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California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Fortuna Headquarters

Susie Van Kirk

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California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Fortuna Headquarters

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Introduction

The first phase of the City of Fortuna’s Rohner Creek flood control project will involve channel modification, widening, and bank stabilization to reduce flooding of bordering properties. Two buildings at the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Headquarters (118 Fortuna Blvd.) are slated for demolition and will not be replaced. To comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, Section 15064.5, (CEQA), the CAL FIRE buildings were researched and assessed for historic significance.

In the course of researching the two CAL FIRE buildings, information about other buildings at the Fortuna Headquarters complex was located. Incorporated into this report, that information documents all of the Headquarters buildings and provides an expanded context for the two buildings.

Findings

1. The Division of Forestry District Headquarters was relocated from Dyerville to Fortuna in 1941.
2. The first construction in 1941-42 consisted of a headquarters building (now the Fire Station), which housed the office and a barracks; followed by the Five-Bay and Seven-Bay garages in 1943; and a warehouse (southern portion of present Command Center) about 1944.
3. A new office (present Headquarters) was constructed in 1948.
4. The Gas and Oil House was built about 1951.
5. The Resource Management building and the Shop were built in 1959.
6. Additions to the original warehouse, barracks, and headquarters and to the present headquarters building have been made, along with building alterations, notably replacement of original wood-frame windows with modern windows and some siding changes.
7. The Headquarters complex retains a measure of integrity represented in one-story buildings, wood construction, paint color, compatible additions, and relative good preservation of the original architecture. Siding changes are evident, but are not particularly intrusive. The significant intrusions, not only to individual structures, but to the entire complex, are replacement of wood-frame windows with modern ones and the installation of new windows where none had existed.
8. Major intrusive alterations—replacement of the original redwood doors on the bays, addition of a door, and the conversion of the westernmost bay into an office—have degraded the architectural integrity of the Five-Bay Garage.
9. The Shop has suffered some alterations—the west-end addition and installation of modern windows in the clerestory. Its size and function preclude
architectural compatibility with the other buildings in the complex; furthermore, it lacks a defining architecture that associates it with any particular style or period of construction.

10. Demolition of the Shop and the Five-Bay Garage will not result in a significant impact to the environment under CEQA, although the clear redwood in these buildings is of significant value.

11. Sheet piling of corrugated steel panels four feet wide was placed along the creek bank for stabilization following removal of an underground tank. It is located in the triangle created by the eastern end of the Five-Bay Garage and the western end of the Shop.

Methods

Land ownership histories were researched in the Recorder’s Office, Humboldt County Courthouse, Eureka. Other helpful resources in the Recorder’s Office include surveys, maps, and the Belcher Atlas.

Local newspapers, primarily Fortuna’s Humboldt Beacon and two newspapers, the Humboldt Times and Garberville’s Redwood Record, were read on microfilm at Humboldt State University Library, Arcata. By reading issue by issue, it was possible to locate information about construction at the Headquarters and personnel stationed there over the years. Several references provided general information about the Division of Forestry and one, Thornton (1994), addressed three pre-1945 buildings still in use at Fortuna.

Steve Grantham, RPA, Humboldt-Del Norte Unit, CAL FIRE, responded to questions via several emails. Jim Moranda, a fifty-plus-year employee of CAL FIRE, was exceptionally helpful by providing crucial information about the Fortuna Headquarters complex. Hugh Scanlon and Bev Powers, CAL FIRE Headquarters, assisted with architect plans and historic photographs. Russell, one of the mechanics in the Shop, supplied information about that building. Several site visits were made in February and March at which time photographs were taken.

Historic Context

What is today known as the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection—CAL FIRE—has a history that dates back 130 years, when the first, but short-lived Board of Forestry was established. Authorized by the California Legislature and signed into existence in March 1885, the three-member Board was to prepare statistics about forestry and tree culture, assist in enforcing laws, and “to act with a special view” to the continuance of water sources that could be affected by forest destruction. Since there were no trained foresters in California at the time,
initial forest inventories were conducted by engineers. Hubert Vischet spent three and a half months in northwestern California, gathering information on the redwood forests and logging. Either due to the cost of maintaining the Board or political squabbling, or perhaps both, the 1885 legislation was repealed in 1893, bringing an end to California’s first attempt at management and protection of the State’s forests and the termination of the country’s first Board of Forestry (Clar 1959).

Twelve years later, another attempt on behalf of California’s forests was made with the passage of the Act of March 18, 1905.

…primarily through the efforts of Governor George Pardee and his friend U.S. Forester Gifford Pinchot, the Board of Forestry was reconstituted and the office of State Forester established. Yet the legislature declined to appropriate funds for forest protection. Until the first World War, the State Forester could accomplish little except decry the treatment of forest lands and the poverty of his office. Fire protection, such as it was, was accomplished at county or private expense under the direction of volunteer State Fire Wardens. (Dept. of Natural Resources 1957)

After the war, the Board of Forestry and its impoverished State Forester began to receive much-needed attention, particularly in the areas of fire prevention and control. In 1919, four rangers were hired for the summer months with a state appropriation and matching federal funds and the following year, the ranger program was expanded to cover ten districts (Dept. of Natural Resources 1957; Thornton 1994). Merritt B. Pratt, appointed State Forester in November 1921, oversaw the slow, but steady development of the once-faltering agency through a 23-year period of growth, restructuring, and expanded responsibilities.

In 1927, major changes in State administration were implemented by the progressive Governor C.C. Young. Those boards and commissions responsible for the State’s natural resources, such as forests, parks, petroleum, and fish and game, were placed under a Department of Natural Resources. A Division of Forestry was created and the State Forester took the helm as its director (Dept. of Natural Resources 1957). Ranger districts were established throughout California, and within each district, camps were located at strategic points for the quickest possible response to wild fires. The first fire suppression crews were organized in the early part of the 1930s and, with the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, Division of Forestry rangers supervised CCC crews in the construction of firebreaks, roads, lookouts, and administrative and fire suppression bases (Clar 1959). Because the CCC crews were expected to fight forest fires, they
“constituted the single largest wildland suppression force ever assembled in American history” (Thornton 1994).

During 1934, unemployment relief work programs, including the CCC and California’s labor camps, built 13 lookouts, six ranger stations, six office buildings, four fire guard stations, nine crew barracks, five warehouses, 13 garages, 260 vehicle bridges, 50 cattle guards, 250 miles of firebreaks, 400 miles of roadway, and 270 miles of Division telephone lines (Clar 1959). By 1940 the Division was supervising hundreds of men in fire crews and putting tank trucks on the front lines. With a communications system, fire camps, ranger stations, and an extensive road network in place, the Division had become a highly-organized and efficient agency (“California Conservationist” Oct. 1940).

It was at this point that the Division of Forestry district headquarters for Humboldt and Del Norte counties was relocated to Fortuna. Although the Division has, over the years, assumed responsibility for other programs, including State Forests, nurseries, pest control, service forestry, and administration of the Forest Practice Rules, its first allegiance has always been the prevention, detection, and suppression of wild fires. No longer a Board of Forestry, or Division of Forestry or Department of Forestry or even the present formal identification as the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, today’s agency proudly calls itself, CAL FIRE, in upper case letters!

**Fortuna Headquarters**

Establishment of a Division of Forestry presence in Humboldt county is connected with a state-wide event of 1910. That year, the good people of California agreed to an $18,000,000 bond issue for the construction of two primary highway systems, a coastal route linking the San Francisco Bay region with Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte counties, all the way to the Oregon line, and an interior one through the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys (Humboldt Times 18 Nov. 1910). The campaign to create a redwood park in Humboldt county began to receive the attention it needed when construction through the ancient redwood groves brought not only their magnificence to the Nation’s attention, but also their on-going destruction at the hands of tie and grape-stake makers. The resulting save-the-redwoods movement brought together an unlikely alliance—businessmen and conservationists. The Eureka business community championed highway construction and preservation of bordering redwood trees, recognizing the economic rewards of tourists traveling northward to see the famous redwoods (Humboldt Standard 9 Aug. 1919, 13 Aug. 1919).
Construction of the soon-to-be-known Redwood Highway through Sonoma and even well into Mendocino county moved along at a reasonable clip, but the push into Humboldt was agonizingly slow. The 1910s saw bits and pieces of road completed to Eureka, until there was a sufficient “highway” to traverse in a motorized vehicle. Completion of the highway to Del Norte and then to the Oregon border dragged on through the 1920s (Leach 2001).

Meanwhile, Save-the-Redwoods League, founded in 1918, galvanized the local movement. Their collective effort found support throughout California and across the Nation all the way to the legislative halls and cabinet-level offices in Washington. The first redwood groves intended for preservation were often purchased with private funds, but so committed was the local campaign, that even the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors pitched in (Humboldt Standard 8 Aug., 13 Sept., 14 Oct., 23 Oct., 27 Nov. 1919).

Because there was no California park system at the time, the default holder and manager of these first “parks” was the Board of Forestry. When a 1921 State appropriation provided sufficient money for serious acquisition of redwood groves, the Board of Forestry designated Deputy State Forester Solon Williams to secure land along the Redwood Highway adjacent to the South Fork Eel River.

Humboldt Redwood Park Now Open To Public—The Humboldt Redwood Park situated between Garberville and South Fork on “The Redwood Highway,” Humboldt county, is California’s newest and most beautiful forest park, having been acquired by the State Forestry Board during the past year.

Through the combined efforts of the Eureka Chamber of Commerce, the Save the Redwoods League, Judge F.A. Cutler, Senator H.C. Nelson, Assemblyman F.J. Cummings and many businessmen and club women throughout the state, the State Legislature in 1921 made an appropriation of $300,000 for the purpose of purchasing tracts of redwoods along both sides of “The Redwood Highway” in Humboldt county, the same to be set aside as a park whose trees should never fall victim of the woodsman’s axe.

Solon H. Williams, Deputy State Forester and a member of the State Forestry Board, was assigned the task of purchasing the various tracts of timber and to act as supervisor of the park. Remarkable progress has been made by Williams since the first of the year. The total amount of timberland now in the park comprises an area of approximately 2200 acres and borders each side of “The Redwood Highway” for a distance of about 12 miles. The work of securing additional tracts is still underway and when all of the tracts have been purchased, it is anticipated that the whole section between Dyerville Flats on the north and Miranda on the south will be included in the park reservation.

A splendid home for G.E. Thompson, the park ranger in charge, has been constructed on the old Dunn and Dimmick property midway between the north and south
boundaries of the reservation. One of the attractive features of this house is the immense stone fireplace which contains 30 tons of stone. Other buildings thus far constructed consisting of an electric light plant and pumping station, garage and home for the Superintendent, all of which have been constructed at the small cost of $5600....

The Humboldt Redwood Park is now open to the public and with the completion of the amusement and camping features by July 15th, this great redwood park will become the favorite Mecca for people from all sections of the United States, as they journey over the only “Redwood Highway” in the world. (Ferndale Enterprise 23 June 1922)

An attractive administration building of rustic design is to be erected shortly on the Dunn and Dimmick property which has been acquired as a State Redwood Park. The property is part of the South Fork of Eel River area which is being acquired in connection with the Save the Redwoods Movement. The administration building will house the park keeper, an official who will watch over the park and protect the interests of the people. He will remain in the park throughout the year. The picture was reproduced by The Standard art department from an architect’s sketch loaned by the State Board of Forestry. (Humboldt Standard 27 Oct. 1921)

Glen E. Thompson was the first State Forest Ranger located in Humboldt county, but with Governor Young’s appointment of the first State Park
Commission in November 1927 and its subsequent appointment of Colonel Charles B. Wing as Chief of the Division of Parks in January 1928, the Board of Forestry’s “park” responsibilities were transferred to the new state agency and Thompson became an employee of the Division of Parks (Engbeck 1980).

The Division of Forestry’s headquarters at Dyerville oversaw fire-suppression activities in the district, but lacking manpower and a physical presence throughout the area, the agency was limited in its capacity to carry out that responsibility. That changed on March 31, 1933, when actions in Washington created the office of Emergency Conservation Work and its offspring, the Civilian Conservation Corps, thought by many to have been the most effective of the alphabet New Deal agencies, and, in fact, was President Roosevelt’s “favorite relief agency” (Fechner 1935; Humboldt Standard 27 July 1935; Humboldt Times 9 Jan. 1937). Immediate activities in Humboldt county provided Forestry officials in Dyerville with a ready-made fire crew.

Dyerville CCC Camp. 1935. HSU Humboldt Room. Lt. Santino’s scrapbook.
New Recruits Arrive For CCC Camp; 190 Arrive at Camp at Dyerville Flats—With the arrival of 190 CCC men from Fort Knox, Ky., with officers and enlisted men, the 7th camp in the Eureka District was officially opened yesterday morning on the Eel River at Dyerville, just across the river from the beautiful Bull Creek Redwood Grove….to be known as Burlington….

With the exception of four permanent buildings, mess hall, kitchen, rest rooms and administration hall, the camp will be constructed of frame tents. In their special train was a complete camp kitchen, all necessary tents and camp equipment ready to set up.

The detachment was awestruck upon awakening yesterday morning and it is reported that their march to the camp site was extremely difficult, due to the tendency to gaze upward in viewing the grandeur so new to the eastern arrivals. (Humboldt Times 18 June 1933).

Expansion of the Eureka District’s CCC presence expanded the Division of Forestry’s presence. Camps were established at Orleans, Hawkins Bar, Big Bar, Prairie Creek, Gasquet, Mad River, and at sites in northern Mendocino (Humboldt Times 2 Oct. 1933). Operated like military detachments, the CCC camps and their well-organized enrollees provided the fire-suppression crews that Forestry needed to be an effective agency in northern California. During the 1936 fire season—an especially dry summer and fall—the Dyerville headquarters coordinated CCC, volunteer, and labor camp crews on the fire lines from Prairie Creek to southern Humboldt (Humboldt Times 13, 18, 23 Oct. 1936).

In 1935, the Dyerville CCC camp (Burlington-Humboldt) at the confluence of the South Fork and main Eel River was abandoned and the 925th company relocated to a newly-constructed camp known as Stephens Grove, now the site of Humboldt Redwoods State Park headquarters (Humboldt Standard 12 Aug. 1935. 26 Oct. 1935). It is unclear where the Division of Forestry’s Dyerville headquarters was located (or relocated), but far from its northern area of responsibility and some distance from any urban services, it was ready for a move.

Courted by the businessmen of Fortuna, the Division of Forestry announced in August 1940 that it would transfer the district office from Dyerville to Fortuna (Humboldt Times 14 Aug. 1940). At a Fortuna businessmen’s meeting that month, Paul Mudgett reported that a committee had been working for some time to relocate the district headquarters to Fortuna and, although “certain details” were yet to be worked out, Mudgett felt the most “serious difficulties” were resolved (Humboldt Beacon 16 Aug. 1940). Perhaps those details and difficulties had to do with securing a site for the new headquarters.

Land owned by Fortuna merchant B.F. Morgan was first leased to the State for a term of 49 years, commencing Nov. 1, 1940. A copy of this lease could not be
located in the Recorder’s Office but it was referenced in the deed in which Morgan transferred the property to the City of Fortuna a few weeks later (Deeds 249:174). The Division of Forestry operated under the lease arrangement with the City until November 1947, when the City gave the property to the State of California (Official Records 48:448). Attached to the deed was this sketch of the property.

At a Garberville meeting in the fall of 1940, Forest Ranger Brown reported on Division plans for the Humboldt-Del Norte District.

George W. Brown, State Forest Ranger in this area, with present headquarters at Dyerville, was guest speaker at Tuesday’s Rotary Club meeting.
Mr. Brown gave a brief history of his work with the state forestry service in this area….bringing his story up to the present time by outlining the building and improvement program now under way in Humboldt and Del Norte counties, which comprise his district.…. The former headquarters of the forestry division, located at Dyerville for many years, is to be moved to Fortuna, where a plot of ground has been purchased by the Fortuna business people and deeded to the state for this purpose. The state is to erect substantial buildings on the property and make it the permanent headquarters of the forestry division in this area…. (Redwood Record 17 Oct. 1940)

The first of those substantial buildings was “a structure that [would] house the office as well as quarters for ten men” plus a “large garage and tool shed” (Humboldt Beacon 16 Aug. 1940). Another year passed before Mr. Mudgett reported to the businessmen’s meeting that the new headquarters at the south end of town was “well under construction and that before long some 15 or 20 families [would] be stationed here” (Humboldt Beacon 5 Sept. 1941). Forest Ranger Brown supervised construction of the new headquarters, moving his family from Weott, where he had for many years made his home to be near his work at Dyerville. Despondent over ill health, George Brown took his life in November 1942 when the new headquarters was still under construction (Humboldt Beacon 6 Nov. 1942).

Bold headlines on the front page of the Humboldt Beacon, Jan. 29, 1943, announced “Forestry Building in Fortuna Dedicated at Meeting of Fortuna Rotary Club.” At the invitation of new Rotarian and District Ranger James A. Glenn, members of the Club convened at the headquarters building for lunch and to hear State Forester M.B. Pratt. At the luncheon, it was recalled that when Mr. Pratt made a local visit a few years before, he had indicated a desire to move the district headquarters from Dyerville to Fortuna to be more centrally located. Fortuna businessmen followed up, offering the headquarters site to the State and now “Fortuna has located in its midst one of the best Division headquarters in the state.” Despite the dedicatory celebration, there were still buildings yet to be completed, including a large warehouse authorized by the federal government, but others would have to wait for the “duration of the war.”

Forester Pratt made special mention of George Brown’s splendid work as a Forest Ranger and paid tribute to local cooperation and particularly mentioned the lumber companies’ willingness to take care of all fires on their own property. The Fortuna station was slated to receive two fire-fighting trucks in the near future and installation of radio communications was completed with plans for equipping automobiles and trucks with radios. In addition to Ranger Glenn, other station
personnel included William Siler, Assistant Ranger; two other assistants Ernest Siipola and Ross Dunwoody; five foremen; five truck drivers; five firemen; two cooks and an office crew of one dispatcher and two stenographers (Humboldt Beacon 29 Jan. 1943). In 1948, a new office building was added to the Division’s complex (Humboldt Beacon 15 Oct. 1948).

In late 1957, the State Architect’s office announced that during the following year, the Fortuna headquarters would be the scene of more than $50,000 in new construction, including a new house for the chief dispatcher and a new shop building, along with additional fencing and concrete surfacing of the yards (Humboldt Beacon 26 Dec. 1957.) It took another full year before the contracts were awarded for this work (Humboldt Beacon 4 Dec. 1958).

**Headquarters Buildings**

There are nine buildings on the Headquarters campus, eight of which were initially constructed by 1960 with later additions, the ninth being the large warehouse at the back of the property. Of the eight, five were constructed in the 1940s, one c. 1951 and the remaining two in 1959. Of the two buildings scheduled for demolition as part of the Rohner Creek flood control project, one was constructed in 1943, the other in 1959.

1. **Fire Station (Original Headquarters and Barracks):** Facing the street and located adjacent to and a few feet north of the present Headquarters building, this was the initial construction identified as the “main office” and “quarters for a crew of ten men” in 1940 (Redwood Record 15 Aug. 1940). It was “well under construction” by September 1941 (Humboldt Beacon 5 Sept. 1941). In his inventory and evaluation of Forestry buildings, Thornton (1994) provided a construction date of 1942.

The combination barracks is based on a special plan drawn by the State Division of Architecture. Although there are some elements of the USFS-CCC D-11 design in this building, the pyramidal hip roof with ridge stone chimney, and general “L” floor plan are significant departures from the D-11 style. The combination barracks has been remodeled and enlarged on several occasions since original construction. It still retains a good degree of its historic architectural integrity. The surrounding area has also undergone significant change, further reducing the property’s historic integrity. (Thornton 1994)

This first construction consisted of the hipped-roof section with the cobblestone ridge chimney and an adjoining section on the south that had a front porch covered by an extension of the roof supported by three posts. Each section had a door leading from the porch. By 1944, another section was added to the
south end (Moranda personal communication). A photo from that date makes it possible to compare the front façade of that first building with that of the present one.

Fortuna Headquarters, original building with south-end addition, 1944. CAL FIRE photo coll.

The rooflines, including the hipped-roof section at the north end, a center ridge gabled section at the other end, and a connecting section with a center ridge, are unchanged. However, the open porch of the connecting section is now enclosed. Window locations appear the same, except for the added windows in the porch enclosure. Original wood-frame windows were replaced with intrusive modern materials, perhaps as recently as ten to fifteen years ago (Moranda). Siding changes have also occurred, just a piece of the original board-and-batten on the hipped-roof section is evident. The flat façade with no overhang on the gable is an identifying feature of minimal traditional houses built locally in the 1940s.

Off the back of the hipped section is the barracks which creates the “L” arrangement noted by Thornton (1994). Moranda stated that the original barracks was a structure about half the present length, the other half added in the 1960s, when the kitchen was constructed. The additions are compatible with the original buildings, confirming Thornton’s determination that the building “retains a good degree of its historic architectural integrity.”
Current Fire Station/Original Headquarters with south-end addition and enclosed porch. Photo March 2015

Barracks and addition at rear/west elevation of Fire Station/Original Headquarters. Photo Feb. 2015.
2. **Five-Bay Garage**: One of the original Headquarters buildings and planned for demolition as part of the Rohner Creek flood control project, the Five-Bay Garage was constructed soon after completion of the original headquarters building. Thornton (1994) provided a date of 1943.

![Five-Bay Garage, 1940s. CAL FIRE photo coll.](image)

The building is based on the CCC era “L” working plan series for equipment garages. As with the neighboring seven-bay garage, the subject building suffers some historic architectural integrity loss with the replacement of doors, exterior cladding changes and glazing alterations. There are three 26x60, five-bay equipment garages that predate 1945 in the CDF building collection. (Thornton 1994)

The Five-Bay Garage is a one-story building with side gables and a low center ridge. It measures 28 feet in width and extends 61 feet with 2x16-foot, gable-end storage spaces. These storage spaces are original, as confirmed by the circa 1940s photograph (CAL FIRE photo collection). The historic photo shows a front façade with five open garages, three occupied with vehicles. The front façade has no other doors and no windows. Original cladding, a wide-board, v-rustic on the main building and board-and-batten on the 2x16-foot storage spaces, remains.
Today’s building displays several alterations on the front façade. At the far eastern end, there is a door into the metal shop and at the other end, the last bay has been converted (about 2000) into the Fire Prevention Office with a modern window and door (Moranda). Although the historic photo does not show garage doors, Moranda said they were made of heavy, solid redwood with a spring operation. These doors have been replaced with non-wood material. In the rear wall are three pairs of original, square windows, featuring six panes in each, plus a modern window in the Fire Prevention Office and another modern window with simulated divisions at the east end of the wall. Three vinyl windows on the west wall and a row of four windows with simulated divisions on the east are modern alterations.

As an original part of the Headquarters complex, the Five-Bay Garage provided space for fire trucks, but later, for administrative vehicles (Moranda). Those early trucks were small enough to fit into this building. Window changes on the rear and side walls are notable, but not overly intrusive to the building’s architecture, because they are not on its “street” façade. Original cladding remains and the overall shape and size of the building have not changed. The old-growth redwood used to construct this building remains.

Thornton (1994) noted that at the time of his report, only three garages of the Five-Bay’s size and period of construction were still in the “CDF building collection.” Perhaps the other two are extant, but it has been twenty years since his report so they may be long gone. It is possible this Five-Bay is the last to go.
Alterations to the front façade, however, are major: loss of the original solid, redwood garage doors; construction of a door into the metal shop; and conversion of the westernmost bay into an office with a modern entrance and window. These unfortunate alterations have significantly changed the building’s identifying façade, resulting in substantial loss of architectural integrity. Removal of the building will not result in a significant impact to the environment.

3. **Seven-Bay Garage:** One of the original buildings of the Fortuna Headquarters complex, the Seven-Bay Garage was inventoried and evaluated by Thornton (1994). A center ridge roof terminating in flat gable façades, fixed multi-paned windows and wide v-rustic siding are typical features of local minimal traditional architecture. Originally the western elevation had a row of seven vehicle bays; now the northern bay is a storage space and the southern bay houses the telecommunications shop (Moranda). The rear/east wall has an original row of multi-paned, fixed windows arranged in pairs, probably seven in number, with singles at either end. Moranda reported a State inspector’s amazement upon viewing the building’s interior to see clear, old-growth redwood structural members. Thornton (1994) provided a 1943 date for the Seven-Bay Garage.

There are five 32x85-foot truck garages in the CDF building collection that were based on a variation of one of the USFS-CCC “N” series plans. The subject building suffered some historic architectural integrity loss due to the conversion of a vehicle stall to office space, door replacement and minor fenestration changes….(Thornton 1994)

These three buildings, constructed during the initial establishment of the Division of Forestry’s Fortuna Headquarters, exhibit modifications, but retain their historic link to that event. Thornton concludes: “The area around the compound has greatly changed since the 1930s [sic 1940s], further eroding the overall historic character of the property. However, all three recorded buildings at Fortuna are considered important cultural resources” (the original Headquarters and the Five and Seven Bay garages). Regardless of this statement, Thornton gave each building low marks for architectural integrity due to alterations and in the intervening twenty years, additional alterations have occurred, particularly to the Five-Bay Garage.
Seven-Bay Garage, north elevation. Photo Feb. 2015

Seven-Bay Garage, rear wall/east elevation. Photo Feb. 2015.
4. **Command Center (Warehouse):** This building has been considerably altered since its original construction, c. 1944. When the big dedication of the new headquarters was celebrated in January 1943, the newspaper noted that while all of the buildings were not yet completed, it was hoped that “in the near future work will start on the erection of the large warehouse.” Permission for that construction had already been received from the federal government but additional buildings would have to wait until after the war (Humboldt *Beacon* 29 Jan. 1943).

Another center-ridge, end-gable structure, this building has a flat façade on the gable ends with eaves along the sides walls. Modern windows and siding are significant changes. A conference room addition on the north end about 1986-87 enlarged the original warehouse, which was converted into the command center at that time (Moranda).

5. **Headquarters:** This building repeats the roofline and arrangement of the original headquarters building; it has a slight hipped roof at the north end and center ridge section. The original building was considerably smaller than the present one. According to Moranda, two offices were added to the south end of the building in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the wing off the back was constructed. Original
v-rustic cladding seems to have remained intact, but all the original windows have been replaced with modern ones. That this is the building described in a 1948 reference is confirmed by the statement that it was to be built a “few feet south” of the present headquarters, i.e., the original 1941-42 headquarters and barracks.

New Office Building Is Started For Forest Unit—Construction started this week on a new six-room office building for the State Division of Forestry. State Ranger William Siler estimated the structure would cost $10,000 and will relieve congestion in the present main building. The new building will be a few feet south of the present headquarters and of the same type of architecture. It will house the communications center with a soundproof dispatching room and many other features. Other offices will also be moved.

The kitchen in the present building will be relocated and the men given a barracks recreation area for which the headquarters originally planned but could never provide.

Six Modern Trucks. Siler revealed that the headquarters here had received one new GMC long-range fire truck with a 400-gallon pressure tank and other equipment of the latest design. In addition, …five new Dodge crew trucks with 300-gallon tanks [have arrived] and [there is] room for eight men on each truck. The men will ride the cushions with greater protection while not sacrificing efficiency in carrying fire-fighting gear. Also completed is a new concrete ramp to handle servicing of all kinds of equipment.

Although heavy rains have removed immediate fire danger in most areas of this district, Siler is still maintaining an alert in case of a sudden change of weather, which in a few days could spell trouble (Humboldt *Beacon* 15 Oct. 1948)
6. **Gas and Oil House:** Architectural plans for this building are dated April 1951 (Scanlon personal communication; plans in Headquarters office). This is a small, one-story building with center roof ridge terminating in gables at either end. The northern door enters the fuel storage portion; the southern door is marked “Generator.” Gable ends are flat without overhangs, but the sides have extended eaves. The lower walls are concrete; upper wall cladding is a horizontal v-rustic. Side walls are marked by a row of eight small “windows,” of corrugated fiberglass panels which are original (Moranda).

7. **Resource Management:** The only other street-facing building, the Resource Management office is a one-story, T-shaped structure. It has a center-ridge roof and a large brick chimney on the south elevation. Modern windows, doors, and some cladding changes are event. A wheel-chair access ramp runs along the back of the south wing. The ramp and front porch and steps are provided with pole railings. Moranda described the interior layout: office in front portion, kitchen and living area in south wing and three bedrooms in north wing. Announcement of contracts in late 1958 indicate a construction date of 1959.
Contracts Let For New Forestry Buildings Here—A $64,989 contract was awarded last Thursday to the Glover Construction Company of Santa Rosa for new construction at the State Division of Forestry headquarters in Fortuna. The State Department of Public Works said plans call for building a wood-frame repair shop, a two-bay equipment building and a wood-frame, three-bedroom home with adjoining garage. (Humboldt Beacon 4 Dec. 1958)

The two-bay equipment building mentioned in this reference could not be identified in any subsequent references nor by Moranda.
8. **Shop:** The late-1958 reference to a “wood-frame repair shop” indicates a 1959 construction date for this large shop building, scheduled for demolition as part of the Rohner Creek flood control project (Humboldt *Beacon* 4 Dec. 1958). A far larger garage than the 1940s Five and Seven-Bay garages, even this building is no longer adequate for the massive fire trucks presently used by CAL FIRE.

A tall building with a flat, but back-sloping roof, the Shop measures 28x74 feet. There are five vehicle bays with metal roll-up doors across the south elevation, plus a single entrance. Siding is v-rustic. The east wall contains two, steel-framed, multi-pane windows; the north elevation has six. The clerestory consists of corrugated fiberglass panels which are original and three vinyl windows. Another vinyl window has been added at the far eastern end of the front façade. An eight-foot, west-end addition, where oil tanks are located, has two vinyl sliders, vertical hardiplank siding, and a small roll-up door (Russell, personal communication).
Although this building has played an important role in the CAL FIRE program, providing the space for maintenance and repair of the large trucks, it is no longer of sufficient size to accommodate present needs. The Shop is a utilitarian building whose design denotes neither a period nor style of construction and, because of its size and function, it doesn’t contribute to the architectural character of the Headquarters complex. Removal of the shop will have no significant impact on the environment under CEQA.

9. **Warehouse:** The newest building in the complex and located at the rear of the property, facing east, the Warehouse was constructed in the 1980s. A large, open-ended “tunnel” near the Warehouse provided shelter for the bulldozer (Moranda).

**Other Considerations**

Underground fuel and waste storage tanks were removed in the 1980s. These tanks were located under a small portion of the Gas and Oil House; near the present Warehouse; under the present tanks west of the Gas and Oil House; and at the west end of the Shop (Moranda). They were removed and hazardous soil hauled offsite, by, according to Moranda, a “shyster” contractor.

Removal of the tanks in the triangle created by the west end of the Shop and the rear of the Five-Bay Garage caused some destabilization of the creek bank. To counter this situation, sheet piling of corrugated steel panels four feet wide was driven into the ground and it is assumed they remain in place. The original septic
system and leach field, located under the pavement in the center of the complex, were abandoned when the City extended sewer service along Fortuna Blvd. The remaining structure on the property, located to the rear of the south end of the Headquarters, is the radio vault, which houses the electronic equipment (Moranda).

Fortuna Headquarters, front/east elevation, facing Fortuna Blvd. Photo March 2015.
Bibliography


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