

For Immediate Release

A Petaluma Hidden Gem Joins the National Register of Historic Places

Petaluma, CA (June 26, 2024)—The Petaluma Woman’s Club has been added to the National Register of Historic Places. This historic property, located at 518 B Street, is part of the City’s “A” Street Historic District. The Craftsman-style building was commissioned by the Woman’s Club in 1913 and designed by architect Brainerd Jones. It has continuously served as the organization’s clubhouse and was expanded in 1928 to include a stage and an enlarged kitchen.

The Petaluma Woman’s Club is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local significance level as a historic center for socializing, educational opportunities for women and community support activities. Women’s clubs gained popularity across America in the first half of the twentieth century, providing women with sociability and intellectual stimulation while fulfilling civic duties. The Petaluma Woman’s Club was founded in 1895, with Mrs. George McNear as its first president. As the organization grew, there was a strong interest in finding a permanent meeting place, and in 1907, Mrs. Josie Hill donated a lot to the club.

The building is also significant at the local level for its classic Craftsman architectural design by Petaluma master architect Brainerd Jones. The Petaluma Woman’s Club exemplifies Jones’ exploration of the Craftsman style, featuring a simple, balanced, and inviting design that epitomized twentieth-century modernism, aligning with the progressive women of the time. The building’s interior spaces are bright and open and easily adaptable for various events, and it retains all aspects of historic integrity, making it a unique and valuable addition to the National Register of Historic Places.

“Prominent community women founded our organization for women in Petaluma in the late 1800’s. Our progressive founders, Mrs. McNear, Ms. Denman, Ms. Cavanagh, and Mrs. Ellis showed visionary leadership when they established a building of significance that has served the club and community for over one hundred years,” said Colleen Mahoney, Past President of the Petaluma’s Women’s Club.

"Brainerd Jones’ choice of the Craftsman style, commonly used in residential projects, for the Petaluma Woman’s Club design was unsurprising. The clubhouse serves as an extension of its members’ homes, where socializing, education, and civic engagement occur," said local historian Katherine Rinehart. "The recent placement on the National Register marks the first time a Petaluma property has been recognized for its association with women, highlighting where women made and continue to make history."

The National Register of Historic Places, authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, is the country’s official list of historic places worthy of preservation. The national program coordinates and supports efforts to protect historic and archeological resources. The Woman’s Club joins an exclusive list of eight Petaluma sites already on the National Register, including the

Post Office, the Museum, the Silk Mill, and Adobe State Park. The club's recent listing is a testament to a collective commitment to preserving our local history.

“It is a tremendous achievement that the Petaluma Woman's Club is recognized by the National Park Service, a bureau of the U. S. Department of the Interior, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For over 100 years, the Petaluma Woman's Club building has been the home of the club’s commitment to fostering community in Petaluma, addressing the community needs both then and now,” said Kevin McDonnell, Mayor of Petaluma.

The nomination process was initiated quite a few years ago by officers of the Petaluma Woman’s Club. The effort was supported as a class project in the Practicum in the National Register of Historic Places at the Sonoma State’s Cultural Resources Management program. A Petaluma SSU student, Jamie Frattarelli, helped with the lengthy application process.

Katherine Rinehart mentioned, “This nomination sets an excellent precedent that will hopefully inspire and encourage others to celebrate the significance of their properties by nominating them for landmark status.”

“The Petaluma Woman’s Club’s history is deeply woven into the fabric of Petaluma. The club is as visionary today as it was in at the turn of the last century. We are organizing the next generation of young women to participate in the future of the Petaluma Woman’s Club. In addition to our social and educational engagement the Petaluma Woman’s Club Foundation 501 (c) 4 supports our annual scholarship’s for graduating high school students as well as fundraising to support local civic needs. Our clubhouse serves our entire community as a wonderful place to gather for special life events. We will always be dedicated to the stewardship of our historic clubhouse. It is truly an honor to receive this recognition on the National Register of Historic Places,” concludes Colleen Mahoney.

Petaluma Woman’s Club -

<https://petalumawomansclub.com/>

Petaluma Woman’s Club National Register Application -

https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1067/files/CA_Sonoma%20County_Petaluma%20Womans%20Club_DRAFT.pdf

National Register of Historic Places (NPS) -

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>

City of Petaluma, National Register Listing -

<https://cityofpetaluma.org/national-register-nomination/>

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