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### Historic Resources Report Tydd Street House

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# Historic Resources Report Tydd Street House

Susie Van Kirk

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**Historic Resources Report  
Tydd Street House  
Eureka, California**



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## **Introduction**

The City of Eureka is planning a trail that will end/begin near the house located at 2186 Tydd Street, which was initially not considered to be within the Area of Potential Effect (APE). Subsequent to the cultural resources report prepared by Roscoe and Associates, the City extended the APE to include the house, anticipating its removal to provide parking for trail users. To comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the house was researched and evaluated for historic significance. The findings of this investigation are reported in this paper, along with a description of the property and a short history.

## **Findings**

1. The house at 2186 Tydd Street was constructed in 1889-90 for the Bradbury Robinson family.
2. Its Greek Revival heritage is evident in the gabled-rooflines, cornice returns, and a recessed front entry with pilasters, small capitals, and sidelights; it qualifies as a historic resource under criterion C (CEQA 15064.5(a)(3)).
3. Of the seven aspects of integrity used in determining a property's historic significance, the Tydd Street House fully retains one—location; partially retains three—design, materials, and workmanship; and retains none of the remaining three—setting, feeling, and association.
4. The house does not retain sufficient integrity for a determination of historic significance
5. Because of its architectural value to the community, adaptive use onsite or nearby, or relocation and restoration are feasible alternatives to demolition.

## **Methods**

In order to determine the original owner of the house and a date of construction, a deed search was conducted in the Humboldt County Recorder's Office. Also available in the Recorder's Office and the Assessor's Office are maps, surveys, and recording data. Tax Assessments on microfilm at the Humboldt County Library in Eureka were searched for improvement values. Considerable information was available online through Ancestry.com, including censuses, directories, and family-tree materials. Using primary sources, it was possible to determine a construction date for the house and its original owner. An 1891 publication containing biographical sketches of prominent persons in northern California confirmed those determinations. The Shuster aerial photos, included in this report, should be viewed online via HSU library special collections to fully appreciate Tydd Street and environs in 1946. Photographs were taken during several site visits in May 2015.

## Historic Context

Jonathan Clark, early-day local physician and big-time land speculator, sold three parcels to Robert Searles in 1868 and 1869 (Deeds F:732; G:112; G:293). Totalling 80 acres, these parcels were located mostly in the southeast quarter of section 23, 5N1W, lying northerly of the county road from Eureka to Arcata, now known as Myrtle Avenue. Searles patented and purchased additional land, including parcels in the northeast quarter on the flat between Freshwater Slough and the slough which runs along the side of the highway. These latter parcels were purchased by Peter Tydd in 1873, where for many years, this Irish immigrant and his nearby Italian neighbors raised vegetables and fruits for the home market (Deeds L:384; Fountain 27:372; U.S. censuses). In the late 1930s, a “hotel court” was constructed on the Tydd tract to create a “high-class resort,” with a bridge over the slough adjoining the highway (Humboldt *Times* 2 Sept. 1936). Although the Tydd name identifies the street where the subject house is located, the family never owned the property.



Hotel Court on flat across highway slough. Tydd Street house at very bottom of photo. Shuster Photo, 2001.01.0058. HSU coll. Online. Photo 27 Dec. 1946.

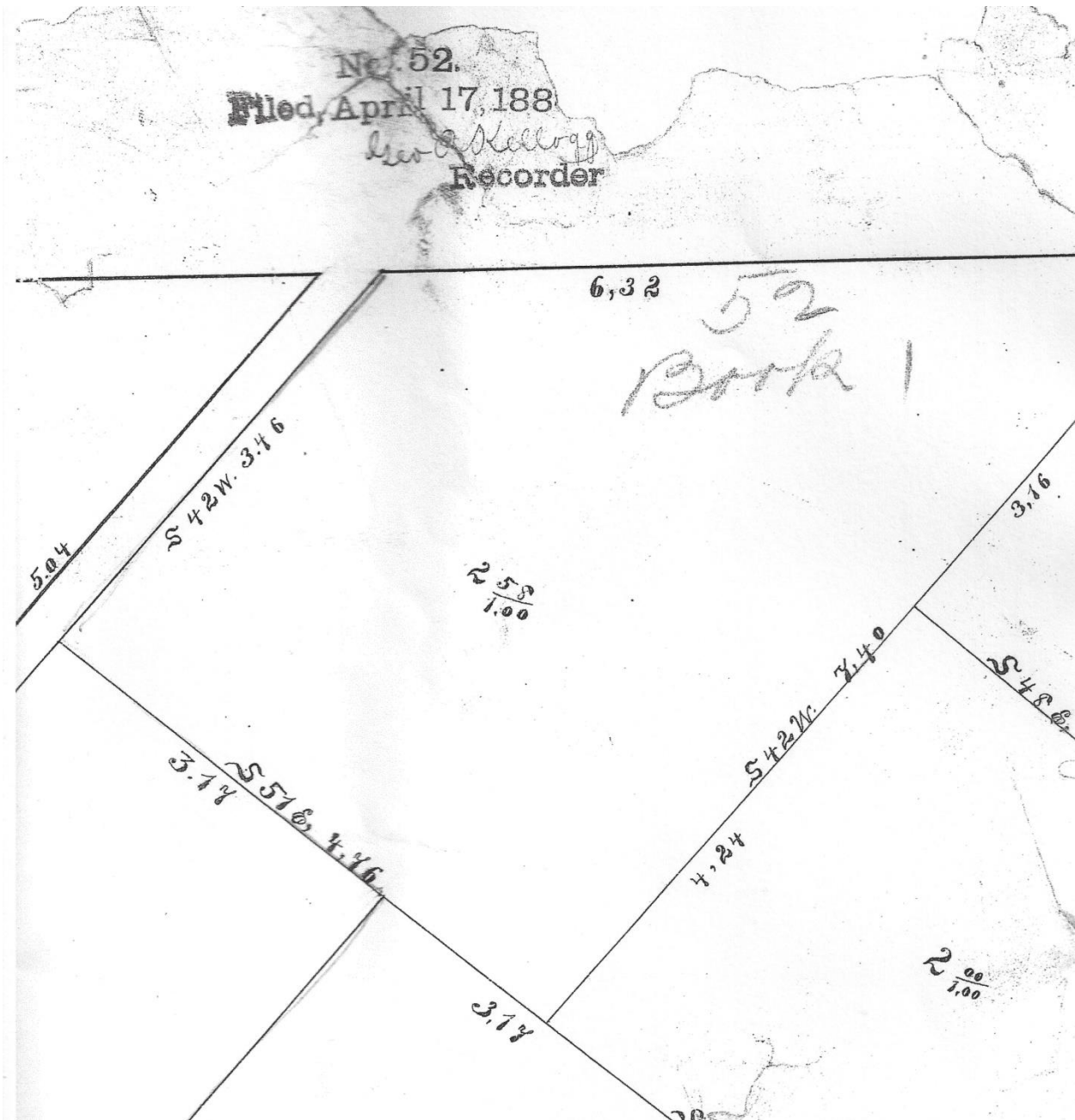
Local surveyor R.F. Herrick platted some of the Searles land into roughly twenty, two-acre lots sometime in the 1880s (Maps 1:52). The map is torn and somewhat difficult to use because not all of the map is visible, there are no section reference points, no interior streets are named, and the filing date is incomplete. Deeds suggest, however, that the map was filed about 1883 or so. Searles, born in England in 1840, was naturalized in Humboldt county in 1865, and was living in San Francisco in the late 1880s. He was buried in Myrtle Grove cemetery in Eureka in December 1892 (Ancestry.com; Deeds 28:111).

The Searles land, while somewhat “upland,” from the Tydd tract, was, nonetheless, intersected with wetlands and sloughs and even today, there is still some greenbelt within the bounds of Hill, Tydd and Searles streets. William Hilfiker described how his grandfather, John, who built a house (still standing) on Searles Street, reclaimed “swampy tideland” by a complex system of wooden pickets, ditches, a flood gate, and fill, all of which were constructed by hand. Like some of his neighbors, John Hilfiker became a truck gardener, delivering produce to homes and supplying local stores (Hilfiker 1980).

Known as East Eureka, Searles’ land was distant from downtown and the waterfront, but it had a strategic location on Myrtle Avenue/Old Arcata Road, which served as the land connection between the county seat and everything to the north until construction of the Redwood Highway in the 1920s.

### **Tydd Street Property**

In 1885, Robert Searles, then living in San Francisco, sold a 2.58-acre parcel out of the Searles Plat to Frank M. Post for \$375, described as beginning at the subdivision line running east and west in the center of section 23, 5N1W, at a point 11.25 chains east of the quarter section post in the center of said section, said point of the beginning being also the intersection of the east line of a lane with said subdivision line and running thence east on said subdivision line 6.32 chains, thence south 42 degrees west 7.40 chains; thence north 51 degrees west 4.76 chains to east line of said lane; thence along last named lane 42 degrees east 3.46 chains to the place of beginning (Deeds 17:206). Three years later Post sold the 2.58 acres to Bradbury Robinson for \$1000 (Deeds 28:222).



Portion of Plat of Searles Land, showing 2.58 parcel, c. 1883. The "lane" is today's Tydd St.

Robinson is an interesting character and the major player in the history of the Tydd Street House. Purchasing the property in 1888, Robinson was assessed the following year for real estate valued at \$450 with \$50 worth of improvements, plus furniture, watches, a cow, farm utensils, a dog and solvent credits of \$2000 (1889 Tax Assessment). However, the following year, 1890, improvements on Robinson's 2.58 acres rose to \$700, indicating a substantial structure (1890 Tax Assessment). Assuming property was declared in the spring of the year, it is



probable that the house was constructed in 1889-90 to be fully assessable in the spring of 1890.

And the interesting character? Robinson was a native of Maine, born in January 1822, but was in Humboldt County by the time of the 1870 U.S. census, when he was living in the Pacific Township, Ferndale post office, with his wife, Mary, and six of the twelve children born to them, their dates of birth ranging from 1844 to 1865. The birthplaces of family members indicate a steady westward migration: Maine, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, and California, until a late retracing of steps, when Robinson was aging. In 1900 Bradbury and Mary were living with a daughter in Iowa, then in San Jose, California, and upon his death in 1905, he was buried in Jackson County, Missouri (1900 U.S. census; Ancestry.com).

Bradbury Robinson, a prominent citizen of Eureka, was born in Somerset County, Maine, Jan 11, 1822, a son of Bradbury and Hannah (Smith) Robinson. His grandfather, Thomas Robinson, was a native of England and a lieutenant in our Revolutionary War.

The subject of our sketch, the sixth in a family of thirteen children, was reared on a farm, a very stony farm, and many a rod of stone fence has he built. His early education was received in barns, open sheds and private houses. When a lad he owned a yoke of young oxen which he used to drive to school with a sled, on which was a box and in this his two little sisters rode to school.

At the age of 21 years, he married Miss Mary S. Patten, a native of Anson, Maine, and a daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth (Savage) Patten, of Irish descent. They had twelve children, of whom Mary was the fifth. After his marriage March 19, 1843, Mr. Robinson followed farming in Cornville Township, Maine, for two years. In the spring of 1845, he started for the frontier, his objective point being Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The route was by steamboat from Waterville, Maine to Boston, thence by the cars to Buffalo and thence by steamer to Sheboygan. There he took up a claim on Government land, twelve and a half miles from Lake Michigan on the Fond de Lac Road and remained on it eleven years, doing much hard work and making a fine farm. In 1857, he sold out and emigrated to Clark Co., Missouri, hoping to experience a milder climate than that of Wisconsin and here during the war he lost all he had—horses, land and crops. In June 1861 himself and oldest son volunteered in the home guard service. In Sept. 1861, his wife and children had to flee to Iowa. In October Mr. Robinson and son left the home guard service and went to the family, they found them in an old log school house on String Prairie in Lee County, Iowa and in the winter of 1861-62, the father worked for 25 cents a day to support his family. In February 1862, he and his son Thara S., enlisted in the Second Regiment of mounted Missouri State militia and served till September, following, when Mr. Robinson was discharged; his son served during the war. He then rented land on String Prairie for seven years. In the spring of 1870 he made a sale and started for California with just \$800. After his arrival in Eureka, with eight in his family, he had just \$15.35 left. He at once set to work and has ever since been successful, having owned and improved several tracts of land in various parts of the county. His last purchase was a fine tract of two and a half acres east of Eureka one mile, on which he has

erected a fine two-story residence and made many improvements; he owns a half interest in one mining claim in El Dorado County.

In religion, Mr. Robinson is a member of the Re-Organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and has for 25 years been a regularly ordained minister, and as such he is zealous and efficient. He is the father of twelve children, the names of the six now living are Thara S., Samuel B., Rose Ella (widow of Orrin Dudley); Don A.; Eva H. (wife of James E. Brown); and Oscar E. (Lewis Publishing Co. 1891)

Pertinent to this report is confirmation that Robinson constructed the Tydd Street House, i.e., “His last purchase was a fine tract of two and a half acres east of Eureka one mile, on which he has erected a fine two-story residence....”

In the spring of 1903, the Robinsons, then living in Santa Clara county (San Jose), sold the house and 2.58 acres to John Hilfiker, who with his family lived around the corner on Searles Street (Deeds 84:36). John Hilfiker was born in Switzerland in 1857, arriving in Humboldt County on his second trip to America in 1884. He first worked for H.H. Buhne on the dairy ranch near Spruce Point, and, when in need of a cook for the many hired men it took to operate the ranch, he was directed to Christine Seemann, daughter of the ranch’s cooper, Henning Seemann. Working in San Francisco, but not satisfied with the arrangement, Christine was happy to return to the Humboldt County. Long-story-short, John and Christine were married in 1890. Two of their four children were born on the Buhne Ranch, John Henry in 1891 and Christine Sophie, 1892. The family moved to town to the Searles Street House before the births of the other two children, Ruth Susan in 1900 and Harold Otto, 1902 (Hilfiker 1980).

According to his grandson, William Hilfiker, John entered into a partnership in the water well-drilling business, John taking the lead in molding the concrete casings for the drill at the Tydd Street location. His expertise with concrete eventually expanded the business to include burial vaults for the nearby Myrtle Grove cemetery. Building on his success, Hilfiker opened a business in Bucksport in 1908 and over time, the business relocated and expanded, always involving family members, including a nephew from Switzerland, a son-in-law, his son, Harold, and Harold’s son, William Hilfiker (Hilfiker 1980).

John died in 1940, leaving his widow Christine and children, John Henry Hilfiker, Arcata electrical contractor; Harold who was running the family business; Ruth Soules of Eureka; and Christine Davis, Rio Dell (*Humboldt Times* 19 Jan. 1940).



The John Hilfiker family. Back row, John, Sr., John Henry. Front row, Harold Otto, Christine Charlotte, Christine Sophie and Ruth Susan. Photo 1910, when they were living in the Tydd Street House. *Humboldt Historian*, May-June 1980.

The Tydd Street property came under new ownership in 1923, when Frank (Francesco) Gaggero purchased about eight acre from John Hilfiker (Deeds 163:431). Frank and his wife, Frances (Francesca) were natives of Italy, Frank arriving in the U.S. in 1905, his wife and children, Angelina and Teresa, in 1911. Four more children were born in Eureka: Josephine, John, Mary and Rose. In 1920 the family was living on Bay Street and Frank was managing a truck farm. Also living on Bay street and working as a truck gardener was John (Gio) Tassara, Teresa's husband, along with their two sons, William and Frank (1920 U.S. census). Several others in this neighborhood listed their occupation as truck gardener, an occupation Tassara continued for at least another twenty years (1920 and 1940 U.S. censuses).

At age 53, Frank died of a heart condition at his home at 2186 Tydd Street, just four years after purchasing the house and surrounding land (*Humboldt Times* 4 Oct. 1927). Frank's widow, Frances, was granted the property as part of the distribution of his estate and she continued to reside at 2186 Tydd well into the 1930s (Deeds 190:170). She deeded the property to Teresa and John Tassara in 1936 (Deeds 222:306). At some point John and Teresa divorced, but John retained the house until his death in 1960 (*Humboldt Times* 8 June 1960). Notably he left

\$2000 to Teresa Giacone, his former wife, and she was living in the house in 1970 (Eureka City Directory). In the distribution of Tassara's estate, Crocker Anglo Bank became the trustee of the parcel "commonly known as 2186 Tydd Street" (Official Records 654:63).

Frances Gaggero, a resident of 1412 6<sup>th</sup> Street, died in September 1966, survived by her children: Mrs. Mary Narron, Mrs. Rose Wilfong, Mrs. Teresa Giacone and Mrs. Angelina Rovai, all of Eureka; Mrs. Josephine Sheehan, Stockton; and John Gaggero, Eureka (*Humboldt Times* 7 Sept. 1966). Teresa Gaggero Tassara Giacone died in 1973, survived by sons Frank Tassara and Michael and Dennis Giacone (*Times-Standard* 20 May 1973).

### **Tydd Street House Description**

The house at 2186 Tydd is a story-and-a-half, side-gable house measuring 35 feet across the front and 43 feet along the north side. A rather unusual third gable extends to the rear. Cladding is a four-inch, horizontal board with a very simple shiplap locking device. Each board has a slot to receive the board from above, creating a siding of lapped boards. Simplicity of design and muted decorative detail suggest a Greek Revival heritage. Identifying features of that heritage include the original cornice returns at the gable ends, corner boards, and the classically-formal front entry.

Photographs taken by Jamie Roscoe prior to the fire indicate that the doors are not original, and that window additions and changes have also occurred. Greek Revival houses built in Humboldt county up to about 1880 had double-hung, wood-framed, six-over-six light windows. During the 1880s, local houses often had a two-over-two arrangement and by the 1890s, windows were generally one-over-one, but the design of windows and doors depended on the over-all style of the house. The fact that this house was constructed in 1889-90 would normally suggest that windows were at least two-over-two, but its Greek Revival architecture, albeit a very late style in 1889-90, may have featured six-over-six light windows.

Centered on the front façade is a recessed entry. Seven feet wide, it features a simple post-and-beam design, small, molded crown, pilasters with plain capitals, and modified sidelights. The original door was probably paneled without glass and the presence of a portico is questionable, the recessed entry being sufficient to serve the purpose of sheltering the front door.



Front entry showing pilaster, little capital and crown. Photo May 2015.

### **Determination of Significance**

CEQA's Section 15064.5 "Determining the Significance of Impacts to Archeological and Historical Resources" provides four criteria for identifying a historically-significant property. The criteria are those used in determining a resource's eligibility for the California Register of Historical Resources. Generally, a resource is historically significant if it

(A) is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage,

(B) is associated with the lives of persons important in our past,

(C) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual or possesses high artistic values, or,

(D) has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history. (CEQA 15064.5(a)(3))





Recessed front entry showing sidelights and pilasters. Photo May 2015.

A resource needs to meet at least one of these criteria, but it must also retain sufficient integrity to impart that significance. Unless a building retains its architectural integrity and associated values sufficient to convey its significance under any of the eligibility criteria, then it fails the test for significance. It should be noted here that the condition of a property, such as the recent fire in the Tydd Street House, is not a consideration in determining historic significance under CEQA.

Integrity is the authenticity of a historical resource's physical identity as evidenced by the survival of characteristics or historic fabric that existed during the resource's period of significance....Integrity is evaluated with regard to the retention of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. (California Office of Historic Preservation, no date)

The Tydd Street House meets criterion C, embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction. Retention of its architectural integrity is another matter.



North elevation showing window changes and relocated door. Photo Jamie Roscoe Feb. 2015.

The front windows of the Tydd Street House (large lower pane with small, vertically-arranged panes across the top) are not original. The February 2015 photographs show this same design in a pair of small windows in the rear wall, another two small windows on the north elevation and in two full-size windows on the south elevation. Two windows on the north wall appear to be recent replacements. The present front door is not original. At some time in the history of this house, a 12-pane door, the lower three panes replaced with a mail slot, was placed in the upper north wall, centered beneath the gable. It is possible this door replaced the original front door and was relocated when the present door was installed.

Tax assessments indicate that in 1935-36, substantial improvements were made to the property, but it is unclear what those were. In 1935, improvements were assessed at \$500; the following year, at \$1000. The “new” windows with upper divisions and the multi-paned front door, now located in the upper wall of the north elevation, are features reflective of that period. An alteration at the southeastern corner is apparent, including extension of the rear roofline at this location. The 1946 aerial shows a door, now replaced with a slider, on the south wall of this alterations and there is no door in the rear wall. The major unknown is the rear-facing gable. Was it part of the original construction in 1889-90 or a substantial addition in 1935-36?





East elevation showing windows with upper divisions and modern door Photo Jamie Roscoe Feb. 2015.



South elevation showing recessed entry, cornice returns, southeast corner. Photo May 2015.



The house retains its original location and some level of original design, materials and workmanship, although window and door changes have occurred and do affect its architectural integrity. The original setting, however, is gone; the house is in an area of modern, high-intensity development, including the Salvation Army apartments, the new Eureka Community Health Center, and just up the street, shopping centers and a very busy thoroughfare. This loss of setting impinges significantly on the feeling and association so important in conveying the house's connection to life on Tydd Street in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The house no longer enjoys the amenities of its original two-and-a-half acres, but is now confined to a 60x100 foot lot. Space for the family cow, a couple of horses, scratching chickens, and fruit and vegetable gardens, so important in the past, is no longer associated with the house.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Of the seven aspects of integrity, the house fully retains location. Due primarily to window and door alterations, the aspects of design, materials, and workmanship are only partially retained. The remaining three aspects—setting, feeling, and association—are essentially gone. The house no longer retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance. This CEQA determination, however, does not mean the house lacks historic value to the community. It is recommended that the City take steps to retain the house, either by some adaptive use at or near its present location, or relocation and restoration off-site.

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Tydd Street House in center at very top of photo. Shuster Photo, 2001.01.0066 HSU coll. Online. Photo 27 Dec. 1946. Notable is the open space around house, lack of commercial development, and only three vehicles on Myrtle Avenue!