



# The Palo Alto Flagpole: From the Circle to the Hostess House

## TIMELINE: 1908 NSGW Flagpole at University Circle

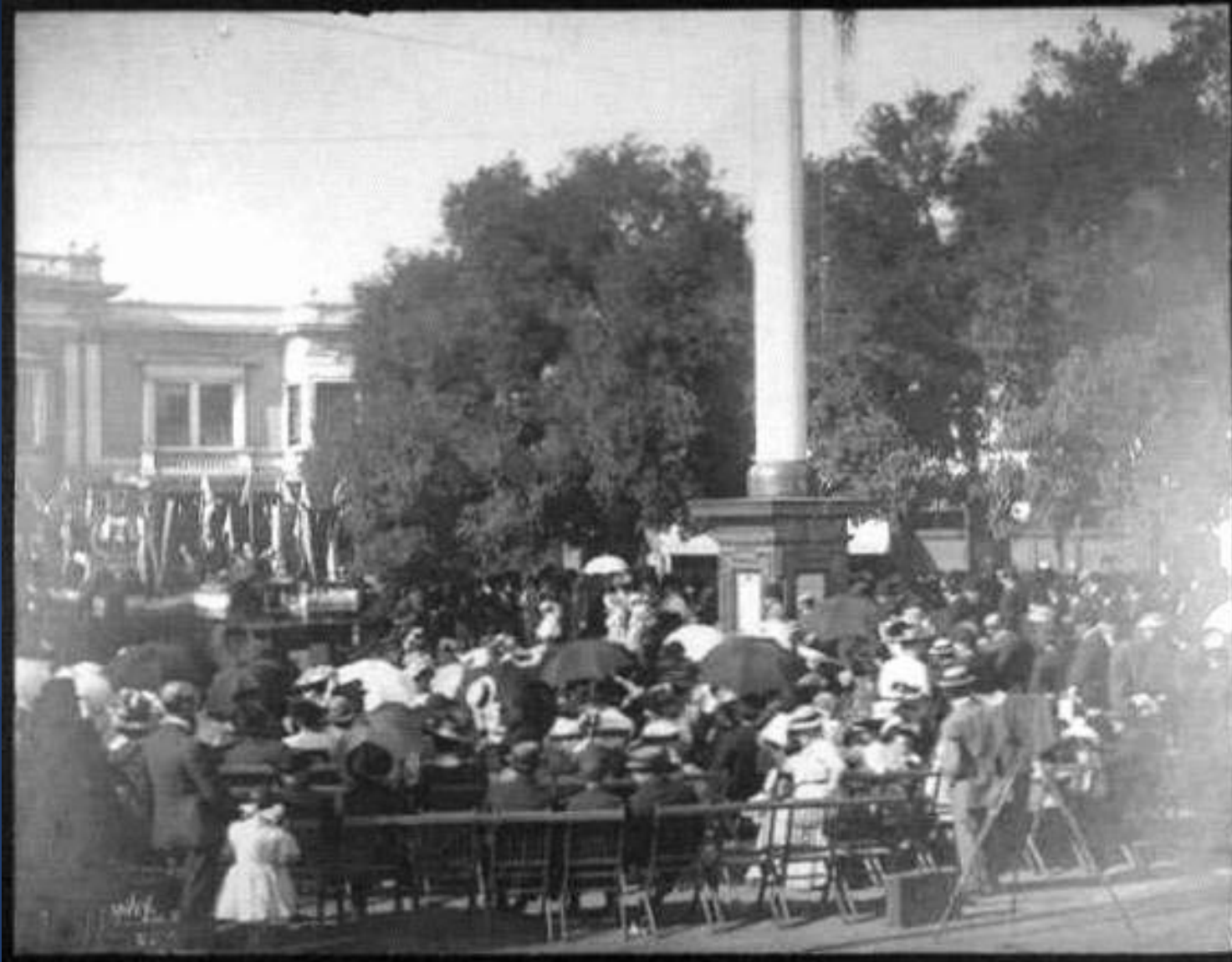


Palo Alto Trustee William Dean asked the local chapter of the fraternal organization Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW) to raise funds to buy a town flagpole in 1907.

Raising of the 206-foot flagpole at the Circle in 1908 before the plinth was placed around the base. Note the standing platform on the lower section of the pole.



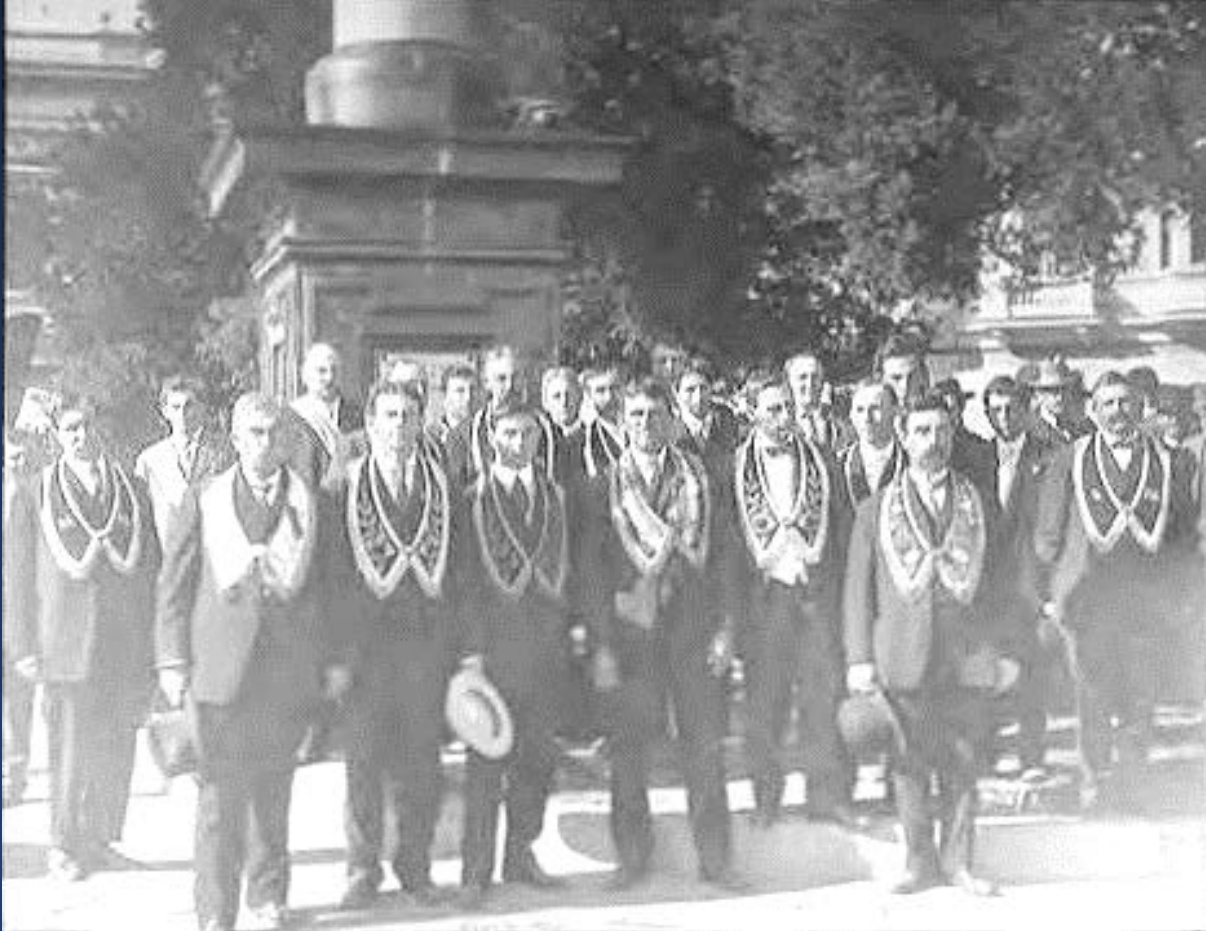
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Dedication Day of the Palo Alto flagpole at the Circle: October 26, 1908. No plaques had been made for the plinth yet.



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In addition to the NSGW, the Native Daughters of the Golden West, the Grand Army of the Republic and the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County agreed to each provide a plaque for the plinth.

The Native Sons of the Golden West at the flagpole dedication, wearing their ceremonial sashes.

## TIMELINE: Circa 1918 NSGW Flagpole at University Circle



The Palo Alto Flagpole held pride of place at the Circle, standing on a corner of University Avenue.

Cadets marched past the pole in 1918, after America joined in fighting WWI.



## TIMELINE: 1918 Hostess House at Camp Fremont, Menlo Park



The YWCA Hostess House at Camp Fremont in Menlo Park was designed by master architect Julia Morgan in the Bay Tradition style. It was used between 1918 and 1919 to provide entertainment to the soldiers but, more importantly, provided aid to both soldiers and their families in numerous ways.



TIMELINE: 1919 Hostess House moved to El Camino Park, Palo Alto\*



The new Community Center opened on Armistice Day, November 11, 1919.

The town of Palo Alto paid \$1 to own the Hostess House, valued at \$20,000 at the time. Moved in pieces to its current site in Palo Alto in mid-1919, it was used as a municipal community center from 1919 until 1935 or 1936.

\*Stanford University is the landowner; Stanford leased El Camino Park to the City of Palo Alto in 1915



## TIMELINE: 1920 Hostess House receives flagpole from American Legion Post 52



Mr. Archibald, who moved the structure, bought the new flagpole. Members of the new veterans group, Palo Alto-Stanford Fremont Post 52 of the American Legion, paid for the flag and volunteered their time and labor in raising the pole sometime between June 10, 1920 and July 16, 1920. New landscaping surrounded the flagpole.



## TIMELINE: 1920 – 1941 Multiple flagpoles



Between 1920 and 1941 there were multiple flagpoles: the NSGW pole at the Circle and the American Legion pole at the Hostess House (Community Center). Two additional flagpoles were mounted on the front of the Hostess House.

## TIMELINE: 1932 – 1941 American Legion Flagpole at Hostess House

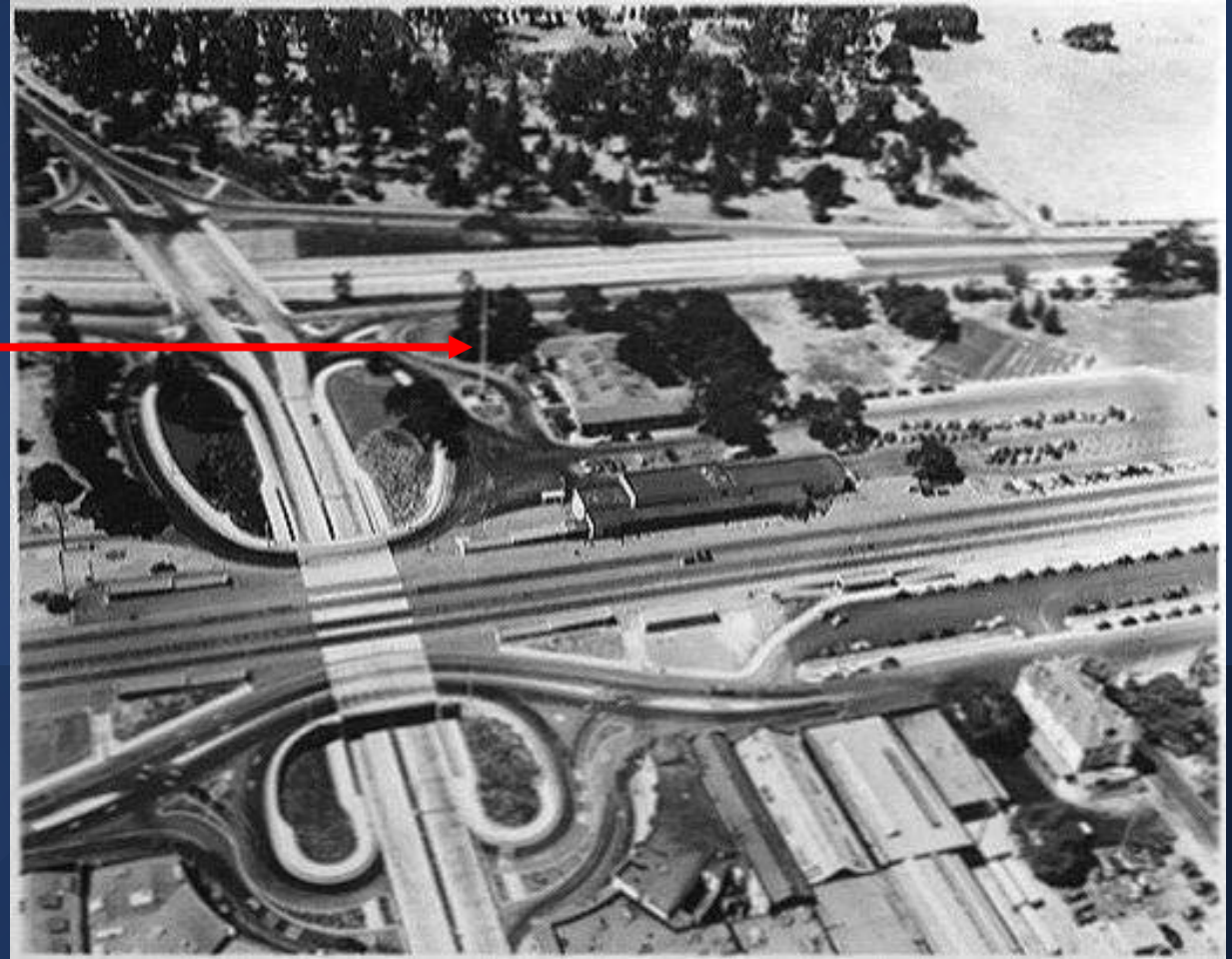


The Hostess House flagpole ca. 1932-1941. The Community Center program moved to the Lucie Stern Theater and Community Center on Middlefield and a local veterans' group leased the building from 1937-1976.



## TIMELINE: 1941 NSGW flagpole relocated from University Circle to Hostess House

Construction of the new underpass began in 1940 (*below*). The Palo Alto flagpole moved from the Circle to the Hostess House (Veterans Building) in 1941 (*right*).





## TIMELINE: 1941 NSGW flagpole dedicated at Hostess House

The 206-foot Palo Alto flagpole and plinth in front of the Hostess House (Veterans Building) and across from the new train depot.

Dedication Day: March 8, 1941. Although it was reported in the newspaper the flagpole suffered from dry rot, it was still moved from its original site to the Hostess House in 1941.



## TIMELINE: 1957 NSGW flagpole shortened

The Palo Alto Fire Department shortened the flagpole in 1957.



TIMELINE: After 1966 NSGW flagpole replaced



A veteran gazes upward at the NSGW flagpole in 1966.



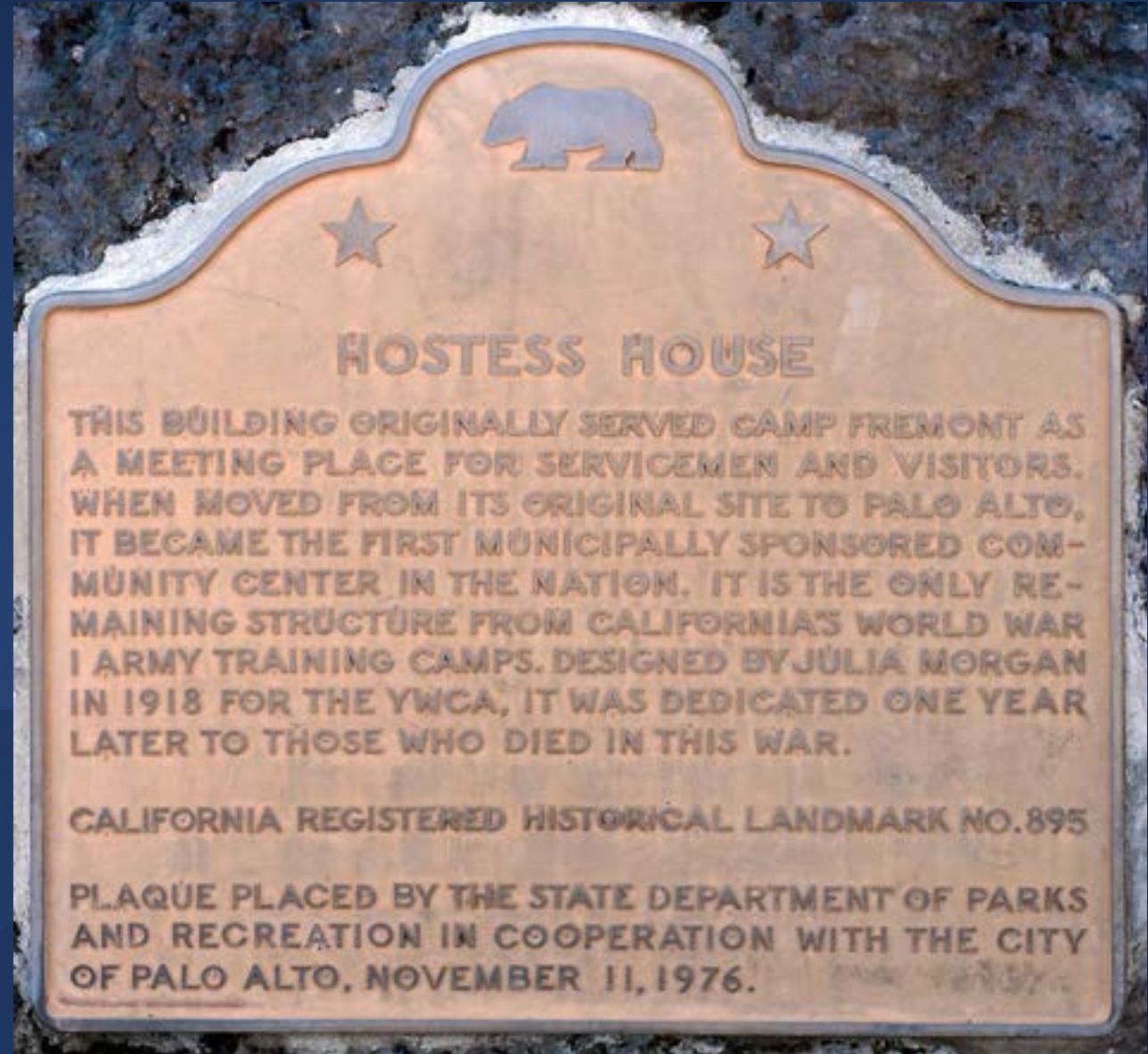
This undated photo of the empty plinth suggests a new flagpole, different from the original NSGW flagpole, was purchased at some point after 1966. The existing flagpole is metal (the NSGW flagpole was constructed of wood) and has no standing platform.



## TIMELINE: 1974-76 Demolition proposal by City leads to listing as a landmark and on National Register



In 1974 the Palo Alto City Manager announced the building would be razed once the Veterans' lease expired in 1976. Interest rose in saving the building. PAHA volunteers organized to nominate the property and the former Hostess House became a California Registered Historical Landmark in 1976.



## TIMELINE: 1976 Hostess House listed on National Register of Historic Places



The YWCA Hostess House was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. It was found significant for being the only surviving WWI training camp structure in California, a distinguished example of the Bay Region architectural style by Julia Morgan, and the first community center building in the US established by a municipality in 1976.



## TIMELINE: 1979-81 Hostess House rehabilitated and leased to MacArthur Park restaurant

In 1979 a contractor optioned a lease for the Hostess House from the City of Palo Alto, renovated it, and sold the lease to the owner of a restaurant named MacArthur Park in 1981. Veterans' groups continue to use meeting room.

The City of Palo Alto ended its management of Hostess House in 1999. The restaurant lease is now managed by Stanford University.



The flagpole and plinth in 2007.



TIMELINE: 2021 NSGW Flagpole base vandalized by copper thieves,  
Stanford boxed the base to prevent further damage



## TIMELINE: 2021 NSGW Flagpole plaques removed for storage





# Historical Resource Status: Hostess House is significant at national and state level

National Register of Historic Places: Hostess House  
Period of significance: 1918 - 1936

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SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

PREHISTORIC

1400-1499

1500-1599

1600-1699

1700-1799

1800-1899

1900

ARCHAEOLOGY PREHISTORIC

ARCHAEOLOGY HISTORIC

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

ART

COMMERCE

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNITY PLANNING

CONSERVATION

ECONOMICS

EDUCATION

ENGINEERING

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

INDUSTRY

INVENTION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

LAW

LITERATURE

MILITARY

MUSE

PHILOSOPHY

POLITICS-GOVERNMENT

RELIGION

SCIENCE

SCULPTURE

SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN

THEATER

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES

May 1918

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Julia Morgan

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

1. The Hostess House is the only intact building remaining from the two Army training camps established in California during World War I.  
At the closing of Camp Fremont in Menlo Park, south of San Francisco, the Army's buildings were dismantled and sold for lumber salvage. The exceptions were buildings still needed for hospital purposes, but eventually all of these were razed, also. The buildings built and equipped by organizations at the request of the War Department were sold or moved by the owners. All of the Y.M.C.A. buildings at Camp Fremont were moved and renovated; the Knights of Columbus building was moved to Belmont and has been demolished.  
None of the World War I buildings remain at Camp Kearny.

2. The Hostess House is a distinguished example of a simple, functional but artistic design by Julia Morgan, California's early woman architect-engineer.  
The War Department requested that the Y.W.C.A. build, equip, and maintain structures in forty continental Army training camps. Identified as Hostess Houses, they were a safe and dignified meeting places for women and children coming to military posts to visit friends, husbands, and relatives enlisted in the service.  
In California responding to a rock-bottom budget Julia Morgan's design for the Y.W.C.A. is a good example of use of well defined lines, attractively and interestingly proportioned with her keynote "signature" of exposed, functional wood trusses in the main hall. Characteristically, she combined craftsman's artistic qualities with the utilitarian needs of a Hostess House.

3. Subsequently the structure provided the basic concept as well as the shelter for a community center. After moving the Hostess House to adjoining Palo Alto and dubbing it the Community House, it became the first community center in the United States established and supported by a municipality. (Similar programs were being supported simultaneously elsewhere by private organizations.)

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Steilberg, Walter T., "Some Examples of the Work of Julia Morgan." Architect and Engineer of California, LV (November 1918), 102, 106, 107.

Wood, Dallas E. History of Palo Alto. Palo Alto, 1939. pp. 151-154.

City of Palo Alto Council Minutes, Planning Commission Minutes, and Annual Reports of the Community Center Commission.

10

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

A

ACREAGE OF DONATED PROPERTY

0.10 acres

3 1/2 Acres

UTM REFERENCES

A

1 0

3 7

3 8

5 0

4 4

4 1

4 8

B

1 0

3 7

3 8

5 0

4 4

4 1

4 8

C

1 0

3 7

3 8

5 0

4 4

4 1

4 8

D

1 0

3 7

3 8

5 0

4 4

4 1

4 8

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Hostess House was moved onto land which is leased from Stanford University. The building was placed at the eastern end of the narrow strip, which is bounded by the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, El Camino Real, and two railroad crossings -- Alma and University avenues. Community House recreational activities led to the designation, El Camino Park.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTRIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

11

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dorothy F. Regnery, Exec. Board Member

DATE

13 October 1975

ORGANIZATION

Palo Alto Historical Association

STREET & NUMBER

488 Westridge Drive

TELEPHONE

415-854-5074

CITY OR TOWN

Portola Valley, California

STATE

California

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STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Signature

Harold M. Jones

DATE

2-5-76

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

7-30-76

ATTEST

DATE

2-5-76

ATTEST

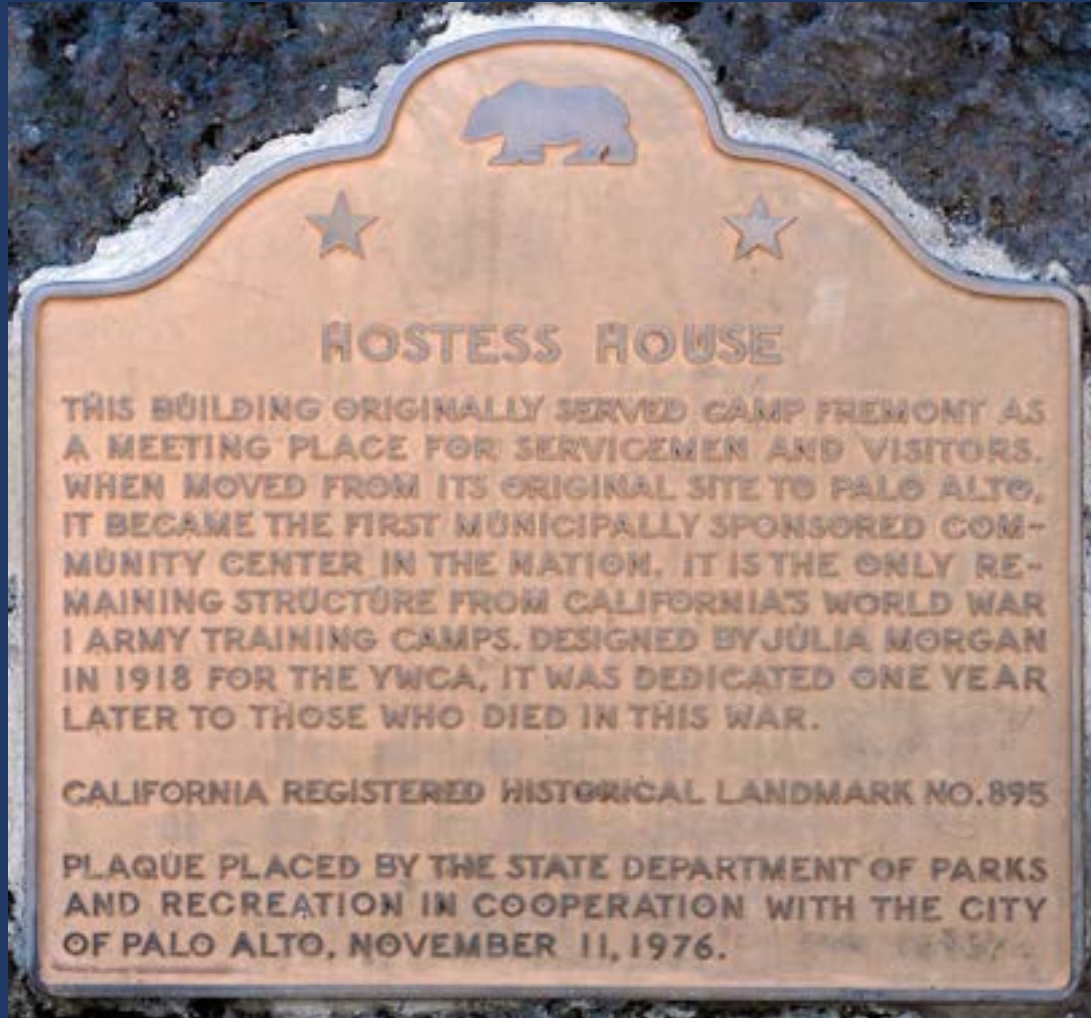
DATE

2-5-76



Historical Resource Status: Hostess House is significant at national and state level

### California Historical Landmark: Hostess House




California Historical Landmarks (Landmarks) are buildings, sites, features, or events that are of statewide significance.

## Historical Resource Status: NSGW Flagpole is significant at local level

### California Point of Historical Interest: First Community Center and Palo Alto's City Flagpole

FORM IS ON NCR (NO CARBON REQUIRED) PAPER. PLEASE USE TYPEWRITER. SIGN ALL 3 COPIES; REMOVE AND RETAIN PINK COPY. TRANSMIT ORIGINAL AND TRIFLICATION TO: DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION, P. O. BOX 2350, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95811. DO NOT FOLD.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—RESOURCES AGENCY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION <b>POINT OF HISTORICAL INTEREST</b>		DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BLOCK Reg. No. _____ Date _____ By _____
County <b>Santa Clara</b>	Name <b>First Community Center and Palo Alto City's Flag Pole</b>	
Location <b>Palo Alto - West of University Avenue underpass and S.P. R.R. Station</b>		
<p>Historical Significance: The <u>First Palo Alto Community House</u>, west of the underpass near the S.P.R.R. Station, is now the Veteran's Building. The First Community House (1919-1933) dates back to World War I days when it was the Hostess House operated at Camp Fremont, Menlo Park by the National War Work Council of Y.W. C.A. When crews were razing Camp Fremont the building was transferred to the City of Palo Alto for one dollar. In 1933 the present Lucie Stern Community Center in Rinconada Park with its many cultural and recreational activities continued the work and activities started in 1919 in the First Community House.</p> <p><u>Palo Alto City's Flag Pole</u> - On October 22, 1908 the N.S.G.W. dedication of the new two-unit flagpole, originally 205 feet tall, on the Circle took place. The building of the University Avenue underpass under the S.P. tracks required the pole's removal to its present site beside the Veteran's Building (First Community House). This nine-ton stick succeeded two previous Palo Alto flagpoles, the first of which was placed in front of the first elementary school in 1894.</p> <p>THIS POINT OF HISTORICAL INTEREST IS NOT A STATE REGISTERED HISTORICAL LANDMARK. DPR/LME/100</p>		
RECOMMENDED:  Signature—Chairman, County Board of Supervisors Date <b>10/21/69</b>	APPROVED:  Signature—Chairman, Historical Landmarks Advisory Committee Date _____	
DPR-147 (4-66)	68555-700 4-66 SH T&EP © DSP	

California Points of Historical Interest (Points) are buildings, sites, features, or events that are of local (city or county) significance.

# Historical Resource Status: NSGW Flagpole is significant at local level

## Palo Alto Historical Resources Inventory: Hostess House, Memorial Flag Pole as "Related Feature"

STATE OF CALIFORNIA - THE HISTORIC HERITAGE  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

UTM \_\_\_\_\_ G \_\_\_\_\_ S \_\_\_\_\_ S \_\_\_\_\_  
Lat \_\_\_\_\_ Lon \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_ S \_\_\_\_\_  
Adm \_\_\_\_\_ T2 \_\_\_\_\_ T3 \_\_\_\_\_ C1 \_\_\_\_\_ HABS \_\_\_\_\_ HAER \_\_\_\_\_ F1 \_\_\_\_\_

IDENTIFICATION Cat. I

1. Common name: Veterans Memorial Building

2. Historic name, if known: Hostess House

3. Street or rural address: 27 University Avenue  
City: Palo Alto ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ County: Santa Clara

4. Present owner, if known: City of Palo Alto Address: 250 Hamilton Avenue  
City: Palo Alto ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ Ownership is: Public ☒ Private ☐

5. Present Use: Restaurant & Veterans Center Original Use: Hostess House, Camp Fremont  
Other past uses: Veterans Memorial Building, first Palo Alto Community Center (1919-1935)

DESCRIPTION

6. Briefly describe the present physical appearance of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

This straight-forward, H-shaped, single-wall board and batten building was originally (1918) the Hostess House at Camp Fremont, in Menlo Park. Its function, thus, made its roomy reception hall its main attraction, with hospitable brick fireplaces under overhanging balconies at each end. Verandas across both front and back, and ample fenestration, invited outdoor as well as indoor activities. The legs of the "H" provided various-sized interior spaces for multiple uses. Some expansion and closure of rear spaces has occurred, although the structure, in the main, retains its original form.

7. Locational sketch map (draw and label site and surrounding streets, roads, and prominent landmarks):

NORTH ↑

ALMA ST  
SOUTHERN PACIFIC TRACKS  
EL CAMINO REAL  
UNIVERSITY

8. Approximate property size:  
Lot size (in feet) Frontage: \_\_\_\_\_  
Depth: \_\_\_\_\_  
or approx. acreage 10.69 (portion of El Camino Park).

9. Condition: (check one)

a. Excellent ☒ b. Good ☐ c. Fair ☐  
d. Deteriorated ☐ e. No longer in existence ☐

10. Is the feature: a. Altered? ☒ b. Unaltered? ☐

11. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary)

a. Open land ☐ b. Scattered buildings ☐  
c. Densely built-up ☐ d. Residential ☐  
e. Commercial ☒ f. Industrial ☐  
g. Other ☐ near railroad right-of-way

12. Threats to site:

a. None known ☒ b. Private development ☐  
c. Zoning ☐ d. Public Works project ☐  
e. Vandalism ☐ f. Other ☐

13. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s): 1978

NOTE: The following (items 14-19) are for structures only.

14. Primary exterior building material: a. Stone ☐ b. Brick ☐ c. Stucco ☐ d. Adobe ☐ e. Wood ☒  
f. Other ☐

15. Is the structure: a. On its original site? ☐ b. Moved? ☒ c. Unknown? ☐

16. Year of initial construction: 1918 This date is: a. Factual ☒ b. Estimated ☐

17. Architect (if known): Julia Morgan

18. Builder (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

19. Related features: a. Barn ☐ b. Carriage house ☐ c. Outhouse ☐ d. Shed(s) ☐ e. Formal garden(s) ☐  
f. Windmill ☐ g. Watertower/tankhouse ☐ h. Other ☒ Memorial Flag Pole. i. None ☐  
Native Sons of the Golden West #216, 1908

SIGNIFICANCE

20. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site when known):

This notable example of traditional Craftsman design by a distinguished architect is important to the local social history (it is California Historical Landmark #895). Said to be the only remaining structure from Camp Fremont, California's World War I military training camp at Menlo Park, it was moved to its present site in 1919, and deeded to the City. It became the first municipally-sponsored community center in the U.S. During the 1920s, it was the home of the local "little theatre" organizations as well as the site for a variety of public activities, programs and meetings. As its community functions shifted to the Lucie Stern Center in the 1930s and, long after World War II, its use as a Veterans Center declined, it deteriorated physically and became a candidate for demolition. In 1980, however, the City invited proposals for rehabilitation and new uses by private developers, the result of which was the approval of plans to convert the building—with minor exterior changes and an intent to restore its original appearance—to a restaurant.

21. Main theme of the historic resource: (Check only one): a. Architecture ☐ b. Arts & Leisure ☐  
c. Economic/Industrial ☐ d. Exploration/Settlement ☐ e. Government ☐ f. Military ☐  
g. Religion ☐ h. Social ☒

22. Sources: List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews, and their dates:  
Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places; Palo Alto Historical Association files.

23. Date form prepared: 1981 By (name): Historic Resources Board  
Address: 250 Hamilton Avenue City: Palo Alto, Ca 94301 ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
(State Use Only)