same time) reflect the high demand for Catholic education in this period, as well as the promotion within Church schools of academic standards and practices far more comparable than in earlier generations to the standards and practices of the public school system.

Architecturally, the building is valuable as a simple, straightforward institutional structure. Its importance at this point lies more in its general massing and scale than in the details of its design. This was, from the start, not considered a structure on which to expend unnecessary ornament or detail; instead, it was treated as an exercise in efficient interior organization and was intended to blend -- but not compete -- with the general classical design vocabulary of the more elaborate church across the street and the 1913 convent addition. Unfortunately, much of the grace with which the architect carried out this mission has been compromised by the subsequent removal of the main doorway, the blocking of windows on the south elevation, the substitution of large-paned aluminum sash windows for the original smaller-sashed, double-hung windows, and the entry addition to the north elevation. Inside, little of historical note remains. The three interior stair banisters mentioned above are all aesthetically pleasing, and one -- on the north stairs -- is of historic value as well. This stairway seems to be the
only architectural remnant on the entire site of the convent's 19th-century heritage.

The incorporation of the 1892 schoolhouse within the north wing of the later building presents a unique historical problem. If the fabric of the earlier building remains largely intact -- if, that is, the newer structure was laid directly over the older facade -- then the older building may be recoverable as a separate structure, and therefore may be determined to have retained its integrity, as defined in Chapter 5 of National Register Bulletin #15. If the physical integrity of this building were in fact intact, then it would be of high historical value as a rare example of a pre-20th-century frame schoolhouse within a highly urbanized area. However, even if the physical fabric of the original building were substantially recoverable, its integrity might be compromised so long as the 1924 building (or the remaining portion of it) remained immediately adjacent to it.

As the building now stands, substantially altered from both its 1892 and 1924 conditions, it does not appear to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

c. The Grounds

This report has, up this point, mentioned little about the grounds surrounding the high school; in part because their history is less clearcut than that of the buildings, and in part because they deserve separate consideration as the most important historical resource remaining on the site. What follows is both a historical overview and a statement of their importance.
The plain that stretched from the Berkeley hills down to the Bay was virtually treeless prior to settlement; any greenery placed on this barren expanse would have been highly conspicuous and noteworthy at the time, and in fact it does seem to have been noted from a very early date. We know from historical references that some kind of planting was made on the convent site as soon as the Sisters moved there. Sister Mary Rose Forest, in her history of the Presentation Sisters, cites several allusions in local newspapers to a new garden around the convent, and attributes this planting to the work of McGee and a John Culligan.\(^30\) In the "Memoir" of Mother Mary Teresa, written shortly after her death, mention is made of the "tasteful walks" that Comerford had laid out, as well as to the "stately trees" now growing around the convent.\(^31\) W.W. Elliott's promotional description of Berkeley, published in 1884, refers to a "spacious, well-cultivated fruit and flower garden" surrounding the north, south, and west sides of the convent (i.e. on every side but the front), and his accompanying engraving of the grounds shows what appears to be an orchard on the site of the current garden (Fig.17).\(^32\) The same trees are depicted in a similar lithographic image, drawn some 10 to 15 years later, after the construction of the schoolhouse (Fig.8) This later image also indicates the presence of another important feature absent from the earlier view: a row of high trees to the west and south of the orchard, possibly around the perimeter of the property. This detail is corroborated by an 1891 bird's eye view of Berkeley (an image that is, however, architecturally inaccurate) and, in part, by a photograph of the cemetery that appears to show the southwest corner of the lot. (Figs.18, 5) The trees behind the picket fence in the cemetery
photograph appear to be eucalyptus, lining the bank of Strawberry Creek; their appearance in this and later photographs confirms the existence of a tree hedge along the south side of the lot, but the continuation of this hedge around the other sides of the property remains conjectural.

Early photographs of the convent area make clear that, while neat rows of trees were planted in the orchard and along the edge of the lot, a quite different, more exotic type of garden was beginning to take shape immediately beside the buildings. (Figs.4, 6) In the space between the church and the eastern entry to the convent, and again in front of the western entry to the convent, curving walkways were laid out around beds filled with a variety of low, ground-covering plants -- including yucca and palm -- and small trees, including several varieties of evergreen. On either side of the convent building, rounded arbors or trellises formed green gateways from the public area of the street to the seclusion of the garden.

It is impossible to date precisely these improvements; in the case of the photograph of the west side of the convent, the most that can be said with any assurance is that the plantings there predate the 1901 building addition, which would have covered them over. Certainly, the mention of Comerford's "tasteful walks" might refer to the curving paths evident in Fig.4, although the connection cannot be proven. There is, however, evidence of similar gardens in the Bay Area, dating from the late 1860s on, that suggests that these beds may have been planted at around the time that the convent was built. Pictures of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in Oakland, show that a curvilinear garden scheme was begun with the initial construction of the building in 1868, and that it was enlarged and elaborated after changes to the
building in the 1870s and 1880s. (Figs.19, 20) In its deliberate mixing of a
variety of semi-tropical and temperate plants in one place, the Presentation
garden would also have been fairly typical of late-nineteenth-century
domestic gardens that have been described in the South Bay and on the San
Francisco Peninsula.33

Unfortunately, no photographs have yet been found to indicate the
appearance of the current garden area prior to the convent addition of 1901.
One view of the enlarged convent (Fig.21), taken from the south end of the
lot some time before the construction of the 1913 annex, shows that the
orchard still existed over the current location of the basketball courts, but
that some system of walkways was already in place on the south side of the
convent. Another view of the same period shows clearly that this was in fact
the system that survives today: two egg-shaped paths overlapping in a
central circle, with a rectilinear cross-axis entering from the north and
south ends of the garden. (Fig.22) Curiously, however, orchard trees run in
straight lines directly through this curving layout -- a fact that suggests that
the orchard was originally planted all the way to the convent, and that the
curving walkways were added at a later date (prior to 1913).

Other photographs indicate the transition that began to take place, in
the early years of the century, from this odd juxtaposition of orchard and
picturesque ramble to a lushier and more exotic form of planting more
appropriate to the fluid design of the paths. (Figs.23, 24) These pictures show
a mixture of evergreens, shrubs, and desert plants beginning to fill the
spaces between the fruit trees. One (Fig.25) also reveals several plants that
remain on the site today: the olive tree in the right foreground (the stump
of which remains today, beside later offshoots from the same roots), the pine
in the background, to the right of the water tower, and, possibly, the yucca
shown on the far left, beside the path.

In July, 1919, the most striking surviving feature of the garden was
formally dedicated: a 15'-high grotto, made of rough stone and concrete, and
embellished with statues of Mary and St. Bernadette (Figs.26, 27). The
stylistic and religious precedents for grottoes like this are numerous, and
they bear brief mention here. At the most immediate level, these rock
constructions refer to the grotto at Lourdes, in which Mary appeared to a
peasant girl (Bernadette) in 1858. The Presentation grotto is, in fact, loosely
designed to resemble the grotto at Lourdes; (Fig.28) as such, it is
representative of the revival of Marian worship in the late-nineteenth and
early-twentieth century that was catalyzed, in part, by the Lourdes incident.
At a slightly more removed level, the Presentation grotto owes a debt to
Victorian garden design traditions, particularly in England, where natural-
seeming grottoes and "rockeries" were common features of the garden
landscape. The free use of concrete, both in the "stalactites" that hang from
the ceiling of the grotto (formed by loosely applying wet concrete to
hanging pieces of burlap) and in the imitation-log benches that flank the
structure, was also consistent with recent European garden traditions, and
has a more immediate local counterpart in Ernest Ransome's 1889 Alvord
Bridge, located in Golden Gate Park. Finally, the grotto has a deep-seated
historical resonance that predates picturesque landscape garden design,
recalling the conceits of Renaissance landscaping and, beyond that, the
Antique and Biblical traditions of placing supernatural events --
particularly those related to spiritual transformation -- in caves and grottoes.\textsuperscript{34}

While the supernatural associations of classical mythology seem far-removed from the 1919 grotto of the St. Joseph's Academy, they are nevertheless present, at however obscure a level. The grotto served as a place in which to escape the everyday world outside of the garden; it provided the convent community with a focus for religious contemplation, collective rituals (like the ceremony of the Crowning of Our Blessed Lady, held each May), ceremonial portraits (Fig.29) and, in the recollections of one Presentation Sister, simple relaxation.\textsuperscript{35} From a design standpoint, it seems to be one of the largest and most carefully crafted such structures remaining in the Bay Area.\textsuperscript{36}

It was, perhaps, in conjunction with the construction of the grotto that the garden was further altered and improved to its most densely developed state, of which certain plantings now remain. Photographs taken from the roof of the convent, some time between 1919 and 1922 (Figs.30, 31) show that the hedges and ground cover of earlier years have thickened (this may be the period that the now empty planter in the northeast quarter of the garden dates from), and that a number of trees have either matured or been planted anew; among the extant trees that appear in this view are the westernmost of the two tall pines (in the middle ground on the right side of the photograph) and the two palms (one shown just to the left of the grotto, the other at the extreme right of the middle ground of the photograph). In addition, the pictures show a number of shrubs and trees -- for example the yews lining the southern edge of the garden and the palms within the inner
circle -- that have since disappeared. The later photograph, taken in 1927, shows that the Creek has been culverted and the trees along its bank cut down.

A second piece of important statuary in the garden is the statue of Mary Teresa Comerford’s patron saint, Teresa. This statue was, according to the mosaic inscription at its base, placed in the northeast corner of the garden in 1930, although the actual figure may date from earlier. It was at one time overshadowed by a huge palm, of which only the stump now remains. (Figs. 32, 33) The other object that deserves mention within the garden is a concrete slab placed within the northwest quarter. This may originally have been the base of a pool or fountain; more visual documentation or research would be required to establish its importance.

The garden is, in conclusion, a highly important remnant of the early development of the convent. It dates at least as far back as 1912, and possibly (though not probably) to the date of the foundation of the convent. More likely, it was begun some time between these two chronological poles. One plausible explanation of its origin is that it replaced the gardens planted outside of the west entry of the convent building, after the 1901 addition covered up this earlier planting. The picturesque layout of the walkways -- formal but not rectilinear -- coexisted for a time with the northern end of an orchard that may have been planted in the late 1870s. Gradually, this area was supplemented with a mix of trees and of native and imported plant species not unlike that which typified the early, pre-1901 garden. This landscape was embellished, in 1919, with the massive grotto and its flanking, rustic benches; at around the same time the earlier orchard trees were
removed and additional trees -- most conspicuously, the palms that survive today -- were planted. Since the essential layout of the garden -- typical of its time but increasingly rare today -- remains, as do the grotto and a fair number of plants that can be dated from 50 to 80 years in age, the garden as it exists today should be considered of high historical value. Its relative uniqueness among nearby religious properties is confirmed by a windshield survey of other East Bay convents and Catholic schools, as well as by the recollections of the Archivist of the Oakland Diocese. It should be measured further against other intact Victorian landscaping within the Bay Area; potential points of comparison might include Mills College, Golden Gate Park, Dominican Seminary in San Rafael, and the Sacred Heart Convent in Menlo Park. Even if these other sites do include extensive intact areas of nineteenth-century garden planting, the importance of this particular garden remains high: it possesses intrinsic value as a substantially intact example of late-19th/early-20th-century picturesque landscape, but it is also charged with the broader historical importance of the overall site, as discussed at the beginning of this section. As for the grotto, it should be considered an integral contribution to the historical value of the garden, rather than an architectural feature to be evaluated in isolation. A definitive statement of its singularity still awaits further research (see below, n.32). Taken together, however, the garden and grotto appear to possess the physical integrity and aesthetic and historic importance to qualify for the National Register of Historic Places.

A final note should be made of the perimeter of the grounds, particularly of the stone gateposts that face California Street. As mentioned
above, these posts were probably installed at the time of the 1901 convent addition, although the possibility of an earlier date cannot be ruled out -- particularly considering that the apparently elaborate layout of the pre-1901 convent garden, suggested in Fig.4, might have led to an entrance on California Street. Like the gardens, these inscribed sandstone posts are a vital reminder of the site's past; in terms of publicly accessible features, they are the most important structure remaining on the site. Although their integrity is compromised somewhat by the absence of the wrought-iron grillwork that once completed the ensemble, their aesthetic and historical value remain intact. There is some possibility that the posts would be considered eligible for the National Register; however, this possibility would presumably be greater if a case could be made for their inclusion within a larger, historically intact context. For this reason, the possibility of including them with the garden, as inseparable components of a single site, should be explored.

Early photographs suggest that the hedge that now remains in places along the California Street edge of the block may not necessarily be the same as the hedge that was planted their at the time of the 1901 addition. While some early images show a high hedge on either side of the gateposts (Figs.10, date unknown, and 34, c.1917), at least one post-1924 view shows the hedge as having been either cut back or removed entirely. (Fig.35) Now that several types of bushes grow along the California Street edge, it is difficult to determine which, if any, dates back to the turn of the century or earlier. More important in ascertaining the historical character of the site is the fact that, for significant periods in the past, such hedges provided a wall of
privacy around the convent grounds; they were, during those times when they were cultivated, a important component of the architectural/cultural character of the site. In the words of one Academy alumna, "The nuns could walk around in there and you couldn't see them."³⁷

There are other trees on the site notable for their size and age -- particularly the redwoods and acacias at the northern and southern edges of the lot, as well as the trees that line the south and east edges of the basketball courts and the pine in the southwest corner of the site, and the palms along the California Street sidewalk -- but their historical importance in relation to the development of the convent grounds is unknown at this time.

d. Surrounding Area

The only structure of recognized historic significance on the blocks immediately surrounding the site is St. Joseph's Church, which is listed on both the City and State Historic Resources Inventories. Beside it, the St. Joseph's Elementary School, while no longer possessed of its original, 1912, facade, nevertheless provides an unusually good example of the kind of design that might have been described as "Modern Classical" in the 1930s and 1940s, and is not incompatible with the High School. The other buildings that face the site are exclusively residential (except for the structure at the southwest corner of California and Addison Street, which was built to house a dwelling unit over a store); with the exception of the apartment building on the northeast corner of Addison and California, they are all under three stories in height. The dates of their construction vary widely; a few may date as far back as the original convent. Many can be typed as 'bungalows,'
although this collective label belies the stylistic variety that they display. While the streetfronts facing the site do not appear to have either the overall consistency or the individual architectural distinctiveness to comprise part of a National-Register-eligible district, their low scale, common setbacks, and shared design elements (excepting a few modern intrusions) do nevertheless contribute to a neighborhood feeling that sets the area apart from the commercial and automotive intrusion of University Avenue, one block away; collectively, these homes and apartments create a unified whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.
3. Potential Adverse Impacts and Recommended Mitigation Measures

The following discussion proceeds at two complementary levels: it considers the potential harmful effects of any development upon the historic and cultural resources identified in the previous section; and it assesses the specific impact of those aspects of the project proposal with which I am familiar. Likewise, the recommended mitigation measures are framed in such a way as to address both the broad issues raised in protecting the historical integrity of the site, and the particular efforts that might be made in the context of the University's plans, as described elsewhere in the EIR. Although it is somewhat outside of the purview of this report, I have also mentioned potential impacts that call for a general historic sensitivity, even though they may not affect formally recognized historic resources (as measured by National Register eligibility potential). Where such impacts are considered, I have been careful to distinguish them from those impacts that can be more narrowly construed as pertaining to specific historic resources.

a. Archeological

Potential Impact: The project could overlook or destroy important artifacts related either to the site's prehistoric settlement or to the history of the religious and educational institutions established here after 1877.

Recommended Mitigation: In those cases where archeological remains are covered over or ignored, the project cannot be considered to have had a "negative" impact so much as it represents a continuation of the current site
condition, in which the presence of significant artifacts is simply unknown. Such cases cannot, therefore, technically be considered negative impacts to be mitigated; the most that can be said is that the project would make future archeological investigation more difficult for those locations that will be covered with new structures. (Needless to say, artifacts that are discovered in the course of construction should be recorded and, if possible, set aside for study.) If, on the other hand, excavation below grade is required (as it may possibly be for the proposed southern addition to the existing building), there is some possibility that subterranean artifacts might be destroyed. In this case, such a potential adverse impact could be mitigated by inspection along the lines of that recommended by Vicki Beard of the California Archaeological Inventory, in her letter to Amy Skewes-Cox, Baseline Environmental Consulting, dated 9 August, 1990. It appears as though the planned addition would not cover the site of any previous buildings, although it would be close to the incinerator and to the site of several outbuildings that once stood at the southeast corner of the lot. This should be confirmed by comparison of the final plans with earlier Sanborn maps available on microfilm at the University of California Doe Library Map Room; obviously, the presence of an earlier building on the site of any excavation increases the chances of coming across historically significant material.

b. The School Building

Potential Impact: The project could destroy the general scale and massing of the building, as well as its significant interior features, through insensitive additions or alterations.
**Recommended Mitigation:** Because the original appearance of the school building is already significantly compromised, and because the building does not appear to meet National Register criteria, it would be misleading to suggest that every detail of its current condition must be preserved for historical reasons. Nevertheless, the project designers should strive to preserve those general elements of the building that still reflect the integrity of its original design: its scale and symmetry, its contrasts of solid (wall) and void (window) and of facade materials (brick and stucco). An effort should also be made to preserve its most historically significant interior feature, the north staircase. Architectural changes of the kind proposed -- including the addition of balconies (and the accompanying alteration of windows), and the construction of an addition on the south end of the building -- would, from a historical standpoint, be preferable to demolition of the structure, so long as they did not compromise those general elements listed above. While such a criterion is obviously susceptible to some degree of subjective interpretation, any eventual design solution must be clearly and unmistakeably based on the original scale, massing, and texture of the original building.

**Potential Impact:** The project could leave in place existing alterations that already compromise the aesthetic quality and historical integrity of the building.

**Recommended Mitigation:** Once again, this point refers less to an actual negative impact than to the maintenance of a historically undesirable status quo. While the proposed project could potentially improve upon this status
quor by reversing those compromising alterations listed in the previous section, its completion without such improvement would do nothing to lessen the building's current historical integrity (such as it is). There is one further respect in which the project will not worsen -- but could ideally improve upon -- previous alterations that relate to a potentially National Register-eligible structure: some remnant of the 1892 schoolhouse presumably remains within the northern third of the 1924 building. Possibly it could be determined that enough of this significant earlier structure remains for the early building's integrity to be considered intact by the standards of the National Register. Still, the prospects for its restoration would have to be weighed against the historical loss of destroying the later building in the process.
c. Grounds

**Potential Impact:** The project could destroy the integrity of the garden.

**Recommended Mitigation:** If the garden is, indeed, National Register-eligible, any compromise of its existing form could be considered to constitute an adverse impact. This impact could be mitigated by preserving the garden area as it is, including the pathways, the grotto, the concrete benches, the statue, and any plants known to date from before c.1925 (or whatever year seems best to represent the garden's most fully developed state). The historic value of this site could be further enhanced by using new plantings, based on photographic or on-site evidence, to restore it to a condition that closely resembles its appearance as of that time. Such work would be an improvement rather than constitute mitigation. If carried out, it would have to be sensitive to National Register criteria regarding reconstruction of historic sites; for the implications of such criteria upon landscapes, see National Register Bulletin #18, "How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes" (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service).

**Potential Impact:** The project could necessitate removal of the stone gateposts on California Street.

**Recommended Mitigation:** The project should preserve the gateposts, making them functional by replacing the gates and grillwork that once existed between them. If the posts were to prove to be National Register-eligible, either by themselves or in conjunction with the garden, project planners
should determine whether they need to be kept in their original location to retain their historical value.

**Potential Impact:** The project could destroy or ignore other prominent trees or landscape features on the site.

**Recommended Mitigation:** In terms of their specific historical value, only the trees within the garden appear to belong to an intentionally designed, substantially intact historical landscape. The value of these other mature trees (for example, the palms on California Street, the various trees around the basketball court, and the sequoias and acacias at the north end of the site) derives more from their general contribution to the aesthetic quality of the site and the neighborhood; their retention is historically desirable, but losing them would not necessarily constitute an adverse impact on known historic resources.

d. Surrounding Context

**Potential Impact:** The project could threaten the setting of St. Joseph's Church.

**Recommended Mitigation:** Project designers should consider carefully the design and scale of the church in those portions of the project that are either adjacent to it, or could be seen beside it from other vantage points; avoid architectural details that would either distract from, or directly copy, the details of the church facade.
Potential Impact: The project could have a scale, density or architectural character inconsistent with that of the neighborhood.

Recommended Mitigation: As is the case with the school building and with the plantings outside of the garden, this potential impact does not relate to a property or area that appears to be National Register-eligible. Therefore, while project planners should in any case endeavor to create a historically sensitive design, their efforts will not affect any known, formally designated historical resources in the surrounding area, aside from the Church.
Notes

2. Frank Clinton Merritt, History of Alameda County, California, v.1 (Chicago, 1928), p.188.
5. Ibid., p. 198; Berkeley Advocate, 17 March, 1877 (5:3).
6. The history and significance of the jurisdictional disputes over control of convent lands is best summarized in a series of articles by Fr. Harry Morrison in the St. Joseph's "Monthly Newsletter," April 1978 to April, 1979. This series also provides the single best historical overview of the convent and the parish from the time of their establishment in Berkeley.
7. Construction money was, apparently, raised both through directly solicited donations and through promotional schemes like picnics. See Berkeley Advocate, 14 April, 1877 (5:1); as well as the Memoir of Reverend Mother Mary Teresa Comerford (San Francisco, 1882; reprint Fresno, 1952), p.-.
8. Berkeley Advocate, 11 July, 1878 (3:3) The only Berkeley church to predate the construction of the convent, according to one standard reference work, was the First Congregational Church of 1875. [Writers' Program of the
Works Projects Administration in Northern California, Berkeley: The First Seventy-Five Years (Berkeley, 1941), p.53] In the five-year period immediately following the convent dedication, however, a number of churches were erected in the city.


10. Berkeley City Ordinances, #98 NS, 30 August, 1910. Though the precise date of the relocation of the graves is uncertain, anecdotal history seems to support the choice of a date shortly after the passage of this ordinance (Steve Finacom interview with Sister Rose Therese, August, 1990)


12. Reference to Clinch is found in St. Joseph's Church archives, and is apparently corroborated by a notice of the construction of a Catholic church in Berkeley in the California Architect and Building News 4, no.5 (May 1883), p.84. For a list of the massive numbers of church buildings designed by this prolific architect in the 1880s and '90s, not just in the Bay Area but throughout California, see John Snyder, "Index of San Francisco Building, 1879-1900," MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1973.


14. MS abstracts of Berkeley City Directory records, collection Father Harry Morrison.


18. I have been able to locate no picture showing the original convent from California Street; the only photograph that does show the western elevation of the older building is not taken from a distant enough vantage point to determine whether the gateposts might have existed prior to the addition. This absence of visual documentation in itself suggests that the posts did not yet exist, particularly considering the frequency with which they are included in photographs of the addition.


23. From permit abstract on file in Berkeley City Hall.


25. Building permit files, Berkeley City Hall.


28. For information on the school closing, see The Daily Californian, 5 February, 1988 (6:1); The Catholic Voice, 15 February, 1988 (17:1); West County Times 24 February, 1988 (1:4), and 25 February, 1988 (____).


30. Berkeley Advocate 12 April, 1878, and 24 April, 1879; Oakland Times, 3 October, 1881; cited in Forest. op.cit., p.206.


32. W.W. Elliott, Berkeley, California, Illustrated and Described (Berkeley, 1884).


34. For further information on these various aspects of the history of grotto construction, the following works may serve as an introduction: Thomas Kselman, Popular Piety in France ( ); Brent Elliott, Victorian Gardens (Portland, 1986); Naomi Miller, Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto (New York, 1982).

36. Interview with Father Harry Morrison, Archivist, Oakland Diocese. This supposition may be borne out by research reportedly conducted for an Environmental Impact Report concerning the site of the Sisters of Mercy convent at San Francisco General Hospital, where another grotto was constructed.

37. Interview with Theophila Raspiller, c.1978, transcript in collection of Father Harry Morrison.
Figure 1:

View of Berkeley Campus and central portion of the future City of Berkeley. circa 1874.

South Hall and North Hall in the center; University Avenue is small white line at right center.

(Bancroft Library)
FIGURE 2:

Berkeley Land Ownership, c. 1874
GF Allardt, 'Official Map of Alameda County' (Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley)
FIGURE 3:

McGee to Comerford Deed
(Harry Morrison collection,
20, April, 1877)
FIGURE 4:
Convent (west elevation; 1906 church in background) (Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 5:
Cemetery (n.d.)
Collection of Father
Harry Morrison.
FIGURE 6:
St. Joseph’s Church (no date). Original church at Addison and Jefferson.
(Collection of Father Harry Morrison)
FIGURE 7:
St. Joseph's Academy (no date).
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 8:
Academy, Convent, and Church, post 1892. (boy's school at far left)

(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 9:
Convent with 1901 addition; west and south elevations. no date.
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 10:
1901 Convent Addition; west elevation. no date.
(Collection of Father Harry Morrison)
FIGURE 11:
St. Joseph's Church. Rectory on left, old church on right. No date.
(Collection of Father Harry Morrison)
Figure 12:
Site Plan, c. 1913
(The laundry, water tower, and unlabeled sheds were all in place sometime before 1911)
(Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1911 and 1928, Doe Library Map Room, UC Berkeley)
FIGURE 13:
1913 Convent Addition, north and east elevations.
no date.

(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 14:
1913 Convent Addition, east and south elevations
(no date)
Sisters of the Presentation Archives.
FIGURE 15:
St. Joseph's Academy, 1924 building (no date).
Sisters of the Presentation Archives
FIGURE 16:
Convent after fire, June 1966
East elevation.
Sisters of the Presentation Archives.
FIGURE 17:

Convent and Parish buildings, circa 1884.

(W. W. Elliott, Berkeley, California, Illustrated and Described, 1884)
FIGURE 18:
Berkeley, circa 1891

Convent grounds are shown in center-right portion of illustration below the word "Tract"
(source unknown)
FIGURE 19:
Convent of the Sacred Heart, Oakland, California, 1868.
(Silver Jubilee Memorial, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Oakland, California, 1868-1893) (SF, 1893, page 81)
BY THE 1880's, the convent grounds on the shore of Lake Merritt was elaborately landscaped. The playground for the girls was behind the building. Part of the lake was fenced off for a swimming pond.

FIGURE 20:
Convent of the Sacred Heart, circa 1880's.
(The Montclarion, 5/7/1980, 10:1)
FIGURE 21:
Orchard, looking north to convent (no date)
(Sisters of the Presentation, 'Our Golden Jubilee', c 1904)
FIGURE 22:
Convent and Garden (no date)
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 23:

Convent and Garden (no date)
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 24:

Northeast corner of garden
(no date)

('The Presentation', June, 1919)
FIGURE 25:

Northwest corner of garden
(no date)
(Sisters of Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 26:
Grotto (no date)
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 27:

Grotto, circa 1921-22

(Collection of Father Harry Morrison)
The grotto of Massabielle of Lourdes, France.

FIGURE 28:
Grotto of Massabielle,
Lourdes.
(The New Catholic Encyclopaedia)
FIGURE 29:

The Grotto. Byrne/DeMartini wedding, circa 1941.
(Sisters of the Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 30:
Garden, viewed from roof of convent (no date)
(Sisters of Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 31:
Garden, viewed from roof of convent, 1927
(Sisters of Presentation Archives)
FIGURE 34

California Street hedge, viewed from west yard of convent (no date)

(Il Presentazione, May, 1918)
FIGURE 35

Convent and grounds, viewed from California Street (no date)
(Collection of Father Harry Morrison)