PHASE I HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY REPORT
SMITH-HOBSON HOUSE / OJAI CITY HALL
401 SOUTH VENTURA STREET
OJAI, VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
(APN 023-090-010)

PREPARED BY:
Carole Denardo, M.A., RPA and Joshua Severn, M.A.
PROVENIENCE GROUP
1552 N. Refugio Road
Santa Ynez, California 93460
(805) 350-3134
www.proveniencegroup.com

PREPARED FOR:
City of Ojai
Community Development
401 S. Ventura Street
Ojai, California 93024
(805) 646-5581

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SMITH-HOBSON HOUSE - TIME LINE

1874–Royce Surdam founds the town of Nordhoff in honor of author Charles Nordhoff.
1907–The A. L. Hobson house was constructed in Craftsman architectural styling.
1917–The town name is changed from Nordhoff to Ojai. Mead & Requa, redesigned the A. L. Hobson home in the same Spanish Revival style as Libbey’s downtown design, and Robert Winfield did the renovation. That same year, Frank Smith proposed to Miss Grace Hobson.
1921–Ojai becomes a city.
1920s –Ojai City Hall is housed at 282 East Ojai Avenue.
1930s – Ojai City Hall occupies 348 (338) Ojai Avenue east of the arcade
1961 – The City organizes the Ojai Parks and Recreation Commission
1963 – The City of Ojai begins to manage Nordhoff Cemetery operations.
1967 –The City of Ojai reaches an agreement with the Golden State Water Company to provide water for the community.
1969 –The police station is relocated next to Ojai City Hall.
1968–1970 – The Ojai City Hall vacates the 1,715 square foot building at 338 East Ojai Avenue and moves to 107 North Ventura Avenue, which was the location of the former Baptist Church established in 1909, and the Ojai Valley Museum is relocated to 338 East Ojai Avenue.
1971 – The Ojai Civic Association deeds Civic Center Park to the City of Ojai, who renames it Libbey Park, in honor of Edward Libbey.
1976 – Fred Smith donates the Hobson-Smith homes, re-designed by Zelma Wilson at 401 South Ventura Street to the City of Ojai and City Hall relocates there from 107 North Ventura Street.
1978 – Construction begins on the new Ojai Police Station at the southeast corner of Sout Ventura Street and Santa Ana Street, east of City Hall.
1990 – The Ojai Historical Preservation Commission is instituted by the City of Ojai.
2003 – The City of Ojai forms the Ojai Arts Commission and adopts a public art ordinance.
2015 – The population of the City of Ojai increases to 6,202 residents. Ojai is proclaimed an International City of Peace. Influence by Chumash tribal elders results in the City of Ojai approving a cultural resources resolution.
2016 –In November, voters in the City of Ojai elected their first mayor to serve a two-year term; previously the mayor was elected by the City Council.
MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Provenience Group architectural historian, Carole Denardo, inventoried and prepared a determination of eligibility using National Register of Historic Places (National Register), California Register of Historical Resources (California Register), and the City of Ojai criteria for the former Smith-Hobson residence, now housing Ojai City Hall at 401 South Ventura Street in Ojai, Ventura County, (APN 023-090-010). Per the requirements of CEQA and policies in the City of Ojai’s General Plan Conservation Element (adopted 1987), this report presents the results of a historic resource inventory and evaluation of the subject property because it is more than 50 years of age.

The results of the study determined the subject property is eligible for designation on the National Register, California Register, and as a City of Ojai Historic Landmark. The municipal building represents a significant architectural design associated with the beginning of the Spanish Revival ‘arcade’ period in Ojai and its association with important individuals vital to the prosperity of Ojai, Ventura and California, and architects of national importance. The Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall retains sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association to establish its historic landmark status.

A copy of this report and associated California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523 Series form will be submitted to the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC) of the California Historical Information System (CHRIS) at California State University, Fullerton. Research materials and photographs are stored at Provenience Group’s office in Santa Ynez, California.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a historic resource inventory and evaluation by Provenience Group for Ojai City Hall (formerly known as the Smith-Hobson House) at 401 South Ventura Street in Ojai, Ventura County, California as requested by the City of Ojai. The approximately 6,000 square foot building is located on an 8.79 acre parcel zoned R-2, within the city limits of Ojai in Ventura County.

Provenience Group prepared this historic resource evaluation pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Title 14 CCR 15064.5), and City of Ojai guidelines. The study was requested by the City of Ojai because the subject property is over 50 years old.

Under NHPA, a historic property is defined as any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the NRHP maintained by the Secretary of the Interior. In compliance with the NHPA, CEQA, and the City of Ojai, this report provides the regulatory framework, historic context, and inventory and evaluation of a historic architectural resource.
2.0 PROJECT LOCATION

The subject property is located at 401 South Ventura Street in Ojai, Ventura County, (APN 023-090-010) in Ojai, Ventura County, California, as indicated on the 1995 Ojai, CA USGS Topographic Quadrangle 7.5-minute Map Series (Figure 1). The one-story building (Assessor’s Parcel Number (APN 023-0-090-010) lies on an 8.95 acre parcel zoned R-2. No other buildings are present on the parcel (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1. Project Location Map
Figure 2. Assessor’s Map Book for 401 South Ventura Street in Ojai- APN 023-0-090-010.

Figure 3. Overview of the Smith-Hobson City Hall property.
3.0 REGULATORY CONTEXT

The regulatory framework that mandates consideration of cultural resources in project planning includes federal, state, and local governments. The purpose of this study is to inventory and evaluate the subject property for National Register/California Register and local eligibility and to offer management recommendations.

3.1 FEDERAL STATUTES AND REGULATIONS

3.1.1 Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

Regulations revised in 1997 (36 C.F.R. Part 800 et. seq.) set forth procedures to be followed for determining eligibility of properties for the National Register. The eligibility criteria and process are used by federal, state, and local agencies in the evaluation of the significance of cultural resources. Very similar criteria and procedures are used by California to identify historical resources eligible for listing in the California Register. Cultural resources eligible for inclusion in the National Register include both historic properties formally listed in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of the Interior and all other properties that meet National Register criteria.

3.1.2 National Register Criteria for Evaluation

Eligibility for listing in the National Register is determined using the criteria for evaluation described in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 60.4, which states that a historic property is any district, site, building, structure, or object:

A. that is associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A);

B. that is associated with the lives of persons significant to our past (Criterion B);

C. that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values; or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (Criterion C); and/or

D. that has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (Criterion D).

If the SHPO determines that a cultural resource is eligible for inclusion to the National Register, then it is automatically eligible for the California Register. If a resource does not have the level of integrity necessitated by the National Register, it may still be eligible for the California Register, which allows for a lower level of integrity.

The National Park Service also produces technical information and guidance for evaluating and documenting various resources, including how to apply the National Register criteria to rural historic landscapes (McClelland et al. 1999).

3.1.3 National Register - Seven Aspects of Integrity

A property’s integrity is determined using the National Register’s seven aspects of integrity described in 36 CFR 60.4, which states that a historic property must not only be shown to be significant under the National Register criteria for evaluation, but it also must retain historic integrity. The seven aspects of integrity include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. A property must meet one or more of the criteria for evaluation before a determination can be made about its integrity.
3.2 STATE REGULATIONS AND CRITERIA

3.2.1 California Environment Quality Act

According to CEQA, the fact that a resource is not listed in or determined eligible for listing in the California Register or is not included in a local register or survey does not preclude a lead agency, as defined by CEQA, from determining that the resource may be considered a historical resource as defined in PRC §5024.1.7. CEQA Statutes and Guidelines describe procedures for identifying, analyzing, and divulging potential adverse impacts to historical resources. CEQA states a “historical resource” is:

- A resource listed in, or determined to be eligible for listing in, the National Register or California Register.

- A resource included in a local register of historical resources, as defined in Section 5020.1(k) of the Public Resources Code (PRC), unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant.

- A resource identified as significant in a historical resource survey meeting the requirements of PRC Section 5024.1(g) (DPR Series 523), unless the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is not historically or culturally significant.

- Any object, building, structure, site, area, place, record, or manuscript which a lead agency determines to be historically significant or significant in the architectural, engineering, scientific, economic, agricultural, educational, social, political, military, or cultural annals of California, provided the determination is supported by substantial evidence in light of the whole record.

3.2.2 California Register Criteria for Evaluation

Created in 1992 and implemented in 1998, the California Register is “an authoritative guide in California to be used by state and local agencies, private groups, and citizens to identify the state’s historical resources and to indicate what properties are to be protected, to the extent prudent and feasible, from substantial adverse change” (PRC §5024.1(a)). Certain properties, including those listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the National Register and California Historical Landmarks (CHLs) numbered 770 and higher, are automatically included in the California Register. Other properties recognized under the California Points of Historical Interest program, identified as significant in historic resources surveys, or designated by local landmarks programs may be nominated for inclusion in the California Register.

All resources listed in or formally determined eligible for listing in the National Register are also eligible for listing in the California Register. The California Register contains a list of resources deemed significant within the context of California’s history. Of further note, local resources contained in a municipal or county list are also eligible for listing in the California Register. To be eligible for California Register listing, a resource must be significant at the local, state, or national level under one or more criteria defined in the California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 11.5, Section 4850:

1. It is associated with events or patterns of events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States (Criterion 1); or

2. It is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history (Criterion 2); or
3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values (Criterion 3); or

4. It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation (Criterion 4).

In addition to meeting at least one of the four criteria of significance listed above, a property must retain integrity, which is the ability of a property to convey its significance. Similar to the National Register applicable elements of integrity, the California Register seven elements of integrity include location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling, and association. Resources eligible for listing in the California Register must retain sufficient historic characteristics to be recognizable to the period of significance, and it must be able to convey the reasons for the resource’s significance. However, the California Register integrity standards are not as stringent because even if a resource may not retain sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register, it may still be eligible for listing in the California Register.

3.3 LOCAL REGULATIONS

3.3.1 City of Ojai Significance Criteria

The City of Ojai established criteria for evaluating potential City Landmarks, as indicated in Chapter 8, Sec.4-8.07 - Criteria for consideration of nomination. The City of Ojai authorizes the Historic Preservation Commission to make a determination about whether a nominated property, structure, or area meets one or more of the following 11 criteria:

(a) Its character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characterization of the community;

(b) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community;

(c) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials;

(d) Its identification as the work of a master builder, designer, architect, or landscape architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the community;

(e) Its embodiment of elements of design, detailing, materials, or craftsmanship that render it architecturally significant;

(f) Its embodiment of design elements that make it structurally or architecturally innovative;

(g) Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature;

(h) Its suitability for preservation or restoration. Any structure, property, or area that meets one or more of the above criteria shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration;

(i) It shall have historic, aesthetic, or special character or interest for the general public and not be limited in interest to a special group or person;

(j) Its designation shall not require the expenditure by the City of any amount of money not commensurate with the value of the object to be preserved; and

(k) Its designations shall not infringe upon the rights of a private owner thereof to make any and all reasonable uses thereof which are not in conflict with the purposes of this chapter.
4.0 HISTORICAL SETTING

This section describes the setting and historic context of the subject property and surrounding area resulting from archival research completed by Provenience Group. The historical context provides a framework for evaluating the architectural resource for National Register and California Register eligibility.

4.1 CONTEXT SETTING

The Ojai Valley lies about 775 feet above sea level within a long valley in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Mountains in central Ventura County. The City of Ojai is approximately 15 miles from the coast and the Los Padres National Forest lies to the north. Ojai has a Mediterranean climate, which is characterized by hot, dry summers, sometimes in excess of 100 °F. Most rainfall occurs between the months of October and April, although in recent years, extreme drought conditions have shortened this period. Winter nights often reach below freezing.

The surrounding area is characterized by oak woodlands, and riparian plants in the San Antonio Creek corridor and seasonal drainages. The Smith-Hobson City Hall is located within a stand of mature valley oak (Quercus lobata) trees, palm trees, and ornamental landscaping. The original building façade faces east with a generous setback from Ventura Street. City Hall entrance faces north onto Santa Ana Street. Another building, Help of Ojai – Oak Tree House – Adult Day Care is also located on the same parcel as City Hall, at 111 W. Santa Ana Street, to the southwest of City Hall.

A summary of historical development and land use associated with the Smith-Hobson City Hall property and surrounding area follows.

4.2 PREVIOUS LAND USE

4.2.1 Mission Period (1760-1821)

Chumash Indians were the earliest inhabitants of the Ojai valley region. According to some sources, the Chumash called it “Ojai” as a derivative stemming from the Ventureño Chumash word ‘awhaý,’ or "moon."¹

The aftermath of Spanish exploration in Alta California led to immigrations and settlement. In 1769, Gaspar de Portolá led the first land expeditions from Baja California to the San Francisco Bay. Coined the Sacred Expedition, Fray Junípero Serra joined the journey with the intent to establish California missions and colonize the region. During the expedition the site was selected for the future San Buenaventura Mission, which would be established in 1782.²

By 1804, five of the 21 missions had been established in Chumash territories. Of sad note during this period, was the perish of large populations of Native American gentiles and mission neophytes, largely triggered from exposure to European diseases and the sudden introduction to subsistence and cultural changes, which contributed to low fertility rates and high infant mortality.³

² Triem 1985:22
³ Tompkins 1978:1
4.2.2 Rancho Period (1821-1845)

In 1810, the Mexican revolution against Spain began, but it until the Treaty of Cordova in 1821 that California officially became a Mexican Territory. The transfer of sovereignty from Spain to Mexico altered Mission San Buenaventura irrevocably. Although secularization of the missions did not occur until 1834, Mission San Buenaventura began to decline with the withdrawal of Spanish support. In 1834, Mexican officials dispersed large land grants to former military soldiers as compensation for their service. The Mexican government also sold some of their holdings as a tactic to thwart Spain’s control of California. During this period, cattle ranches prospered by trading hide and tallow for manufactured goods, and wheat farming was also profitable. Native people who suffered from the mission's reduced economic circumstances, were hired as *vaqueros* at the ranches.

The Rancho Ojai Mexican land grant was awarded to Fernando Tico in 1837, where he established a cattle ranch. Señor Fernando Tico was born on April 9, 1798 in San Francisco, California. He acquired the 17,216 acre Rancho Ojai in 1837 in recognition of his service to the Mission San Buenaventura civil administration. In order to conform to the legal requirements of acquiring a Mexican land grant, Tico built two homes in Upper and lower Ojai by the end of 1837.5

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4 Angel 1883:233
4.2.3 Anglo-Mexican Period (1845-1880)

The Mexican-American War in 1846 weakened Mexico’s hold on Alta California, and American influence steadily increased. In 1848, hostilities between the Mexican Californians and the Americans ceased and the two-year Mexican-American War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the United States attained California as the victor in the Spanish American War. The treaty enabled the United States government to redistribute land where ownership was in question. After statehood, the California state legislature passed the Land Act of 1851, which created a board of commissioners to adjudicate disputes regarding Mexican citizens’ land claims.6

The Gold Rush, which began 1848-1849, provided economic opportunities throughout California for Americans, which included San Buenaventura County beef and other commodities to be sold at a premium. In 1850, California became the 31st state of the union. Under American rule, the government required proof of land ownership for land grant claims formerly made under Mexican rule. Often land grants were denied to the original grantee when formal legal documents were lacking, and the property fell into the hands of new owners, generally the recent American arrivals.7

In 1853, Henry Carnes purchased Rancho Ojai from Fernando Tico, three years later he sold it to Juan Camarillo. In 1861, torrential rains, followed by crops spoiled by grasshopper pestilence and several years of extreme drought, most notably 1863-1864, created livestock starvation; this contributed to the obliteration of cattle herds and financial woes for ranchers. Following severe drought, Americans began to supplant the Californios. The newcomers, who were attracted to the beauty and climate of the area, transformed ranches into farms with cultivated fields of citrus, grapes, and vegetable crops.8

In 1864, Thomas A. Scott and his local agent, Thomas Bard, began prospecting for oil in the Ojai area. It was Bard who initiated the first subdivision of Rancho Ojai in 1867, which split the property into 37 parcels. The town was established in 1874 by real estate developer Royce Gaylord Surdam who had purchased several of Bard’s parcels comprising 1,606 acres. He named the town Nordhoff, in honor of the writer Charles Nordhoff, whose 1873 book California: for Health, Pleasure, and Residence effectively boosted the appeal of California as a whole, the town began its planning and building stage.9 Ed Hare conducted the initial surveys in January of 1874, finally recording the findings by March 15, 1875. The town was laid out in an organized grid pattern, which was common for many Western towns of the time. The boundaries of this period were Santa Ana Street on the south side, Aliso Street to the north, Rincon Street to the west, and John Montgomery’s place to the east. The town site did not initially sell well, despite Surdam’s advertising. Montgomery was one of the few who responded, purchasing 1,300 of the original 1,606 acres.10

4.2.4 Americanization Period (1880-1915)

During the early American Period, cattle ranching continued on the ranchos, with the value of California cattle increasing substantially during the Gold Rush. Numerous Americans arrived to take advantage of the opportunity to own fertile land, which could be used for crop cultivation, fruit production, and livestock grazing (Barter et al. 1995:32). Agriculture was a significant draw for many homesteaders and investors to the area, with citrus one of the strongest crops. By 1894 the Ojai Citrus Growers Association formed to oversee cultivation activities in

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6 California State Archives 2005
7 Barter et al. 1994:25
8 Tompkins 1966:75
the area. Olives were also an important agricultural product during this period. Ranching, including the founding of the Hobson Brothers Meat Packing Company in 1905, also played a part in the regional history.11

The railroad was one of the main catalysts for the region’s population boom during the 1880s. In 1887, the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived in Ventura, providing a link to Los Angeles. The railroad’s arrival was slow, and access to Ojai continued mainly over Creek Road to Ventura and the William McKee-constructed Casitas Pass Road (currently State Route 150). The largest contributing factor to expansion within the Ojai valley occurred when the connection to the Southern Pacific Railroad via the Ventura River and Ojai Valley Railroad branch came to town. In light of this direct route to Ventura, agriculture expanded and several tracts were purchased by the Ojai Improvement Company for sale to new settlers.

R. G. Surdam, like other California advocates, promoted California’s health benefits and climate to affluent travelers from the east looking to convalesce from respiratory problems or seeking a retreat from the cold winters. By the 1890s, he even provided free land to Abram Blumberg to construct the Nordoff Hotel. Additional Ojai hotels and inns followed throughout this period, contributing to the area’s reputation as a place of recreation and healthy living.12

Leading up to and during World War I, American sentiment became increasingly anti-German. Across the United States, German and German-sounding place names were changed to more palatable alternatives. It was partly this trend, in addition to the renovations to the town, which inspired a name change away from Nordhoff.13

In 1907, Edward D. Libbey was invited to winter in Nordoff by Harry T. Sinclair. Libbey immediately appreciated the valley and its restorative qualities. Completion of the Foothills Hotel in 1903 by the Ojai Improvement Company firmly established the Ojai Valley’s reputation as a resort destination, and it was here that Mr. Libbey stayed.14 In 1907, he hired Los Angeles architects Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey to design a rustic cottage just south of the hotel. Unhappy with the aesthetic qualities of the downtown area, which reflected the rough Western history of the region, Mr. Libbey began compiling plans to transform the downtown area by 1916.

By 1912, available Sanborn Maps indicate that the majority of residences were located on the blocks closest to Ojai Avenue, where the commercial district was located. Homes remained few and scattered. The business district had grown considerably by 1912, reflecting the settlement of the larger Ojai Valley. A variety of service businesses lined Ojai Avenue, including a bank, three grocery stores, a print shop, a real estate/insurance office, carpenter and builder services, watchmaker, clothes cleaners, a baker, a sweet shop, garage, blacksmith, three general merchandise stores, a drugstore, barber, and a laundry.15

4.2.5 Period of Regional Culture (1915-1945)

The Ojai Valley Men’s League formed by prominent men in 1915, served as a receptive audience for Libbey’s vision of a renovated town. After a fire destroyed much of the original western-style downtown Nordhoff in 1917, Libbey helped design, finance, and build a new downtown in Spanish Colonial Revival architecture. Utilizing his connections among influential town’s people, including Sherman Thacher and Walter Bristol, Libbey reinvented the downtown area into a cohesive whole. The projects included a Spanish-style arcade along the

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12 San Buenaventura Research Associates, City of Ojai Historical Context Statement, 8.
15 Ibid., 13.
main street, a bell-tower reminiscent of the famous campanile of the Basilica Menor de San Francisco de Asis in Havana, Cuba, and a pergola opposite the arcade. The Ojai Valley Men’s League and local storefront owners, including A.L. Hobson, contributed outside funding to construct the downtown revitalization project. The original 1917 arcade and bell tower still stand today, and have come to serve as symbols of the city and the surrounding valley.

During the 1920s, City Hall was located in an arcaded storefront at 242 East Ojai Avenue. During this time, the back half of the building was used to store plumbing supplies for a neighboring plumbing business. By 1939, City Hall moved to a separate building at 348 Ojai Avenue east of the arcade, which had previously housed a restaurant.

4.2.6 Suburban Period (1945-1965)

The Post-war era marked a decline in the citrus industry regionally, as agriculture was replaced rapidly by suburban development in much of Southern California. Ventura County in general, and the Ojai Valley specifically, were largely protected from these trends and maintained a viable citrus throughout the Post-war Era.

Following World War II, a building boom occurred in Ojai with the opening of both large and small subdivisions spreading east and north of town. The auto court and motel concept of accommodation rose swiftly in popularity and began to supplant traditional resort hotels. Auto courts first appeared in Ojai during the late 1940s. The population of the city grew from 500 in 1921 to 2,519 in 1950.

4.2.7 Contemporary Period (1965-present)

Libbey’s pergola was destroyed in 1971, after it sustained damage in an explosion. It was later rebuilt in the early 2000s to complete the architectural continuity of the downtown area. Also in 1971, the Ojai Civic Association deeded Civic Center Park to the City of Ojai, who renamed it Libbey Park in honor of Edward Libbey.

By 1970, Ojai City Hall moved from the 348 (338) East Ojai Avenue to 107 North Ventura Street, the site of the former Baptist Church in 1909. After 338 East Ojai Avenue was vacated the Ojai Valley Museum moved in.

In 1973, Fred Smith donated the Smith-Hobson property at 401 South Ventura Street to the City of Ojai and sold them the adjacent lots. The main Smith-Hobson residence and guest house fronting Santa Ana Street were redesigned and connected by prominent architects Fisher & Wilde and Zelma Wilson, and in 1976 the property became the new Ojai City Hall.

In 1978, construction began for the new Ojai Police Station at the southeast corner of South Ventura Avenue and Santa Ana Street, east of City Hall. Two years later, Ojai’s population reached 7,000.

Recognition of the importance of historic preservation fueled an initiative to create the Ojai Historical Preservation Commission in 1990. In 2015, a cultural resources resolution was adopted, Ojai residents seek to balance growth with small-town charm as it grapples with present and future planning issues.

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16 Ibid., 19.
4.3 SUBJECT PROPERTY AND ASSOCIATED IMPORTANT INDIVIDUALS

4.3.1 A.L. Hobson and Family

Abraham (Abram) Lincoln Hobson was the son of William Dewey Hobson, known as the “Father of Ventura County.” W.D. Hobson was a key figure in Ventura County history, being instrumental in forming the county itself, and a prominent entrepreneur who founded and constructed many Ventura businesses during his time in the region, including a meat packing business that would later inspire Abram in his own business ventures.20

Abram and his brother, William Arthur, established the Hobson Brothers Packing Company in 1905. The brothers also found success in street paving, real estate, and urban development.

Abram and Helen Hobson built the all-wood-construction Smith-Hobson home in the American Craftsman style in the small town of Nordhoff, California in 1907 (Figure 5).21 A.L. Hobson was a York Rite Mason active in the Ventura Lodge F & A.M., Ventura Chapter, R.A.M., and Ventura Commandery K.T. while also maintaining fraternal connections with the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the Knights of Pythias and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. He was a member of the Rotary Club and served as president of the Ventura Chamber of Commerce.

Helen Hobson was the daughter of W.E. Barnard, first president of the University of Washington at Seattle. Mr. Barnard opened a real estate office in Ventura and was active in the lumber trade before moving to Oakland, California.22

Edward Libbey, Ojai benefactor and entrepreneur hired the San Diego architectural firm of Frank Mead and Richard Requa to design a Spanish Revival style false front for the northern side of Ojai Avenue to unify and connect all the buildings into one architectural scheme. They also designed and built a matching pergola and arches on the southern side of Ojai Avenue as the entrance to the downtown park. The 65-foot tall post office tower with its arches at the northwestern corner of the park were designed to complement the arcade and donated to the community by Libbey. When the arcades were completed in 1917, the name of the town was changed to Ojai, which completed the transformation of the Western town of Nordhoff to the Spanish Revival community of Ojai.23

Mead & Requa, who were familiar to A.L. Hobson through their work in downtown Ojai, were enlisted to redesign the Smith-Hobson home in the same Spanish Revival style as Libbey’s downtown design scheme (Figure 6). Robert Winfield was hired for this renovation c. 1917, the same year Frank Smith proposed to Miss Grace Hobson (July 22, 1917, according to Ventura County marriage records).24 Robert Winfield was a prominent builder and constructed a variety of buildings in Ojai, including El Roblar Hotel (now the Oaks at Ojai resort), the current Ojai Valley Cleaners building, Blakely’s Photographic Shop, and the Ojai Catholic Church (now Ojai Valley Museum).25 A nearby guest house in the same Spanish style accompanied the redesign and construction and

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24 David Mason, “Hobsons left a legacy that includes Ojai’s City Hall.”
was completed by 1925. Most of the aesthetic changes were to the exterior of the structure. The new Spanish Revival styled home included arches and wide patios typical of the style but maintained much of the same Craftsman styling inside, including fireplaces in nearly every individual room.

According to records, the east estate was remodeled c. 1915, while the west building was completed by 1929.  

![Figure 5. “The Craftsman-Style Abram Hobson House” - Ojai Valley Museum Collection.](Ojai Valley News, 02-25-2000).

According to the newspaper article “Hobson’s Will Bequeaths Large Fortune” found in the *Oxnard Daily Courier* and dated Wednesday, March 13, 1929, A.L. Hobson maintained a wide network of family members and community connections, of which several were named in the execution of his will. Among the names were Helen Barnard Hobson and Grace Hobson Smith, his wife and daughter, respectively. Mary Hobson McMillan, A.L. Hobson’s sister, Grace Barnard, Helen’s sister, Charles Cyrus Hobson, A.L. Hobson’s brother, and Edith Rice Swain, Carissa Rice Simonds, and Tennie A. Rice, nieces, were named and bequeathed $600 per month. A.L. Hobson’s various ranch properties, including the Willoughby Ranch, Ross Ranch on Vineyard Avenue, and the Hill Ranch in Oxnard were bequeathed to his grandchildren Rodney Hobson Smith, Barbara Barnard Smith, and Helen Margaret Smith and held in trust by their parents. Hobson seemed to be an active member of the San Buenaventura Lodge No. 214, Free & Accepted Masons of California, as he bequeathed all stock owned in the Masonic Temple association. As noted in the article, a “large amount of property was given to Grace Hobson Smith and Fred W. Smith in trust,” with 10 percent to be used at their discretion for any and all support and expenses as needed. Attorneys Clarke & Bowker of Los Angeles oversaw the will’s reading and execution as retainers of the petitioners.  

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4.3.2 Fred and Grace Hobson Smith

Fred Smith was a rancher and property owner-manager of the Smith-Hobson trust and its associated companies. He originally arrived in California from Alamosa, Colorado at the age of 15. Smith worked in Riverside before arriving in Ventura County in 1911. He worked for the Mallory and Dennison mercantile in Ojai. He met Grace Hobson, daughter of A.L. and Helen Hobson, around this time, and they were married July 22, 1917. At its height, Smith and his wife Grace oversaw some 15,000 acres of Smith-Hobson trust-owned land in three counties, including Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey.

Smith was the president of the Salinas Land Co. in Monterey County shortly before his passing, having helped create the corporation in 1917. He was a member of the Ivy Lawn Cemetery Board and was the director and vice president of the California Orchard Co. of Monterey County. A charter member of the Ventura Downtown Lions Club, Smith was elected International Director of Lions in 1940. He went on to serve as Third Vice President after 1944, and International President after 1947. As a member, Smith was the representative of Lions International at the chartering of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. In Ojai, Smith was a trustee of the Ojai Civic Association, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and President of the Hobson Brothers Packing Company after 1929.

Grace Hobson Smith graduated from University of California and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

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28 Bob Holt, “Noted Venturan Fred Smith dead at 89, services Monday,” n.d.
29 John Steven McGroarty, 574-576.
30 John Steven McGroarty, 574-576.
With the passing of Abram Hobson on March 7, 1929, his daughter Grace and her husband Fred Smith took up residence on property from 1929. In 1973, after Grace’s death in 1968, Fred Smith donated (nearby lots, appraised at $37,500 in 1973 were purchased by the City for $35,000) the Smith-Hobson estate to the City of Ojai as a gift on the behalf of the Smith-Hobson family.31

Award winning local architect Zelma Wilson was enlisted to combine the two houses into a single building appropriate for city offices. Zelma Wilson was able to create a space that was appropriate for municipal offices while maintaining the character of the Mead & Requa redesign. In 1976 the Smith-Hobson estate became the new home of Ojai City Hall.32 The City of Ojai purchased the Catholic Church building and adjacent rectory in 1993, converting them into the Ojai Valley Museum in 1996. This building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.33

4.3.3 Zelma Wilson

Zelma Wilson was a prominent architect recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for her design work. According to records found at the Ojai Valley Museum’s Research Library, Binder 148 “Ojai Buildings and Architects,” Zelma Wilson worked on and designed several prominent Ojai buildings and structures besides City Hall, including the Ojai Racquet Club, Meditation Mount Building (1972), St. Andrews Church, Arcade Plaza Mall, the Pavilion in Libbey Park, the Humanities Building at Thacher School, Friends Ranch Market, and she was the designer of the award-winning “New Bridge on Creek Road.”34

The sole female graduate with a degree in architecture from the University of Southern California in 1947, Wilson left the country for France when her husband, Michael Wilson, was blacklisted for his work on “Salt of The Earth.” They moved to Ojai in 1964, where Zelma Wilson established her own architectural practice. Wilson designed Oak Grove Elementary and Secondary schools, the William P. Clark Gymnasium at Villanova School in addition to the above-mentioned buildings. According to Andy Belknap, Ojai City Manager in 1996, Wilson “contributed an awful lot to the community” and “was part of a few key people who had a vision for downtown Ojai in the late ’70s and early ’80s that resulted in the transformation that has taken place and is continuing to take place.” Wilson received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the City in 1994. She was also named to the American Institute of Architects, the highest national honor in the field of architecture, with five awards for her designs. Prominent in community events and policy, Wilson served on the Ojai Architectural Board of Review, the Ojai Historical Preservation Commission, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy and the Ojai Film Society. Patricia Fry, vice-chair on the Ojai Historic Preservation Commission, stated “the one thing that stands out is her dedication to this community and to preserving its architectural integrity.”35 Zelma Wilson was named as one of Ojai’s Living Treasures in the technology category and taught architecture courses at the California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo.36 Per an editorial column printed in the Ojai Valley News and dated May 15, 1996, “in the tradition of Edward Drummond Libbey and J. Krishnamurti” the City must “add the name Zelma Wilson to the exclusive list of those who helped shape Ojai’s unique character.”37

In 1978, at the awards banquet put on by the Ventura County Unit of the American Institute of Architects, Fisher & Wilde and Zelma Wilson were honored for their “outstanding contributions to the architectural profession” for their redesign of the Ojai City Hall (Figure 7).

Figure 7. “Ojai City Hall Wins Architectural Awards” – Ojai Valley News: January 8, 1978:6.
Ojai Valley Museum Collection

According to available records, the City Hall has seen modest improvements and renovations since its transformation into the City Hall offices, including a reroofing project conducted from July - October 1993, with work completed by single-bidder Rayco Roofing Contractors, Inc., according to an Ojai City Council Memorandum. Roof repairs were also conducted in 2015 with Architect Sean Jarvis, Contractor Preston Reeves, and Public Works Director Greg Grant presiding (Building Permit No. BP 15-38).
5.0 METHODOLOGY

The methods used to conduct archival research, field inventory, and evaluation of the subject property at Smith-Hobson City Hall, and the results of those efforts, are detailed below.

5.1 ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Archival research facilities included the Ojai Public Library and Ojai Valley Museum, and Ventura County Genealogical Society. Building and assessor parcel documents and surveyor maps were also reviewed at the County of Ventura and Ojai City Hall. Further, specific publications, historic maps, and online sources were reviewed for additional information about the subject property.

5.2 FIELD INVENTORY

On September 29, 2016, architectural historian Carole Denardo performed a field inventory of the Smith-Hobson City Hall property at 401 South Ventura Street in Ojai. Ms. Denardo exceeds the qualifications criteria listed in the Secretary of Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation (Per Section 101(f), (g), and (h)).

During the architectural inventory, Ms. Denardo took detailed field notes and photographed the building exterior, including elevations and three-quarter views. Digital photographs were taken of specific architectural elements and to provide a visual overview of the resource in its existing setting. Specific Craftsman interior architectural elements were also photographed. Photographs of the building and associated captions are in Appendix A and associated DPR 523 forms with supporting maps and photographs are provided in Appendix B.
6.0 INVENTORY RESULTS

The following section provides information on the existing condition of the Smith-Hobson City Hall in Ojai, Ventura County, California, based on an on-site inventory and evaluation, to determine its eligibility for the California Register and significance in accordance with City of Ojai criteria. The historic resource inventory was performed because the building is more than 50 years old. The on-site inventory assessed the building’s significance and integrity. Integrity is determined by assessing a combination of building attributes that include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association (CEQA PRC SS5024.1, Title 14 CCR, Section 4852).

6.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SMITH-HOBSON HOUSE/ OJAI CITY HALL

The subject property currently consists of an irregular-shaped Spanish Colonial Revival municipal building, characterized by its white stuccoed exterior walls, prominent arches, low-pitched side-gabled roof with narrow eaves clad with terracotta roof tiles, and concrete foundation within a landscaped garden setting. Among other character-defining features is an arced porte-cochere, loggia, ornate chimney top, arched windows, single and multiple 1/1 pane paired casement windows, and boxed window grilles.

![Figure 8. Façade of the original Smith-Hobson House (eastern end), facing southwest.](image)

The original portion of the A. L. Hobson residence (now City Hall) was designed in the Craftsman style in 1907, but the exterior was remodeled in the Spanish Colonial Revival styling in 1915. The guest house located west of the main house, was also redesigned in Spanish Colonial Revival styling and completed in 1929. Many examples of Craftsman elements in the building interior, such as dark wood boxed beams, built-in cabinets, and ceramic tiled fireplaces, remain unaltered (see Plates 34-40).
On February 22, 1976, the Smith-Hobson estate was donated, in memory of Grace Hobson Smith, to the City of Ojai “to preserve this landmark, reconstruction for use as their City Hall was authorized by the Ojai City Council” (Figure 9). Architects Fisher & Wilde and Zelma Wilson were then contracted to connect the 3,340 square foot Smith-Hobson residence to the 2,312 square foot guest house (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Smith-Hobson residence donation plaque placed at City Hall in memory of Grace Hobson Smith.

A review of the original floor plans (Figure 10) and an assessment of the current building suggests there were minimal changes made when the two buildings were connected. Most of the alterations, such as wall, window, and door removal or relocation, occurred within the interior of the building to create offices.

The eastern facade, which features an arcaded porte-cochere and loggia, arched windows, paired casement windows, and boxed window grilles, appears to be relatively intact (Plates 3-9), as do other portions of the building (Plates 10-33). In particular, the depiction in Figure 8 is nearly identical to the 1927 photograph of the residence (Figure 6). It is uncertain if the stucco wall in front of the building, parallel with Santa Ana Street, was constructed during the Smith-Hobson tenure or after it became City Hall. At least one source suggests the wisteria lined pergola supported by stucco covered columns with domed tops present today were extant in 1925 between the Hobson residence and guest house.38 A review of photographs taken by Julius Shulman in 1976 of Ojai City Hall as designed by Zelma Smith, revealed the building façade has remained intact after renovations were completed to present day (Figure 11).39 Doors and windows throughout the exterior of the building largely appear to be authentic, with the exception of two picture windows in the rear. The back decking may also be a more recent addition. Architectural elements, such as some of the exterior lighting, may be more recent replacements, but if so, they complement the architectural styling.

Figure 10. Floor plans of the original A. L. Hobson residence (r) and guest house (l) prior to architect Zelma Wilson connecting the two buildings in 1976.
Figure 11. Overview of Ojai City Hall in 1976 by Julius Shulman.
7.0 INTEGRITY AND CRITERIA ANALYSIS

In accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and CEQA regulations, this report presents the results of a historic property inventory and evaluation of the Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall at 401 South Ventura Street because it is more than 50 years of age. The on-site inventory assessed the building’s significance and integrity using National Register and California Register criteria.

7.1 NATIONAL REGISTER AND CALIFORNIA REGISTER ELIGIBILITY RESULTS

Criterion A/1—Significant Historical Events: The subject property appears to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A and California Register under Criterion 1. Historic research indicates the Smith-Hobson residence was constructed in 1907, during early twentieth century development of the town of Nordoff/Ojai and it reflects changes in architectural preferences in California. The municipal building is also associated with its use as Ojai’s City Hall for the past 40 years.

Criterion B/2–Lives of Significant Individual in Our Past: The subject property appears to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion B and California Register under Criterion 2. Both Abram L. Hobson, the original owner, and his son-in-law, Fred Smith were important individuals associated with the Smith-Hobson City Hall; both used the building as their residence. Mr. Hobson was a prominent Ojai businessman who operated the successful Hobson Brothers Packing Company and several other commercial endeavors. He was also active in several local fraternal organizations: York Rite Mason, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the Knights of Pythias and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. In addition, he was a member of the Rotary Club and served as President of the Ventura Chamber of Commerce.

Fred Smith was a rancher and President of the Salinas Land Company, and after 1929, he served as President of the Hobson Brothers Packing Company. Among his service for numerous local fraternal associations was his involvement as representative of Lions International at the chartering of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. As property owner-manager of the Smith-Hobson Trust, he was responsible for bequeathing the Smith-Hobson residence to the City of Ojai for use as a permanent City Hall.

Criterion C/3–Distinctive Characteristics of a Type, Period, or Method of Construction; Work of a Master, or High Artistic Values: The subject property appears to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C and California Register under Criterion 3. The Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall is an excellent example of early Spanish Colonial Revival architectural design, with notable architectural elements such as an arcaded porte-cochere and loggia designed by architects Frank Mead and Richard Requa, who also designed the renowned ‘arcade’ and other Spanish Revival buildings in downtown Ojai.

In 1978, the building was acclaimed “one of the most beautiful City Halls in the United States” by a panel of renowned architects. The Ojai City Hall is also associated with distinguished architects Zelma Wilson and Fisher & Wilde who received an award by the Ventura County Unit of the American Institute of Architects for their outstanding work integrating the two residences for use as a municipal building.

Criterion D/4–Propensity to Yield Information Important in Prehistory or History: The subject property appears to be not eligible for the National Register under Criterion D and California Register under Criterion 4. The building has been documented and is not the source of additional information.
7.2 INTEGRITY

For a property to be eligible for listing to the National Register/California Register, in addition to qualifying under one or more of the four criteria, it must retain sufficient integrity. The seven aspects of integrity include:

1) location (the property has not been moved);
2) design (the combination of elements that create the form, plan, and style of a property);
3) setting (the physical environment of a property);
4) materials (the physical elements used at a particular period of time to create the property);
5) workmanship (the physical evidence of craft used to create the property);
6) feeling (the property’s expression of a particular time and place); and
7) association (the link between a significant event or person and the property).

The Office of Historic Preservation and National Park Service guidelines indicate that design, workmanship, feeling, and materials are the most critical integrity elements for historical buildings and structures (National Register Bulletin 15-VIII). The property retains integrity of location, having never been moved, and the design, materials, and workmanship have not been compromised because of the meticulous restoration work by the architects to retain the building’s integrity. The setting is intact within a wooded area of mature trees with an ample setback from Ventura Street, and the sense of feeling and association are strong, especially because the interior still displays Craftsman elements reminiscent of former residential use.

As a whole, the building maintains sufficient integrity required to qualify it for listing on both the National Register and California Register.

7.3 CITY OF OJAI EVALUATION

The Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall meets each of the 11 criteria because:

- Under criteria (a), (c), (e) and (f), the building represents an important period in Ojai’s history when its architectural character began to develop in the early twentieth century. The Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall reflects the same Spanish Revival design elements which function to aesthetically unify the community, and the meticulous design work achieved to connect the two residences was an innovative architectural approach to modify the building for municipal use.
- Under criterion (b), the building is identified with the Hobson and Smith families who were prominent individuals who served the community through their businesses and fraternal organization involvement.
- Under criterion (d), the building embodies the important work of architects Frank Mead and Richard Requa, who also designed the renowned ‘arcade’ and other Spanish Revival buildings in downtown Ojai. It is also linked with local, woman architect Zelma Wilson and Fisher & Wilde, who received an award for their meticulous work integrating the two residences for use as a municipal building.
- Under criterion (g), the classic Spanish Revival architectural design within a wooded setting contributes to its familiarity as a visual feature in the community.
- Under criteria (h), (i), and (j), the building retains sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration and it retains historic character and heritage to the community.
- Criteria (j) and (k) do not appear to be relevant to this study.
8.0 RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA, CEQA, and City of Ojai criteria, this report presents the results of a historic architectural resource inventory and evaluation of the Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall because it is more than 50 years of age.

8.1 National Register and California Register Eligibility Results

This report concludes that the subject property is eligible for the National Register and California Register under Criteria A/1, B/2, and C/3, and furthermore, it retains sufficient integrity to qualify as both a significant historic property eligible for listing in the National Register and an important historical resource eligible for listing in the California Register.

The municipal building represents a significant architectural design associated with the beginning of the Spanish Revival ‘arcade’ period in Ojai and its association with important individuals vital to the prosperity of Ojai, Ventura and California, and architects of national importance. The Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall retains sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association to establish its historic landmark status.

8.2 City of Ojai Eligibility Results

Because the Smith-Hobson Ojai City Hall is eligible for the National Register and California Register, it is also eligible for local listing as a City of Ojai Historic Landmark.

8.3 Conclusions

The results of the study determined the subject property is eligible for designation in the National Register, California Register, and as a City of Ojai Historic Landmark.
9.0 REFERENCES CITED

Andree, Herb and Noel Young

Gidney, C.M., B. Brooks, and E.M. Sheridan

McAlester, Virginia, and Lee McAlister


APPENDIX A: PLATES

EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS

Plate 1. Façade of residence at 440 El Sueño Road, facing south.

Plate 2. East end of property showing mature trees and landscaping, facing southwest.
Plate 3. Arcaded porte-cochere at the east end of façade, facing south.

Plate 4. East end of façade displaying arched doors and windows, facing south.
Plate 5. South end of east elevation arcaded loggia, facing north.

Plate 6. Interior of the arched loggia, facing southwest.
Plate 7. Over-sized entry door within the arched loggia, facing west.

Plate 8. East side of façade, facing southwest.
Plate 9. Façade – east of the City Hall courtyard entrance, facing south.

Plate 10. Façade from City Hall courtyard entrance, facing southwest.
Plate 11. Façade from City Hall courtyard entrance, facing south.

Plate 12. Façade from City Hall courtyard entrance, facing southeast.
Plate 13. Front door to City Hall from courtyard, facing south.

Plate 14. Front door to City Hall, facing southeast.
Plate 15. Ramp to eastern entry to City Council Chambers, facing southwest.

Plate 16. Wisteria covered arbor over ramp to eastern entry to City Council Chambers, facing east.
Plate 17. West end of façade, facing southwest.

Plate 18. West end of façade and west elevation, facing southeast.
Plate 19. West elevation of City Hall, facing northeast.

Plate 20. South end of west elevation of City Hall, facing east.
Plate 21. West end of the south elevation, facing east.

Plate 22. West and south elevations – staircase to rear deck, facing northeast.
Plate 23. West elevation, entrance from rear deck, facing east.

Plate 24. South elevation from rear steps to deck, facing north.
Plate 25. South elevation, east of the rear deck, facing north.

Plate 26. South elevation, east of the rear deck, facing northwest.
Plate 27. East end of south elevation, facing northeast.

Plate 28. Overview of south elevation, facing northwest.
Plate 29. Overview of the eastern portion of the south elevation, facing north.

Plate 30. Overview of the east end of south elevation, facing north.
Plate 31. East end of south elevation, facing north.

Plate 32. South end of east elevation break area shaded with bamboo, facing northwest.
Plate 33. South end of east elevation, facing west.
Plate 34. City Council Chambers depicting wood ceiling beams, wood built-ins, and ceramic tile fireplace.

Plate 35. City Council Chambers- Craftsman-style ceramic tiled fireplace.
Plate 36. Close-up of Craftsman-style tile on fireplace in City Council Chambers.

Plate 37. Craftsman-style built-in cabinets in City Council Chambers.
Plate 38. Craftsman-style tiled fireplace in City Hall office.

Plate 39. Craftsman-style tiled fireplace in City Hall Conference Room.
Plate 40. Second floor staircase on east side of building.