

**CITY OF FOLSOM
CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY
EXCERPT FROM REGISTRATION FORM**

NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Emma's Place

Other name/site number: Emma's by the Lake
(name used in staff reports prepared in the 1970s through the 1990s)

LOCATION

Street & Number: 214 Natoma Street ☐ Not for publication

City/Town: Folsom ☐ Vicinity

State: California Code: CA County: Sacramento Zip Code: 95630

DESCRIPTION

The Historic Residence/Business

Emma's Place was originally a 1,220-square-foot residence (approximately 30'x 40'). The craftsman style building was covered by a hipped roof that incorporated a narrow front porch. Along the front of the roof structure was a dormer with louvered vents. Lap siding with wide boards covered the exterior walls and wood shakes covered the roof. The home had a simple design but it was framed with old growth timber and solid planks covered the floors and walls. Interlocking boards were used for the ceilings.

On City maps from 1979, a rear addition with an approximate size of 10'x 20' can be seen along the rear side of Emma's Place. A City survey from 1995 shows a twelve-foot-wide addition along the east side of the building that also connects to the earlier completed addition along the rear of the building. The added building area was covered by a shed roof. After the additions to the building, the area of the overall structure was 1,780 square feet.

At some point in time tongue-and-groove wood paneling was installed in the lower wall area of some rooms. It is likely that fabric was used to cover the wall-boards in the upper half of the same walls. During one of the many building uses, a hardwood floor was installed in the main living area of the original building.

The Current School Building

When Emma's was moved to the current location at 214 Natoma Street (on the property of the Sundance Montessori School) it was not possible to save the earlier additions along the side and the rear of the building. The new additions that were constructed after the move were designed to meet current building and zoning codes and to meet the needs of the new owner. The following changes have therefore been made:

- The width of the addition along the side of the building has been reduced from 12 feet to 8 feet;
- The roof of the added building area (along the side and rear of the school building) has been incorporated with the main building roof and the roof pitch has been increased;
- The three windows along the east building façade have been replaced by decorative shutters within ‘false’ window frames;
- The new side addition has been recessed by 3 feet from the front façade;
- The new side addition does not include the front porch or entrance door that was a part of the original side addition;
- Handicap ramps have been added along the west and north side of the building to provide handicap access.

Before the building was moved to Natoma Street, the top of the roof structure had to be removed in order to clear overhead lines along the relocation route. At the Natoma Street location, new framing was added to complete the roof and to reconstruct the side and rear building additions. However, most of the building frame of the original ‘Emma’s Place’ still remains. In addition, floor planks, wall and ceiling boards, and a portion of the wainscot area have been left intact below the new plywood sub-floors and new drywall surfaces. An interior ceiling beam outlines the original building area and the original hardwood floor mirrors the footprint of the earlier living room/business area. A replica of the original wood siding has been applied to the exterior building walls. New doors and hung windows have been installed within the original framed openings. The previous wood shakes have been replaced by dimensional composition roof shingles and a replica of the original dormer with louvered vents has been installed in the front roof area. The building has been painted white with slate blue trim and doors.

SIGNIFICANCE

Historic Context

In 1849, Samuel Smith (and other miners) discovered gold at Negro Bar north of the future town of Folsom. The map of the Town of Folsom was approved by Sacramento County in 1855, and all the lots of the new town were sold in one afternoon. A railroad connection between Sacramento and the Folsom Railroad block was developed the same year and in 1856, the train service was established.

Emma’s Place

The building that is known as ‘Emma’s Place’ was built 149 years ago and over the years, the building has been relocated four times. The following table summarizes the known historic data regarding the building:

HISTORIC TIMELINE FOR EMMA'S PLACE		
Approximate Date	Occupant and/or Owner	Known Events or Building Uses
1858 -	Eliza Foster (owner of Lots 9 and 10 in Block 8)	Residence built from old growth timber at 814 Leidesdorff Street (assumed address)
1885 -	Samuel and Sarah Kay	Rancher and wife murdered in the residence.
1886 -	Jacob Hyman	The owner of J. Hyman & Co. Dry Goods purchased the home - The building was later rented to bordello operators
1919 - 1925	Clark and Emma Spencer	The Spencer's purchased and occupied the residence Started a boarding house (Alpine Rooms).
1925 - 1955	Emma Spencer	Emma operated a bordello from the residence
1953 - 1955	Emma Spencer	Emma occupied the residence
1950s - 1970s	Joe Murer and the Baker Family (date of purchase not known)	Occupied by a bar (Lighthouse Joe's) and a black-smith shop Relocated to 902 River Way in the late 1960s to allow for the widening of Leidesdorff Street
1970s - 1986	Robert Leach and Richard Fenstermaker (date of purchase not known)	Occupied by Montessori School
1986 - 1998	June Hose	Relocated to 904 River Way and occupied by a dance studio
1998 - 2005	City of Folsom	Relocated to 101 Reading Street where the building was left unoccupied
2006 - current	The Sundance Montessori School	Relocated to 214 Natoma Street and renovated to a Montessori School

In 1857, Eliza Foster purchased Lots 9 and 10 of Block 8 (as designated by Theodore Judah) at the northeast corner of Leidesdorff Street and Decatur Street (before roads had been extended to this area). The property was located between the railroad block and the river. East of the lots were a lumberyard and sawmill. Based on the location, the designated lot address may have been 814 Leidesdorff Street.

'Emma's Place' was built in 1858. As it turned out, the residence was located south of the Foster property in the area designated for the future Leidesdorff Street. It is possible that the residence was intended to be the home of Stephen Foster who operated the nearby lumberyard. Several years later the residence was occupied by Samuel and Sarah Kay, who according to some records operated a small ranch along the river. In 1885, the couple was brutally murdered in their home and the crime was never resolved. This event, along with the location of the residence (across the railroad tracks, between the jail and Chinatown) may have determined the use of the building for years to come.

Jacob Hyman (owner of the J. Hyman & Co. Dry Goods) purchased the home as an investment in 1886. When Mr. Hyman could not find a buyer for the property he resorted to rent the home to bordello operators and on the 1904 Rumsey Map, the building was labeled 'red light'. Clark and Emma Spencer purchased the building in 1919. Misfortune followed the new residents when Clark got injured in a fall from the prison wall (where he worked as a guard) and later passed away in 1925. Around the same time Emma started to rent out rooms in her home under the business name 'Alpine Rooms'. At some point in time, the boarding house evolved into a bordello. As a part of the operation, Emma sold whiskey and at times arranged poker games. Over time the establishment employed up to 20 'girls' and the building was decorated with fine furniture and red velvet drapes. After WWII broke out, the bordello attracted customers from Mather Air Force Base. The business was closed down in 1945 by police from Mather Air Force Base and after it reopened it was closed down again in 1953 by the County Sheriff's Department as a part of a 'red light abatement operation'. In 1955, Emma moved to a small duplex at 107 Decatur Street close to her previous home.

Emma's Place was later owned by Joe Murer and the Baker family. Among the businesses that followed were a bar (Lighthouse Lou's) and a blacksmith shop. When Leidesdorff Street was widened in the late 1960s, the building had to be moved north away from the right-of-way area and onto Lot 9 at the northeast corner of Leidesdorff Street and Decatur Street. After the building move, access to Emma's was more convenient from Decatur Street or the River Way alley, and the building address was therefore changed to 902 River Way. The building was then occupied by a Montessori School. Around this time, most of the 700- and 800-blocks north of Leidesdorff Street (including Emma's Place) was purchased by Robert Leach and Richard Fenstermaker for investment purposes. When the partners got City approval for a new hotel and shopping center, the old Emma's building was in the way. When Robert Leach announced that the building would be given away or demolished, June Hose (the current president of Folsom Historical Society) offered to buy the building for \$1. On August 21, 1986, June Hose had the building moved to the west side of Decatur Street for a cost of 35,000. The new address that was designated to Emma's Place was 904 River Way.

With the development of Radisson Hotel and the Lakes Center, Decatur Street north of the railroad block became Gold Lake Drive. For several years, Emma's Place was occupied by a dance studio. After the City had voted to construct a new bridge in the alignment of Folsom Boulevard, the building was once again in the way of progress. This time the City purchased the building and on September 23, 1998, the building was moved to 101 Reading Street at the west end of the historic Block 9. At this location, the building stood vacant and a permanent foundation was not completed until 2004. The same year the wood shakes on the roof of the building were replaced by composition shingles. The arrival of light rail to the historic railroad block added new demands for parking in the historic area of Folsom. On March 16, 2005, City Council decided that Emma's Place had to be relocated for the fourth time. A request for proposals was circulated, and on May 10, 2005, the City Council determined that Emma's should be relocated to the property of Sundance Montessori School at 214 Natoma Street. After the removal of the side and rear addition and all environmentally hazardous materials (including asbestos and lead based paint), the building was transported to 214 Natoma Street east of the Montessori School. The renovation of the structure was completed as described under Section 7: Description.

Emma Spencer

The building that now is located at 214 Natoma Street was named after its most controversial and colorful owner, Emma Spencer. Emma was born 1879 in Chico and her original name was Emma Rogers. Little is known about her early history but at the age of 16, she worked as the first female bartender at the historic Eagle Hotel in Redding. In 1906, she married Alvin Robert Mosby of Oroville. The marriage did not last and in 1919 she married Clark Spencer. For a short time, the couple operated a chicken farm in Pataluma. When they moved to Folsom, Clark was first employed by the Natoma Company (on a gold dredger) and later by Folsom Prison (as a guard). Clark and Emma purchased their home at 814 Leidesdorff Street (assumed address based on the location of the lot) in 1919. In 1923, Clark broke his back when he fell from a wall on the prison grounds. After the accident Clark managed a pool hall and Emma worked as a cocktail waitress. In addition, they converted their home to a boarding house (Alpine Rooms). Clark passed away in 1925, and Emma eventually established herself as the 'madam' of a 'house of convenience'. Among the mixed accounts of Emma, are reports that she had an extensive library of literature and poetry, was well informed about current events and drank a bottle of whisky a day. Her bordello was decorated with red velvet drapes, fine furniture and Native American basketwork. She raised chickens in her back yard and sold illegal whiskey in her bordello. Many of Emma's customers came from Mather Air Force Base, and she had signed photos of several generals (including General Patton). Emma was discreet about the nature of her business and generous with money, but these qualities did not prevent her from being sent to jail many times. Emma resisted several attempts to close down her operation and was eventually put out of business by the County Sheriff's Department in 1953. After she moved to a small duplex at 107 Decatur Street close to the former bordello, her health worsened until she became wheelchair bound because of bad feet. In 1961, she was forced to move to a county home where she died penniless in 1964 (at the age of 85 years). As a part of her

legacy, a burial space was donated to her by a Folsom resident and the Sutter Street merchants paid for her gravestone. Emma is buried at the Lakeside Cemetery in Folsom.

FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: The Planning Division (Contact: Associate Planner, Lisbet Gullone)

Organization: The Community Development Department Date: February 2, 2007

Street & Number: 50 Natoma Street Telephone: 916/355-7214

City or Town: Folsom State: CA ZIP: 95630



THE RED LIGHT HOUSE. Emma Spencer, born in 1876, was a plump, soft-featured woman whose looks belied the independence and resourcefulness of her personality. After the 1925 death of her second husband, Clark Spencer, the 49-year-old widow established a house of prostitution, which became known simply as Emma's Place, after its madam.

Her business card, which is displayed in the Folsom History Museum, says, "Alpine Rooms, Folsom Cal., Mrs. Emma Spencer, Proprietor. Rooms for Rent by the Day, Week or Month." In its heyday, her bordello, which employed a few "girls," was reportedly lavishly furnished with plush, red velvet draperies, thick carpets, and fine furniture.

Emma loved books and, because of foot problems, spent most of her time at home, running the business, raising chickens, and reading. Her personal treasures included a 10-volume collection of American and British poetry by Edwin Markham.

During World War II, Emma's Place continued to operate, but the bordello was shut down permanently by the Sacramento County Sheriff's office in the 1950s.

Emma lived out her final years as a penniless patient in what was then the Sacramento County Hospital. When she died, she was buried in a plot donated by a Folsom resident so she would not have to be buried in a pauper's grave.

Since its early years, the building has been home to a beer hall, an art gallery, a Montessori school, and a school of dance. In 1993, June Hose, ex-manager of the Folsom History Museum, acquired the white frame house that once stood at 902 River Way. Today, it sits on blocks, awaiting its rebirth as a classroom for the City of Folsom's Parks and Recreation Department.



Special to Neighbors

Emma in the early 1920s.