

State of California  The Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
 HRI #
 Trinomial
NRHP Status Code

Other
 Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Listings

Page 1 of 9 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 1 N. San Antonio Road

P1. Other Identifier: HRI #15: Civic Center Orchard

*P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

*a. County Santa Clara and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad Mountain View Date 2021 T 37 ; R 78 ; NE 1/4 of of Sec ;

B.M.

c. Address 1 N. San Antonio Road City Los Altos Zip 94022

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone , mE/ mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, decimal degrees, etc., as appropriate)

APN 170-42-029, 170-43-001

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The Civic Center Orchard is part of the Civic Center complex on a block bound by Angela Drive to the north, Cielito Drive and Eleanor Avenue to the east, Hillview Avenue to the south, and San Antonio Road to the west. The civic center complex consists of City Hall, Los Altos Police Department, Los Altos Community Center, Los Altos Library, J. Gilbert Smith House, Los Altos History Museum, Hillview Baseball Field, Hillview Park, a playground, and parking areas. The surrounding area is a mix of residential and commercial buildings. (See Continuation Sheet.)

*P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP39 Other (orchard)

*P4. Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession #)

Northwest of the library, looking northeast.

P5a. Photograph or Drawing (Photograph required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: Historic Prehistoric Both

1901, June 2000 DPR form for the Civic Center Orchard

*P7. Owner and Address: City of Los Altos

*P8. Recorded by: (Name, affiliation, and address)

Treanor,
351 California St., Suite 800, San Francisco, CA 94104

*P9. Date Recorded: January 20, 2025

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe) Intensive Survey

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.") None.

*Attachments: None Location Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object

Record

Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record
 Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List):

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) HRI #15: Civic Center Orchard *NRHP Status Code CA REG: 5S1
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B1. Historic Name: _____

B2. Common Name: Civic Center Orchard

B3. Original Use: Agricultural B4. Present Use: Mixed

*B5. Architectural Style: N/A

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

Established 1901.

*B7. Moved? No Yes Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

*B8. Related Features: J. Gilbert Smith House

B9a. Architect: N/A b. Builder: N/A

*B10. Significance: Theme Early Development/Agriculture Area Los Altos

Period of Significance. c.1900-1961 (50 year mark) Property Type Orchard

Applicable Criteria NR/CR/Local (A/1, B/2)

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)
In 1901, J. Gilbert Smith purchased land near San Antonio Road (then Giffin Road), on which he constructed a house and planted a small number of apricot trees. Over the years, he and his wife, Margaret Hill Smith, purchased more land that eventually totaled 15 acres. The land was used to grow apricot trees, except for approximately 1 acre of land around the house, which was reserved for yard space. In 1954, the Smiths sold a portion of their land to the City of Los Altos. Their home and the surrounding nearly acre of land was not part of that sale, however a provision in their wills stated the house and land be donated to the City upon their deaths.¹
(See Continuation Sheet.)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) N/A

*B12. References:
See Continuation Sheets.

B13. Remarks: This DPR form updates previous DPRs completed for the site, 2000 and 2011.

*B14. Evaluator: Treanor *Date of Evaluation: January 20, 2025

(This space reserved for official comments.)



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*P3a. Description, Continued:

The Civic Center Orchard is one of the last remaining orchards in Los Altos, and additionally holds significance for being planted by early Los Altos resident, J. Gilbert Smith. In 1981, the Civic Center Orchard was designated as a historical landmark in the City of Los Altos, as described in Resolution No. 81-23. The historical designation included the J. Gilbert Smith House and its surrounding garden. The legal description of the property, as taken from Resolution No. 81-23, discusses the boundaries of three parcels and includes a clause that reads: "All other structures on the land, as well as a presently undefined portion of the orchard necessary to accommodate the future Council Chambers, are specifically excluded." Since no other description is provided for the "undefined portion of the orchard," it is unknown which areas of the land were excluded in the 1981 designation boundaries. Resolution No. 91-31 was passed in 1991 and describes a modification to the historic landmark orchard boundary. While the modification is not detailed in the resolution, the boundaries are reduced since its original designation in 1981. Resolution No. 91-31 is accompanied by a hand drawn sketch labeled "Exhibit A," showing the new landmark designation boundaries of the Civic Center Orchard.

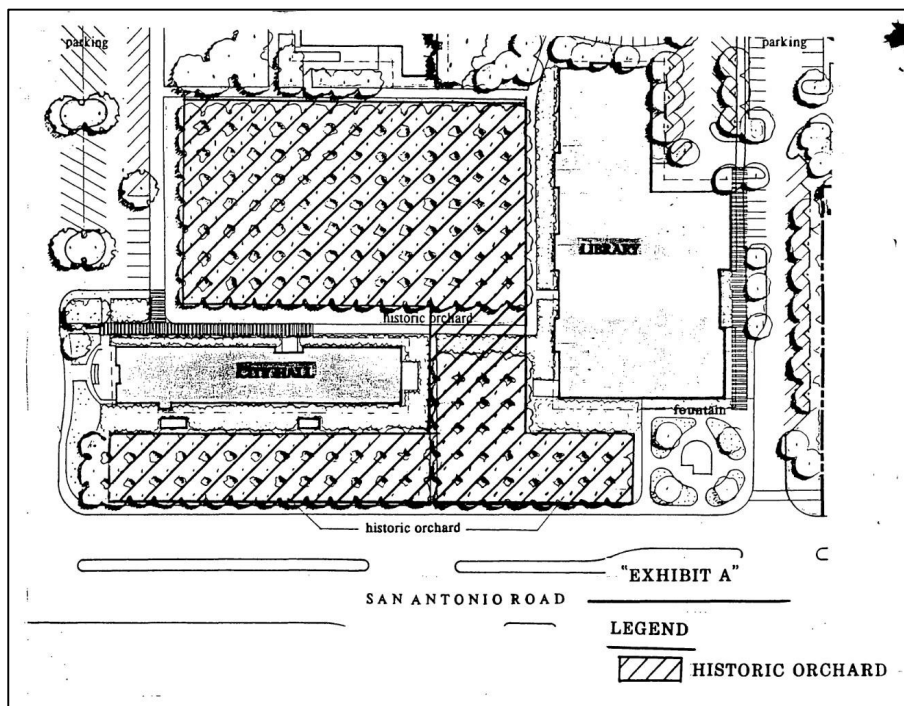


Figure 1. Exhibit A of Resolution 91-31, boundaries of the historic orchard (City Council of Los Altos Resolution No. 91-31 attachment).

The Civic Center Orchard surrounds City Hall and is largely broken up into two main areas with a strip of land east of San Antonio Road and City Hall and continues east of City Hall, occupying land south of the surface parking lot and north of the Los Altos Library. The orchard connects north of the Los Altos Library and south of City Hall. Although the boundaries of the orchard have remained the same since its modification in 1991, many trees within the orchard have been replaced over time since some have died or were removed due to disease. In early 2024, the orchard was planted with many new apricot saplings and irrigation was added.² The number of trees planted within the boundaries of the resource have varied over

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time and there is not a defined number of trees or planting sites established with the original designation in 1981 or modification in 1991.

*B6. Construction History, Continued:

Historic Context and Chronology of the Civic Center Orchard

When J. Gilbert Smith arrived in Los Altos on August 1, 1901, he purchased five acres of land near the area by San Antonio Road (formerly Giffin Road), Edith Avenue, and railroad tracks that are no longer extant. The land was undeveloped, with poppies, lupine, and trees. By 1902, Smith had planted apricots trees on the five acres and began construction on his home, the Smith House.³ Smith's orchard was developed within a period establish by the National Park Service as the United States' modern orchard fruit growing era (1881-1945). Orchards established between the years of 1881 and 1945 were characterized by a limited variety of fruit types grown within a farm because not every variety of fruit was commercially viable. Prior to this period, hundreds of fruit varieties were found on farms and orchards throughout the United States. Research did not confirm what all the types of apricot J. Gilbert Smith grew throughout his career as an orchardist, however the orchard that has been maintained by the City consists of only Blenheim apricot trees and saplings.⁴

According to *Fruitful Legacy*, a text issued by the National Park Service that provides information on the history of orchards in the United States, pruning orchard trees to have shorter trunks was a technique that began in the early 20th century and became widespread after World War II. A pruned tree trunk, approximately 18 to 36 inches in height, led to a shorter tree overall, which allowed for a more manageable canopy. The practice also encouraged early fruit bearing because the pruning also had the effect of altering the hormones of the tree. A photograph (Figure 2) taken in the early 20th century shows J. Gilbert Smith among his orchard trees, which appear to have short trunks and broad canopies. Fruit trees of this period not only featured a shorter trunk but would have been pruned to have one of a variety of canopy forms. In the historic photograph (Figure 2), Smith's fruit trees had an "open bowl vase" styled canopy, which did not have a central leader branch that extended from the center of the tree, but rather had three to five main shoots that radiated from the head of the trunk. This "open bowl vase" style created an opened center that allowed sunlight to reach deep into the canopy. This style benefited the grower since they had more control of the tree height. The central leader style was more common since it required less skill and labor since the "open bowl vase" style needed more interventions, such as pruning.⁵



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Figure 2. Gilbert Smith in his apricot orchard, early 20th century (*Los Altos Remembered*).

The typical spacing of trees in orchards also changed in the early 20th century. Earlier orchards were tightly spaced, however with the rise of tractors, wider rows were needed for the angle of turning of the machine. The rectangle shape of the orchard was adopted when a square orchard was previously more popular. Trees planted 15 feet of each other and 20 feet between rows became more common, opposed to a tighter square of the 19th century.⁶ Apricot orchards in the United States grown between 1880 and 1945 commonly held 100 trees per acre on a 20- by 20- foot grid. Contemporary apricot orchards are arranged on a 10- by 20-foot grid with 200 trees per acre.⁷ As described below in the chronology section of this report, the orchard has changed over time. The Civic Center Orchard is currently arranged on rectangular areas of land with orthogonal rows with trees spaced on an approximately 12- by 12- foot grid.

A chronology of the orchard between 1948 and 2022 is shown below through aerial photographs. The first aerial photograph below (Figure 3) is from 1948 and shows what the area looked like before the Smiths sold a portion of their land to the City of Los Altos.



Figure 3. 1948 aerial photograph of Los Altos and the approximate area of the Smith orchard blocked out in green, yellow, and orange (Google Earth Historic Imagery).

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The Smith orchard land was sold to the City of Los Altos in 1954. Shown below is an aerial photograph of the general area of the Smith orchard land in 1956 (Figure 4).

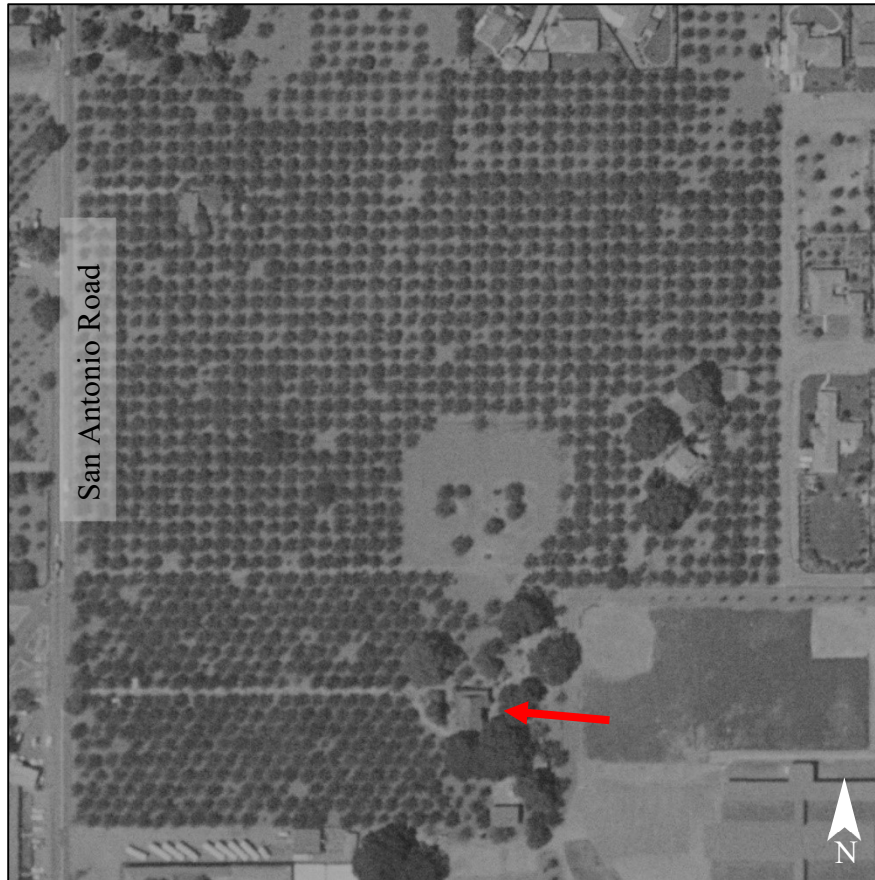


Figure 4. 1956 aerial photograph of the general area of the orchard, Smith House is identified with a red arrow.

In 1981, the City of Los Altos designated the orchard, the Smith House, and the surrounding garden as a local historical landmark, per Resolution No. 81-23, which included the boundaries of three parcels. The resolution also included a clause: “All other structures on the land, as well as a presently undefined portion of the orchard necessary to accommodate the future Council Chambers, are specifically excluded.” Since the excluded land is not specified or detailed in the resolution, the boundaries of the initial landmark designation are unclear. Shown below is a 1981 aerial photograph of the property.

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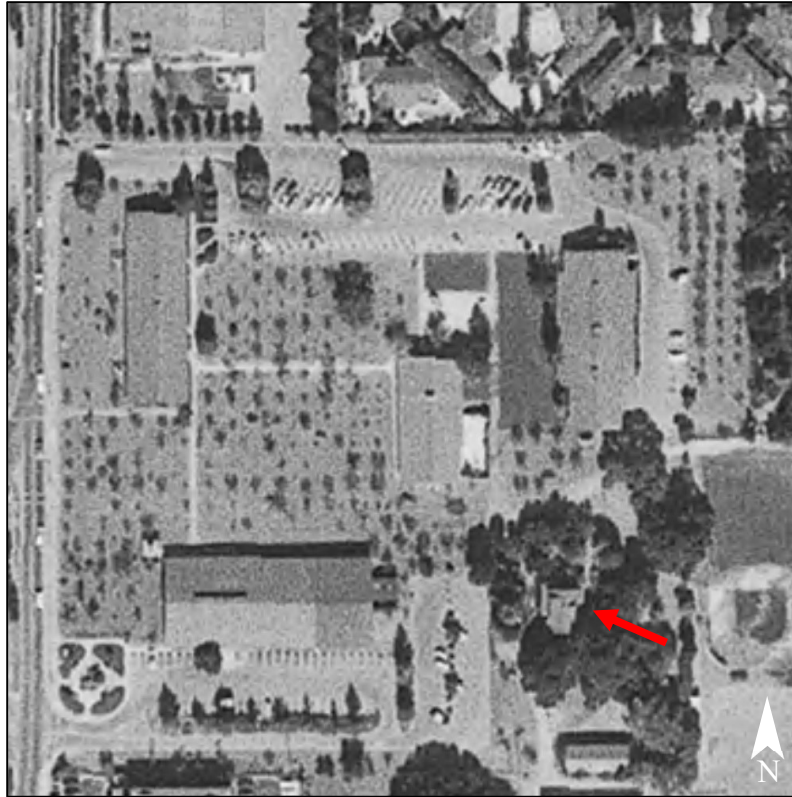


Figure 5. 1980 aerial photograph of the property a year prior to designation as a City Landmark. No specific orchard boundaries were included in the resolution, rather the language simply called out the orchard on the land described in the legal property descriptions provided, which included all three parcels previously owned by the Smiths.

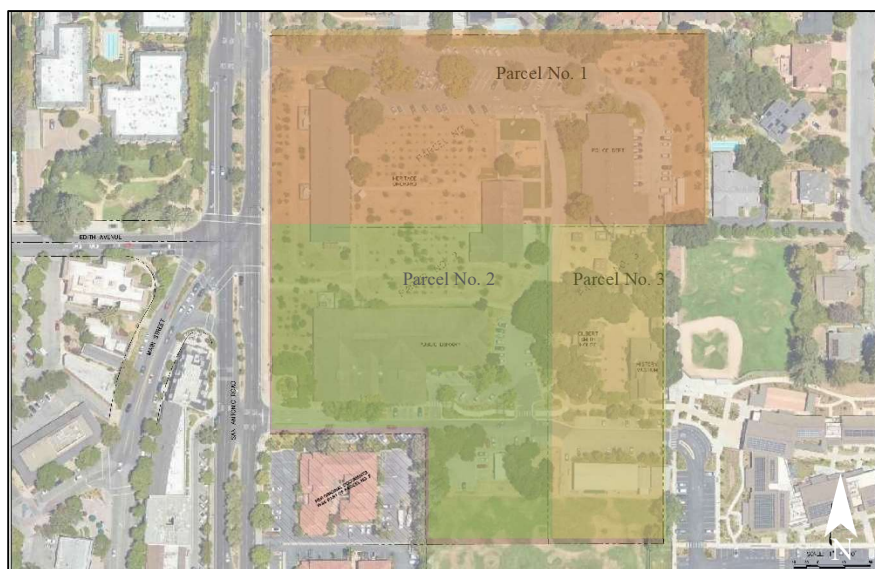


Figure 6. 2022 aerial photograph with the three parcels, as described in the legal description of Resolution No. 81-23 indicated in a graphic overlay.

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The boundaries of the Civic Center Orchard were modified in 1991, as described in Resolution No. 91-31. Included in Resolution No. 91-31 is a sketch of the boundaries of the historic orchard. Shown below is a 1991 aerial photograph with an overlay of the boundaries described in the sketch (Figure 7) and a 2022 aerial photograph with an overlay of the boundaries (Figure 8).

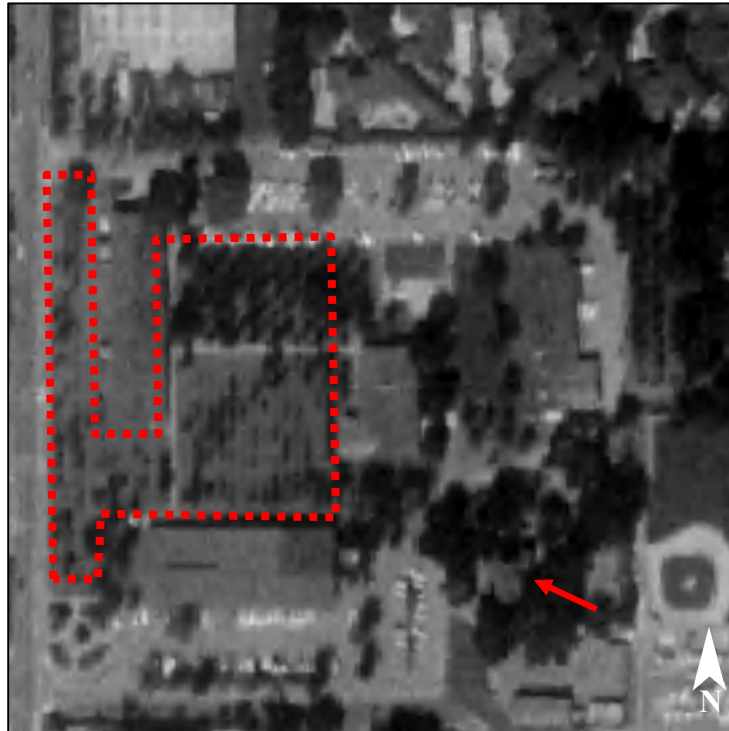


Figure 7. 1991 aerial photograph of the orchard with the boundaries as presented in Resolution No. 91-31, red arrow identifies Smith House for reference.

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Figure 8. Aerial photograph of the Civic Center, Smith House identified with a red arrow for reference (Google Earth, April 2022).

The orchard is eligible under Criteria A/1 (Association with significant events) and B/2 (Persons significant to our past). The orchard is a designated City of Los Altos Historical Landmark. In 1981, the orchard was designated a City Landmark per Resolution No. 81-23, and in 1991, the orchard's landmark boundaries were modified, per Resolution No. 91-31. Treanor concurs with the previous DPR evaluation:

The Civic Center orchard is one of the last active apricot orchards remaining in Los Altos and was first planted by early Los Altos resident, J. Gilbert Smith. Despite the orchard's decrease in size and adjacent new construction, the site retains a fair degree of integrity. Therefore, it is listed on the Los Altos Historic Resources Inventory as a Historic Resource and is assigned the California Register Status Code 5S1: "Individual property that is listed or designated locally."⁸

*B12. References (Endnotes):

¹ "To Set the Record Straight: A Letter from the Civic Center Orchard." *The Town Crier*, February 18, 1970.

² 2024 orchard maintenance background information provided by City staff.

³ Smith, J. Gilbert. "Reminiscences of J. Gilbert Smith. Notes made in 1957." in *A Collection of Historical Materials, Los Altos California*. City of Los Altos, 1957.

⁴ City of Los Altos, Maintenance Division. *Apricot Orchard Management & Guidelines*. Updated August 2016; Google Earth; Susan Dolan, *Fruitful Legacy: A Historic Context of Orchards in the United States with Technical Information for Registering Orchards in the National Register of Historic Places*, (National Park Service, 2009), 63-64.

⁵ Susan Dolan, *Fruitful Legacy: A Historic Context of Orchards in the United States with Technical Information for Registering Orchards in the National Register of Historic Places*, (National Park Service, 2009), 8, 88-91.

⁶ Susan Dolan, *Fruitful Legacy: A Historic Context of Orchards in the United States with Technical Information for Registering Orchards in the National Register of Historic Places*, (National Park Service, 2009), 90-91.

⁷ Susan Dolan, *Fruitful Legacy: A Historic Context of Orchards in the United States with Technical Information for Registering Orchards in the National Register of Historic Places*, (National Park Service, 2009), 145.

⁸ Circa: Historic Property Development. *Civic Center Orchard, 1. N San Antonio Road, Los Altos Primary Record*. July 2011.