

History Doesn't Repeat Itself, But It Does Rhyme

From Livery Stable to Parking Lot

A Historical and Cultural Survey of APN 101-290-003 and APN 101-290-001
Redding, Shasta County, California

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May 2018

Introduction

With its weathered red clay brick and towering green doors of iron, the structure at 1313 California Street known to many as “the old police station” and others as “the old Lou Gerard dealership” seems to harken back to the Gold Rush days, but its current facade only dates back to the late 1970s, and its oldest portions to the late 1940s. As plans proceed for repurposing of the property, a look back at its historical uses is in order.

The property occupies the western half of Block 14, which is bordered by Shasta, Tehama, California, and Market Streets. The block is bisected by an alley running from north to south. Although the eastern half of the block, anchored for many years by the Gruttner bakery, gradually urbanized into a multi-story mixed-use district, the western half has been somewhat underdeveloped in comparison to adjacent blocks.

Previous Uses

As far as can be determined, the first permanent use of the western half of Block 14 following white settlement of the Redding use was that of a corral and stable. The October 1885 Sanborn Map, the earliest map by the company, shows a two-story livery and feed stable located on the northeast corner of Tehama and California Street with an adjoining one-story wagon shed. There was a porch intruding into the Tehama Street right-of-way and wrapping slightly around the eastern side. The longtime proprietor of the station was a man by the name of John Newton Major (1841–1896).

Major arrived in Shasta County around 1875 or 1876 and carried the mail from Shasta to Weaverville.¹ By 1878, he settled in Redding and partnered with Jerry Culverhouse in stage line between Redding and Alturas and by 1881, Major had sold his interest in the stage and purchased the livery from Thomas Mullen.²³

There were also a number of other properties on the western half of Block 14 at this time: A gunsmith and saddler had an establishment on the corner of the alley and Tehama Street.⁴ Located adjacent and immediately to the west was another structure of undetermined use. Immediately north of the gunsmith, horse stalls stretched north to Shasta Street, and two other structures of unknown use were located on the California Street frontage. Most, if not all, of these structures were either destroyed and rebuilt or at least significantly modified by the time the next Sanborn map was created in 1889.

In 1886, the *Republican Free Press* announced that there would be a “grand dedication ball in Major’s New Hall” on Christmas Eve.⁵ For admission of \$3.50, attendees enjoy a “grand supper” and dance to “the best musicians” in the “magnificent new hall.”⁶ Livery options

¹ “John Newton Major,” *Daily Free Press*, November 21, 1896.

² Ibid.

³ Frank, B. F., and H. W. Chappell. *The History and Business Directory of Shasta County*. 1881. Redding Independent Book and Job Printing House, Redding.

⁴ Sanborn Map, 1885.

⁵ *Republican Free Press*, December 4, 1886.

⁶ Ibid.

continued on the ground floor, but the second floor now served as a cultural venue—perhaps Redding’s first dedicated cultural space—commonly referred to as “Major’s Opera House.”

The 1889 shows that the Major livery building now extended north to the midpoint between Tehama and Streets with a furnishing store between it and the corner. A saloon and paint store are also located on the corner nearest the alley at Tehama Street.

The next longtime owner of the stables was Edward Alexander Reid (1825–1902), one of Redding’s earliest pioneers. Reid was a forty-niner, arriving in California on September 18 in search of gold and making his way to Shasta County by 1851.⁷ In September of 1872, Reid built the ferry that would bear his name where the Diestlehorst Bridge is today.⁸ Reid owned the land across the Sacramento River from Diestlehorst and was a founding director of the Bank of Shasta County.⁹ Regrettably, Reid appears to have played a significant role in some of the spasms of mob violence directed at the Native Americans, having “organized one of first companies of volunteers to wage war against the redskins and in many a skirmish and many an expedition he was a leader.”¹⁰

Ownership of the livery building then passed into hands of his son, Edward Reid and his business partner D.F. Adams. In 1916, the livery finally closed, and Reid went “into the auto business, having taken a big block of stock in the new automotive corporation, the Bystle Auto company.¹¹ It is possible the wooden structure was torn down and replaced with the structure that housed the Farnsworth Trading Post and Morrison Secondhand Store around this time; but the structure was definitely in place by the time the Sanborn map was again updated in 1930 and lingered past 1950.

Prior to the construction of the current “old police station” structure, the northwest quarter of Block 14 was largely underutilized by transient businesses. The underutilization may have been driven by the present of Redding’s Chinatown directly across Shasta Street until the expulsion of the Chinese in 1886. Redding’s Tenderloin districts were also adjacent to this area: first along the alley across Shasta Street between Market and California Streets until a 1900 fire, then along the blocks of California and Center Streets northwest of the property into the 1950s.

Many of the known uses of this northwest quarter of Block 14 seemed to double as a cultural “middle-ground” between these less-respectable uses and the rest of the community. For example, a man named John P. Lacerda (1868–1935) built a saloon called “The Keswick Exchange House” there in late 1896 and opened “in grand style,” according to the paper, “distributing something like 400 minute bottles of famous Kentucky whisky as an advertisement.”¹² In 1899, Lacerda had just finished a series of expensive renovations, including

⁷ “He Was A Pioneer And Brave Fighter.” *Daily Free Press*, March 15, 1902.

⁸ *Shasta Courier*, August 31, 1872.

⁹ “He Was A Pioneer And Brave Fighter.” *Daily Free Press*, March 15, 1902.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Livery Stables Give Way To Garages,” *Sacramento Union*, May 5, 1916.

¹² *Daily Free Press*, December 26, 1896.

a new floor,¹³ a 20 by 40 addition, and a redwood backbar,¹⁴ when the saloon burned under unexplained circumstances in the wee hours of Monday morning, October 30.¹⁵

The building was gutted, much of the roof destroyed, and the billiard table, bar, and other furniture damaged, representing a loss of \$2,000.¹⁶ By November 4, Lacerda had sold his lots to E.A. Reid and announced his intentions to relocate to Frank Miller's brick building one block south.¹⁷

The northwest quarter of Block 14 is shown as empty in the 1904 Sanborn map. By 1912, a blacksmith shop was located on the northwest quarter, which was replaced by 1930, with the Denham service station and associated car lot occupying the northern two-thirds of the western half of Block 14. The western half of the southern third was occupied at this time by a secondhand store operated by longtime Redding merchant (and builder of the Jack's Grill building) William J. Morrison while the remainder of the land occupied a building described as a dwelling and another as a combination. The paucity of city directories from this era, combined with large gaps between Sanborn map updates, makes research of the era between 1912 and 1946 extremely time consuming.

The Current Structure

The brick-clad structure located at the southeast corner of Shasta and California street dates back in part to 1946 when it was built by Karl Melchur Winetrout (1893–1986) as a home for his Studebaker dealership. Winetrout was born in Applegate, Oregon, and moved to Shasta County in 1935 from Klamath Falls.¹⁸

According to a February 20, 1946 article in the *Redding Record-Searchlight*, the 100-by-118-foot building was designed "on modern lines" by Howard R. Perrin, an architect from Klamath Falls, Oregon. The structure was to be of reinforced concrete, with an exterior finish "of glass brick and light grey-green ceramic veneer."¹⁹ The building was to house "a four-car show room, repair and service department, body and fender shop, paint shop and a modern lubrication department" accessed by 18-foot entrances on Shasta and California Streets.²⁰ A used-car lot was planned to adjoin to the south.²¹ Winetrout planned to construct the building himself over 90 days, superintended by Casper Riepp, with an expected cost of \$60,000 to \$70,000.²²

Perhaps proving things don't change all that much, construction of the Winetrout Building took nearly three times longer than originally expected—the grand opening wasn't until November 6. The publicity lead-up to the event is a poignant capsule of a departed era:

¹³ *Searchlight*, October 12, 1899.

¹⁴ *Free Press*, September 30, 1899.

¹⁵ "Wrecked By A Fire," *Daily Free Press*, October 30, 1899.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Searchlight*, November 4, 1899.

¹⁸ "Karl Winetrout," *Record-Searchlight*, April 8, 1986.

¹⁹ "Work Started On New Garage," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, February 20, 1946.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

One day's paper featured a quarter-page ad from Winetrout thanking those who supplied materials and labor—including over a dozen different unions²³—while another day featured a full-page ad by companies, merchants, and individuals welcoming the Winetrout Motor Company to the community.²⁴

The grand opening celebration was capped off by an opening night gala, beginning at 6 p.m. and featuring a giveaway of 75 pairs of nylons, one Sunbeam Mixmaster, and a two-slice Toastmaster “for our lady visitors, 16 years of age or over.”²⁵ The evening was capped off with free dancing from 9 p.m. to midnight in the “ultra-modern” building with music by “Arch Merrifield and his 7 piece orchestra.”²⁶

Following the departure of a strong management team in 1949, the Studebaker manufacturing company began experiencing financial troubles as it struggled to keep up with a price war between Ford and General Motors.²⁷ Winetrout eventually sold to Lou Gerard in the early 1950s, and Gerard relocated his growing dealership from Market Street.

The Lou Gerard company held on onto the structure for the next two decades or so. The Redding area saw considerable growth in the postwar era, which coincided with the height of auto-based development. Automobiles and lax county development regulations made the rapid growth of the unincorporated Enterprise area possible, which siphoned off tax revenue from the City of Redding and imposed other externalities.

In the early 1970s, the City of Redding began soliciting proposals from local car dealerships for a sale or trade of approximately 18 acres of land it owned between Cypress and Parkview Avenues.²⁸ The property had been in the city's possession since 1918, when it was purchased from Ellen G. Bassett, widow of Lemuel F. Bassett.

Rod Rodriguez had already relocated his Chevrolet dealership to the northeast corner of East Cypress Avenue and Hemsted Road by 1972,²⁹ and the city was presumably eager to prevent the loss of another lucrative sales-tax revenue source as other downtown auto dealerships began to look for room to expand.

By early May 1973, the Redding City Council had received two offers: one from Taylor Motors to purchase all 18 acres for the appraised value of \$323,350 and another from Lou Gerard Ford that proposed a land swap of the western-half of Block 14 and the buildings on it (appraised at \$282,700) with an additional cash payment of \$40,850 which brought the total offer to just \$200 higher.³⁰ The council meeting on May 7 had a note of high drama when a last-minute land swap proposal was brought before the council by Rod Rodriguez. The council demurred, claiming the Rodriguez property wasn't suitable for the police station. Tensions were further ratcheted up when Taylor's realtor (perhaps prophetically) called Gerard's property a “used turkey” and both Taylor and Gerard said they would be forced to leave the city if their

²³ *Redding Record-Searchlight*, November 2, 1946.

²⁴ *Redding Record-Searchlight*, November 5, 1946.

²⁵ *Redding Record-Searchlight*, November 4, 1946.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Studebaker#World_War_II

²⁸ *Record-Searchlight*, May 5, 1973

²⁹ Shasta Sam, “To Rod Rodriguez,” *Redding Record-Searchlight*, June 24, 1972.

³⁰ “City decides on Lou Gerard building for police station,” *Redding Record-Searchlight*, May 8, 1973.

offers were to be rejected.³¹ A letter to the council from Police Chief Robert Whitmer said the Gerard property would be adequate for 15 to 20 years, while Officer Steve Cilenti told a *Searchlight* reporter he felt department would outgrow it within five. The council ultimately chose to accept the Gerard proposal. Taylor presumably did relocate outside of the city at the southeast corner of East Cypress Avenue and Churn Creek Road before the annexation of Enterprise put him back in the city limits.

The following January 7, it was revealed that a survey of the City's Cypress Avenue parcel revealed it to be smaller than originally thought, and the appraisal was adjusted downward by \$35,950 to reflect this new information, reducing Gerard's cash payment to \$4,700.³² The City Council approved escrow instructions at this time, as well.

An architectural contract to design the preliminary remodel plans was unanimously awarded by the city council to the firm of Woodward-Nichols on February 20, 1974 for an estimated \$6,000. At the time, "Woodward-Nichols had never been granted a city contract because Willard Woodward was until recently a city Planning Commissioner."³³

High interest rates and a correspondingly sluggish auto market forced Lou Gerard Ford to postpone construction of its new facility on Cypress Avenue for some time, which meant Gerard was paying \$2,500 a month in rent to the City to remain in the California Street building, in addition to monthly escrow penalties.³⁴ Blueprints were finally turned into the city on September 11, 1975³⁵ and construction finally began in early January 1976.³⁶

By August 27, 1976, construction on the Cypress Avenue complex was complete and Lou Gerard Ford had completed its move from California Street, changing its name to Redding Ford in process.³⁷

A double dose of bad news arrived with 1977, when the city found it out that not only did it not receive a \$760,000 federal Economic Development Administration grant for the project,³⁸ but the building's roof was in need of \$77,000 in structural work to bring it in line with the city's own standards.³⁹ Fortunately, City Attorney Earl Murphy reported the city was not obligated to meet its own 30-pound snow load rule and the city opted to proceed without the recommended reinforcement work.

The January 3, 1977 meeting also saw some discussion regarding security concerns at the new facility: Mayor Fulton was in favor of the city council continuing to share space with the Redding Police Department at 1313 California as it was at 1313 Market, but "Councilmen Robert Anderson and Don Demsher asked if the combination would present security problems."⁴⁰ Ultimately, the two voted in favor of continuing to share facilities. Woodward and Nichols also discussed the building's new "'Old Shasta' design" at this meeting, which some may

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Redding okays escrow papers on Lou Gerard land swap," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, January 8, 1974.

³³ "Police, museum design jobs awarded," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, February 20, 1974.

³⁴ "Gerard submits building plans," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, September 11, 1975.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Construction begins on Gerard complex," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, January 10, 1976.

³⁷ "Ford complex open for business," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, August 30, 1976.

³⁸ "Linden project goes to panel," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, January 1, 1977.

³⁹ "City approves remodeling despite code," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, January 4, 1977.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

consider somewhat ironic, considering the city had just demolished dozens of its own historic brick buildings for the Downtown Mall earlier that decade.

Upon reviewing the bids, the Redding City Council unanimously awarded the remodeling contract to Gifford Construction on April 18, 1977—despite some minor calculation errors, the bid was still the lowest.⁴¹ The building’s roof again came before the council on July 18 of that year, when Gene Nichols reported “reconstruction work to strengthen the building has created new openings to the roof” and the contractors were concerned a patch job would not be adequate to prevent leaks.⁴² A staff report offered the option of a \$4,200 partial repair to address “most” of the problem, but the council chose to expend an addition \$37,549 for a whole new roof, bringing the total cost of the remodel to \$800,548.⁴³

Renovations seemed to proceed without much further issue from this point, and the first city council meeting in the new chambers was held on February 6, 1978. The city council at the time was composed of Mayor Lee Fulton, Bob Anderson, Don Demsher, and Archer Pugh. Councilmember Barbara Gard was absent.⁴⁴

Redding Police also relocated around this time, and the building was formally accepted on February 21, 1978.⁴⁵ According to an oral interview conducted with former Police Chief Robert P. Blankenship in May of 2018, the Redding Police Department experienced its first building issues—termites coming through the walls of the Investigations Department—within two years of moving in. The Redding Police Department remained in the building for another thirty-five years.

⁴¹ “City awards police station bid,” *Redding Record-Searchlight*, April 19, 1977.

⁴² “New police building roof OK’d,” *Redding Record-Searchlight*, July 19, 1977.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Minutes, Redding City Council, February 6, 1978.

⁴⁵ Minutes, Redding City Council, February 21, 1978.

Timeline

February 20, 1946

Winetrout building announced.

November 6, 1946

Winetrout dealership opens at 1313 California.

May 7, 1973

The City of Redding accepts the Lou Gerard Ford proposal, swapping 18 acres of property on Cypress Avenue for western half of Block 14, its structures, and \$40,850.

January 7, 1974

The Redding City Council approves escrow instructions for the land swap.

February 19, 1974

The firm of Woodward and Nichols is awarded the contract to design the preliminary remodel plans for the new police station.

January 9, 1976

Construction on Lou Gerard Ford's Cypress Avenue dealership begins after a two-year delay caused by high interest rates and a sluggish auto market.

August 27, 1976

Lou Gerard Ford opens its Cypress Avenue location.

January 3, 1977

The City of Redding opts to disregard on its own snow load roof standards and proceeds with the remodeling of the former Lou Gerard Ford building on California Street.

April 18, 1977

The Redding City Council awards the \$762,969 construction contract to Gifford Construction. Although an error in calculations may increase the bid by \$7,700, the bid remained the lowest received.

July 18, 1977

The City Council votes to put a new roof on the police station after reconstruction creates new openings in the roof that contractors fear cannot be adequately patched.

February 6, 1978

The first city council meeting is held in the new council chambers.

February 1978

Redding Police Department moves into the building at 1313 California.

2013

After years of chronic maintenance issues, a proposal by City Manager Kurt Starman to relocate RPD to the Civic Center campus is fast-tracked.

June 16, 2015

The new Robert P. Blankenship Police Facility is dedicated.

July 23, 2015

Redding Police Department begins moving into the new facility.

Factoids

- The property colloquially known as “the old police station” or “the old Lou Gerard dealership” sits on the western half of Block 14 in the original map of Redding.
- TWHB14 (The Western Half of Block 14) has hosted a myriad of businesses and uses over the years, including:
 - John N. Major’s Opera House.
 - Edward A. Reid’s Livery Stable.
 - Various saloons, including John P. Lacerda’s Keswick Exchange House.
 - A cobbler.
 - A second-hand store.
 - A service station.
 - A liquor store.
 - A battery shop.
 - Car dealerships.
 - A police station and council chambers.
- TWHB14 has always been somewhat underutilized in comparison to its neighbors.
- TWHB14 was historically adjacent to a number of distinct districts (the Market Street mixed-use corridor to the east, Chinatown and the Tenderloin to the north, the warehouse district to the west, and the California Street business district to the south) but was not a cohesive part of any particular district.
- The livery stable on TWHB14 was a functional antecedent of the Denham service station and the 20th-century car dealerships. It was also a functional antecedent of the temporary parking lot planned for the site. “Parking” once and walking to multiple destinations was a common practice in the 19th century.
- The existing brick-façade structure was originally built as a Studebaker dealership in 1946 by Karl M. Winetrout.
- Lou Gerard Ford took over the property in the early 1950s.
- The City of Redding executed a land swap for the property now known as Crown Motors in 1973, but Lou Gerard Ford occupied the property (paying the city rent) until 1976.
- The current façade was designed by Gene Nichols and the brick façade and iron doors are an explicit homage to the buildings of (Old) Shasta.
- The remodel and renovation were done by Gifford Construction.
- RPD was experiencing building issues within two years of occupancy and quickly outgrew the facility.
- A disgruntled police officer once drove his pick-up truck into the lobby of the police station.