

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Pence Hotel and Post Office **DRAFT**Other names/site number: 2828 Messilla Valley Road

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)**2. Location**Street & number: 2828 Messilla Valley RoadCity or town: Oroville State: California County: ButteNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

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**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**

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**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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**Signature of commenting official:****Date**

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**Title :****State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

##### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing Noncontributing

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1

\_\_\_\_\_

buildings

\_\_\_\_\_

1

sites

\_\_\_\_\_

1

structures

\_\_\_\_\_

2

objects

1

4

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Hotel

GOVERNMENT: Post Office

DOMESTIC: Multiplied Dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single-Family Residence

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum/Work in Progress

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: No Style/Vernacular

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood, granite, composite shingles, concrete, glass.

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Pence Hotel is located at 2828 Messilla Valley Road (APN 041-110-026) in Butte County, California on a 1.30 acre parcel with a 2,844 square foot timber-framed residence. The two-and-a-half story 20th-Century vernacular residence has a simple rectangular footprint with irregularities, and features an overhanging hipped roof sheathed in composition shingles with two first-floor shed extensions facing north and south respectively. The building is clad in timber clapboards with vertical corner boards at each corner of the building. The Pence Hotel retains integrity to its only period of significance under Criterion A.

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## Narrative Description

### Pence Hotel/2828 Messilla Valley Road

2828 Messilla is a two-and-a-half story 2,844 square foot timber-framed commercial building turned residence featuring a simple rectangular footprint with irregularities on a 1.30 acre parcel. The Pence Hotel has a moderately pitched hipped roof sheathed in modern composition shingles with slight overhanging closed eaves and closed cornices. A moderately pitched gable dormer projects out of the east side sheathed in modern composition shingles, while the west side has a metal gutter with no downspout extending along roughly two-fifths of the west roof.<sup>1</sup>

The north and south side each have a one-story low pitched shed roof extension sheathed with modern composition shingles with exposed rafters and cornices.<sup>2</sup> A metal gutter with downspout extends along the north facing section of the north shed extension, and the south shed extension features a metal gutter with downspout extending along the south facing section. The west roof features a capped stove chimney and eyebrow dormer louvered vent, while the east roof has an eyebrow dormer louvered vent. The south roof hosts an uncapped stove chimney in the south-east corner, and has two low-profile rectangular modern skylights placed in the center area of the roof. The north roof features an uncapped stove chimney in the northeast corner and an uncapped chimney near the roofline.

2828 Messilla's walls are clad in wood clapboards of the rabbeted beveled board variety, and each corner of the building hosts simple square corner boards running from the foundation to the cornices. The west façade features one-over-one single-hung, paired one-over-one single-hung, and paired four-over-four single-hung vinyl sash replacement windows. A fixed wood stained glass single-paned resides in the porch on the west façade. The south façade hosts one-over-one wood single hung, paired-one-over-one wood single-hung, fixed wood single-paned, and a six-over-six single-hung vinyl windows. The east façade features one-over-one wood single-hung, paired one-over-one wood single-hung, and a paired one-over-one single-hung vinyl replacement windows. The north side hosts single-hung one-over-one wood sash windows and paired single-hung one-over-over windows. The north façade hosts a two-story square bay with central paired single-hung one-over-one windows facing north flanked by single-hung one-over-over one wood sash on the west and east facing sections of the bay.<sup>3</sup>

Each original single-hung and nearly all vinyl replacement windows features original simple rectangular board window dressings hosting two small metal brackets above each window to hold separate window screens.<sup>4</sup> The Pence Hotel's window screens are one-over-one fixed wood sashes with metal wire screen that fit in the space over the window created by the window

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<sup>1</sup> See Photo 1, Section 9.24.

<sup>2</sup> See Photo 2, Section 9.24, and Photo 4, Section 9.25.

<sup>3</sup> See Photo 3, Section 9.25.

<sup>4</sup> See Photo 5, Section 9.26.

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dressings, and all present window screens are reconstructions of the originals based upon period design for similar vernacular screens.

Two porches provide access to 2828 Messilla on the north and south, southwest faces of the building. The Pence Hotel's main porch is an integral porch at the southwest corner of the west façade that connects to the south side's full width one-story projecting porch. Square timber columns support the building above and run equidistant along the entire main porch. Timber railing runs from the inset porch all through the south side porch, and features an alternating pattern of turned and square balusters on the west facing side and solely square balusters on the south railing. Access is provided by a flight of wood steps flanked by square handrails with rectangular balusters and square landing newels.

The entry porch interior hosts a sash door facing west with a fixed floral-pattern glass pane above and five panels below the lock rail, while timber door trim resides around the doorway with simple projecting molding above.<sup>5</sup> The door window has a window dressing featuring carved leaf patterns for the horizontal boards and carved vertical boards. The central roof of the entry porch hosts a hanging twelve-sided light fixture, and the ceiling features vertical shiplap wood boards with curved molding separating the ceiling from the walls. The entry porch has a flooring of simple wood boards that continues on through the south side.

The south side of the main porch features two doors, with one facing south and the second facing west.<sup>6</sup> The south door is a replacement two-paneled wood door with simple door trim and a metal screen door over it, while the original Dutch door was moved inside for security purposes. The west facing door consists of a sash door with fixed single pane with three panels below, and is surrounded by a simple square door trim. Access is provided by a short flight of wood stairs flanked by square handrails with rectangular balusters and square landing newels.

The north porch is supported by equidistant square timber columns with railing featuring square balusters running along the length of the porch. The north porch interior features a sash door facing north with a fixed floral-pattern window above the lock rail with two panels below. Simple square wood door trim surrounds the door. The north porch has simple wood board flooring. Access is provided by a wood stairwell facing west with handrails featuring square balusters and square landing newels; a wooden stairwell facing north with handrails exhibiting square balusters and square landing newels; and a concrete handicap ramp facing east with wood railing featuring square balusters and square posts.

2828 Messilla rests atop a poured concrete wall foundation with local granite facing on the west side enclosing a crawlspace. The concrete foundation walls feature simple squared aluminum framed vents roughly half-a-foot above the ground. Simple square timber posts embedded in poured concrete foundations support the north and south facing porches. The Pence Hotel rests atop a parcel of land bounded by a chain-link fence on the west border, a vertical timber board fence on the south border, and a metal wire fence with equidistantly placed circular timber poles

<sup>5</sup> See Photo 7, Section 9.27.

<sup>6</sup> See Photo 6, Section 9.26.

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along the east border, and a metal fire fence with sections of barbed wire and metal poles along the north border. A rough gravel driveway provides access to the hotel from Messilla Valley Road.

### Noncontributing Resources

#### *Messilla Valley Schoolhouse Remains*

The site of the Messilla Valley Schoolhouse retains exposed features from its time of activity. At the northeast corner of the property is the poured concrete pad for the carriage house of the school. The center of the north boundary of 2828 Messilla hosts the partially excavated and unexcavated foundational remains of the boys and girls outhouses respectively. The southeast corner features the mortared stone foundation of a windmill with a steel construction that once operated on the school grounds.

#### *Modern Well and Sheds*

A modern well with a circular storage tank lies roughly midway on the east border of 2828 Messilla for the provision of clean water given the property's rural nature. The south area of the property hosts three portable wood-framed sheds assembled close together, two side-gabled and one front-gabled.

#### *Messilla Valley Schoolhouse Monument*

At the northwest corner of 2828 Messilla is a tapered square pillar of rough stone mortared together in 2013.<sup>7</sup> A bronze plaque facing west from the Gold Nugget Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution is embedded in the plinth commemorating the property as the 1879 location of the Messilla Valley Schoolhouse.

#### *Messilla Valley Schoolhouse Arch*

Standing at the site of the Messilla Valley Schoolhouse entrance is a monument to the former building now located in Yankee Hill, California and serving as the headquarters of the Yankee Hill Historical Society.<sup>8</sup> The archway consists of rough stone mortared together atop poured concrete foundations forming two pillars rising above the archway. A metal plaque commemorating the former schoolhouse lies on the west face of the north pillar.

### Alterations

Alterations to the Pence Hotel began at an unknown date either during or after the period of significance when the eastern section of the south facing porch was enclosed as an interior of the hotel for laundry purposes. The central chimney was removed after the August 1, 1975 earthquake rocked the Oroville area with considerable damage. The original wood sash windows

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<sup>7</sup> See Photo 8, Section 9.27.

<sup>8</sup> See Photo 9, Section 9.28.

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on the west façade, save for the porch window, and two on the east were replaced with vinyl sashes at an unknown date prior to 2006. The movement of the Pence Hotel to its present location in 2006 was the next major known alteration, and resulted in the removal of the north and south facing porches along with the south extension because of severe deterioration from years of neglect. The deterioration was significant enough that no original materials from the porches could be reused in the later reconstructions.

2828 Messilla was relocated atop a new foundation of poured concrete with local granite facing on the west side to comply with California building codes instead of replicating the original foundation of bare earth and loosely placed local granite. The south facing porch and extension were reconstructed in 2015 following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Restoration. The wood shake roof was replaced in 2015 with a modern composite shingle roof, but surviving shakes were retained and are stored onsite. The south facing roof underwent an alteration in 2015 with the addition of two low profile rectangular skylights. The north facing porch was reconstructed in 2016 with the addition of a concrete ramp on the east facing side for Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) compliance to provide handicap access to the building.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

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A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐

B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐

C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐

D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.



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### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☒ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Communications

Community Planning & Development

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### Period of Significance

1901-1912

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### Significant Dates

1901

1912

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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**Cultural Affiliation**

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**Architect/Builder**

Wilson, William

Van Ness, Leon

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Pence Hotel is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of **Communications** for its role as a surviving representative of the fourth-class post office that connected rural areas to the nation at large until the advent of Rural Free Delivery. The Pence Hotel under Criterion A has a period of significance from 1901-1912 to reflect its function as an operating fourth-class post office. The Pence Hotel is also locally significant under Criterion A in the area of **Community Planning and Development** for its role as a representation of the last period of prosperity for the community of Pentz until the rise of Rural Free Delivery began a period of contraction that resulted in Pentz ceasing to exist. The Pence Hotel has a period of significance from 1901-1912 to reflect its role as the last period of prosperity for Pentz. The property is a moved property, but meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration B as the sole remaining building directly associated with the rural community of Pentz.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

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The Pence Hotel is significant under Criterion A for communications to Butte County's postal heritage because it is one of only two extant fourth-class post offices from before Rural Free Delivery (RFD) out of originally thirty-three. Fourth-class post offices serviced rural areas nestled in tiny communities, and usually operated out of stores with postmasters subject to appointed by Congressional Representatives. The fourth-class post office connected farmers and other rural citizens with the nation at large, and helped connect the people of Butte County closer together by allowing locals to partake in the mailing process. The Pence Hotel is an important resource because the fourth-class post offices vanished with the arrival of RFD as the US Postal Service consolidated routes and shut down small post offices. The lack of these post offices resulted in the small communities they serviced usually vanishing over the next few decades aside from two extant survivors in 2025.

The Pence Hotel is significant under Criterion A for community planning and development to Butte County's heritage because it represents the last period of prosperity to Pentz before RFD caused the small community to vanish. The Pence Hotel was the last major addition to the community of Pentz located on and around the Pence Ranch since 1864 as an important stop on the route from Oroville to the Magalia Ridge mining communities. The 1901 Pence Hotel is important because it is both the last major addition to Pentz during its last era of prosperity, and is the only remaining major resource connected to the former community of Pentz.

### **Criteria Consideration B**

Although the Pence Hotel has been moved roughly a quarter mile from its original location, the resource still retains integrity of materials, workmanship, feeling, association, and design.<sup>9</sup> The Pence Hotel's orientation was rotated over roughly 180 degrees clockwise because it kept the building facing the Messilla Valley Road, a road it performed its historic functions facing. Setting has changed minimally because the Pence Hotel remains in the Pentz area surrounded by agricultural fields and pasture only a quarter mile from its original location. Pentz and Pence Ranch buildings that once surrounded the hotel during its period of significance are no longer extant, and the buildings and structures present on the current ranch are later constructions.

The Pence Hotel was saved from demolition because of Lyn Batt Moore in 2006 when the owners of the then Lord's Seven Ranch intended to demolish the building and erect a small church for their religious focused property. The Pence Hotel was purchased and moved to prevent demolition on to the site of the former Messilla Valley Schoolhouse, and has undergone a slow restoration for eventual use as a public museum dedicated to the long defunct community of Pentz and associated local histories. Relocation has had a limited effect on the property's significance because of recognition and acknowledgement by the Gold Nugget Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and pending recognition by Pair-O-Dice Chapter No. 7-11 of E Clampus Vitus.

### **Historic Context**

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<sup>9</sup> See Figure 2, Section 9.29.

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The area of Pentz in Butte County once hosted a small agricultural settlement nestled on the road connecting the City of Oroville to the Town of Paradise and other small mining communities located on the Magalia Ridge. Pentz began as the Lyon Ranch established in 1850 by the partnership of Manoah Pence, William Lyon, Robert Bounds, Alfred Kagy, and John Slocum.<sup>10</sup> The Lyon Ranch's position on the road leading to the mines located in Magalia, California and other mining camps on the Paradise Ridge resulted in the operation of a small store and restaurant out of a tent for trade and hungry travelers. Lyon Ranch remained a minor stage stop and cattle ranch during the 1850s and early 1860s with no indication of developing in to a larger settlement.<sup>11</sup> Manoah Pence bought out the remaining partners and created Pence Ranch in 1864, and filed for and established the Pentz Post Office in the same year as the first postmaster.<sup>12</sup> Manoah Pence operated the post office out of the two-story Pence Hotel he had built to provide overnight accommodations for travelers headed to or from the Magalia Ridge area or further on to Susanville in Plumas County.

Pentz was the official spelling the Post Office Department gave the new post office, and this spelling defined the name for the new community and its environs. The Pentz post office created a gathering place for local farmers as they visited Pentz for mail and became tied to the emerging Pentz area. Lumber developed in to an important Butte County industry in the 1870s, and the Flea Valley Lumber Company established a lumber flume in 1876 that terminated just east of Pentz.<sup>13</sup> Timber employed labor from the Pentz area and lasted until Flea Valley went bankrupt, while the flume terminus became locally known as Dumpsville or Dumptown until it hosted the second location of the Messila Valley School in 1879.<sup>14</sup>

Pentz expanded in to a small settlement by 1878 with the growing community hosting two hotels, feed yard, barber shop, restaurant, saloon, grocery, and a communal dance hall.<sup>15</sup> Agricultural prosperity remained the main focus with the 1880s dominated by olive growing to the south, while the 1890s saw extensive grape holdings until a locust swarm in 1894 devastated the crop.<sup>16</sup> The Chico Meat Company would establish large hog and cattle holdings around the Pentz area in the 1890s, and Pacific Gas & Electric would connect Pentz to electricity in the late 1890s from two power plants built nearby. Pentz's size in the 1890s was significant enough to

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Wells, Frank Gilbert, and W.L. Chambers, *Reproduction of Well's and Chambers' History of Butte County, California, 1882* (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1973), 251.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Talbitzer, *Butte County: An Illustrated History* (Northridge, California: Windsor Publications Inc., 1987), 40; George C. Mansfield, *Butte: The Story of a California County* (Oroville, California: Oroville Register Print, 1919), 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph F. McGie, *History of Butte County Vol. 1 1840-1919* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oroville, California: Butte County Board of Education, 1982), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Talbitzer, *Butte County*, 70; McGie, *History of Butte*, 225.

<sup>14</sup> Forrest D. Dunn, *Butte County Place Names: A Geographical and Historical Dictionary* (Chico, California: Association for Northern California Records and Research, 1977), 67.

<sup>15</sup> McGie, *History of Butte*, 226.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

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warrant its defined boundaries displayed on the U.S. Geological Services 1895 1:125,000 scale topographic map for the Chico area, and it maintained this size until the mid-1920s.<sup>17</sup>

Fire devastated the Pentz community on May 20, 1901 when the Pence Hotel burned down from a hot stove and consumed or damaged a series of nearby homes located on the ranch.<sup>18</sup> Fire insurance allowed for the building of a new, and current, Pence Hotel in late 1901 that doubled as the new post office. Pentz continued to thrive agriculturally with wheat and rebounded grape fields when Butte County promoted the area in 1903 and highlighted a local olive mill and quality lime and clay deposits.<sup>19</sup>

Rural Free Delivery swept across the rural areas of the United States in the early 1900s, and the citizens around Pentz began to clamor for a route serving them directly instead of having to travel to Pentz.<sup>20</sup> Oroville Post Office accepted these demands with the creation of Oroville Rural Free Delivery Route 4 on June 1, 1912 that fulfilled the role the Pentz Post Office served since 1864.<sup>21</sup> The Pentz area farmers still utilized the community hall in to the early 1920s, but by the 1930s, the Chico Meat Company owned the Pence Ranch and much of the former Pentz area.<sup>22</sup> No records of a Pentz community appear after the middle 1920s, indicating the area became increasingly rural until no sense of community remained. The Pence Hotel remains the only surviving element from the days when Pentz was a thriving agricultural settlement.

#### Fourth-Class Post Office and Rural Free Delivery

Fourth-Class post offices once dominated the American postal landscape connecting small rural communities to the nation at large until the establishment of Rural Free Delivery. The postmaster commission system was established on July 1, 1864 after two years of debate within Congress, and it divided postmasters in to five classifications defined by two-year compensation cycles.<sup>23</sup> The majority of postmasters were fourth class, especially after the fifth class was abolished in 1874, and most never did enough postal business to improve to third class.<sup>24</sup> Fourth-class postmasters operated in rural locations and became community cornerstones for gathering and local identification.<sup>25</sup> The fourth-class post office encouraged the improvement, maintenance,

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, *California, Chico Sheet* [map], 1895, 1:125,000. United States Department of the Interior, USGS, 1895; U.S. Geological Survey, *California, Chico Sheet* [map], 1895 Revised 1901, 1:125,000. United States Department of the Interior, USGS, 1901; See Figure 1, Section 9.29.

<sup>18</sup> "Pentz Hotel Destroyed," *Chico Record*, May 20, 1901, 1; "Pence Hotel Burned," *Daily Register*, May 20, 1901, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Butte County Board of Supervisors, *Butte County: Where Northern California Oranges Grow* (Oroville, California: Oroville Mercury Print, 1903), 12; *Ibid.*, 32; *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> "Clear Creek Wants Rural Free Delivery," *Chico Record*, May 24, 1912, 5.

<sup>21</sup> H.E. Salley, *History of California Post Offices: Second Edition 1849-1990* ed. Edward L Patera (United States: The Depot, 1991), 325.

<sup>22</sup> "Benefit Dance Is Planned By Pentz Farm Bureau," *Chico Record*, March 29, 1923, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 299.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 300; *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

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and expansion of the American road network because communities that failed to maintain roads risked denial of postal services.<sup>26</sup>

Fourth-class post offices usually existed within general stores or overnight accommodations such as hotels or inns, and postmasters usually operated their post offices as a secondary job.<sup>27</sup> Trade was encouraged by the presence of a post office within a store because of rural residents or farmers coming in once or twice a week to collect mail. The act of visiting the post office also transformed the space in to one the community congregated in as the practice of sending and receiving mail became ever more accessible.<sup>28</sup> Fourth-Class postmasters often became one of the most important individuals within a community because they usually functioned as the only representative of the federal government in said community.<sup>29</sup>

Fourth-class postmasters experienced high turnover rates because the fourth-class post office represented the largest patronage pool in the federal government during the late 1800s. Congresspersons held the right of appointing every fourth-class postmaster within their districts, and partisanship resulted in post offices changing within communities whenever a district flipped to a different party.<sup>30</sup> Information gathered by fourth-class postmasters from mail gave them invaluable insights in to the individuals of their communities, and even subtly influenced election campaigns by promoting incumbents to maintain their postmaster roles.<sup>31</sup> Postmasters utilized the information they gathered by alerting congressional representatives of potential rivals and discontent to ensure they stayed in power under the spoils systems. Over 77,000 fourth-class post offices existed by 1899, but a new federal postal system arose in the same year that shattered the patronage system and fourth-class post offices.

The establishment of Rural Free Delivery (RFD) in 1899 represented a significant advance of federal service in an age of poor communications and sluggish transportation that continues to the present and brought about the decline of the fourth-class post office.<sup>32</sup> Free postal delivery in America began in 1863 for cities of over 50,000 people, and Urban Free Delivery expanded to smaller cities and towns of 10,000 by 1880.<sup>33</sup> Farmers began to call for a rural version of Urban Free Delivery in the 1870s with the farmer's organization the National Grange adopting RFD as a legislative goal, but it was not until the threat of the Populist Part in 1893 that the Republican dominated Congress began a trial run in 1893 to maintain rural support. Political machinations delayed the actual trial until 1895 with fifty-nine trial routes created by 1896, and the sheer

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, *RFD: The Changing Face of Rural America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964), 84.

<sup>28</sup> David M. Henken, *The Postal Age: Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 66.

<sup>29</sup> Fuller, *The American Mail*, 295.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Kernell and Michael P. McDonald, "Congress and America's Political Development: The Transformation of the Post Office from Patronage to Service," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 3 (1999), 796.

<sup>31</sup> Fuller, *RFD*, 84; Kernell and McDonald, "Congress and America's," 796.

<sup>32</sup> Kernell and McDonald, "Congress and America's," 795.

<sup>33</sup> Fuller, *The American Mail*, 71-73.

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popularity of the routes despite fourth-class postmaster opposition resulted in 469 new routes added over the next two years.<sup>34</sup>

RFD became a separate division within the Postal Department between 1899 and 1900, and over 1,638 new routes were established shortly after as rural constituents lobbied representatives for RFD routes.<sup>35</sup> Fourth-class postmasters desperately attempted to resist the new system by engaging in anti-RFD campaigns and attempting to manipulate local opinion, but congressional members were quick to support RFD over the patronage system of old. The Postal Department mandated in 1901 the closure of one or more fourth-class post office for each new RFD route created, and President Theodore Roosevelt made RFD permanent in 1902 while signing an executive order that incorporated rural carriers as part of the civil service system.<sup>36</sup> RFD's popularity continued to grow at the cost of fourth-class post offices, and by 1920, only around 41,102 fourth-class offices remained as new RFD routes continued to remove extant offices.<sup>37</sup>

Butte County was an early adopter of RFD routes and replaced the fourth-class post offices present over the course of eighteen years based upon local resident demands. Butte County before RFD hosted around thirty-three working fourth-class post offices in 1896 connecting the county's small communities closer together and to the nation at large. The introduction of RFD routes in Butte County starting with Chico RFD Route 1 on April 1, 1902 resulted in the slow closure of all active fourth-class post offices by 1920 because each new RFD route in Butte shuttered or rendered obsolete multiple fourth-class post offices.<sup>38</sup> Rural Butte communities began to vanish with the loss of the local post office, and the communities serviced by the thirty-three post offices exist only as local area names in the present of 2025. The NRHP listed Mountain House Historic District was the only small fourth-class post office community to survive intact until the 2021 Dixie Fire obliterated the entire historic community. Only two former fourth-class post offices from this time remain in Butte County, and they are the Pence Hotel and the Inskip Hotel.

Pence Hotel

The Pence Hotel was erected in late 1901 by local builders William Wilson and Leon Van Ness following the fire on May 20, 1901 that destroyed the original two-story Pence Hotel.<sup>39</sup> Fire insurance payouts covered most of the costs of the new building, but owner Christian Mortensen did not witness the new hotel's erection because of his sudden passing from erysipelas on June 18, 1901.<sup>40</sup> The new hotel reused the surviving main floor of the original Pence Hotel, and doubled as the Pentz Post Office under owner and later postmaster Jennie Mortenson, Christian's

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<sup>34</sup> Kernell and McDonald, "Congress and America's," 797.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 798.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; Fuller, *RFD*, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Fuller, *The American Mail*, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Salley, *History of California Post Offices*, 322.

<sup>39</sup> "Pentz Hotel Destroyed," *Chico Record*, May 20, 1901, 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Oroville Has A Smallpox Scare," *Chico Record*, June 18, 1901, 4.

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wife. Jennie would hold the role of postmaster from 1906 until the dissolution of the Pentz Post Office in 1912 and operated the hotel from 1901 until her sudden death on January 28, 1913.<sup>41</sup>

The Pence Ranch was sold at public auction to Ole Hebol for \$11,000, however, W.J. Miller, in partnership with W.P. Lynch, made a higher offer of \$14,000 to the Superior Court of Butte County and became the new owners of the ranch on December 8, 1913.<sup>42</sup> Miller and Lynch informed the *Oroville Daily Register* they planned on making of improvements to the Pence Ranch, and no records indicate the Pence Hotel continued operation as a site of overnight accommodations.<sup>43</sup> Miller and Lynch would go on to sell Pence Ranch to the Chico Meat Company, and the company probably used the Pence Hotel as lodging for ranch workers. Chico Meat would sell the Pence Ranch to the Gunn family in 1940 and renamed it the Lucky 7 Ranch. The Gunns modified and rented the former hotel as small apartments to young couples, allowing the main and side porch to slowly deteriorate while maintaining the interior.<sup>44</sup> The August 1, 1975 earthquake that struck the Oroville area damaged the central chimney of the Pence Hotel, and the Gunns removed the central chimney column rather than repair it while the fireplace was damaged in the process.

A kitchen fire in 2004 burned up the interior wall through the second story and out the east facing gabled vent, and the Gunn family considered restoration undesirable.<sup>45</sup> Then owner Clayton Gunn intended to demolish the Pence Hotel and replace it with a church as they rebranded the Lucky 7 Ranch to the Lord's Seven Ranch focused on an aspect of Protestant Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Dale Dunlap intervened and purchased the Pence Hotel in 2005 to prevent its demolition, while his daughter Lyn Batt Moore purchased property adjacent to the Lord's Seven Ranch in 2006 that was the former site of the Messilla Valley Schoolhouse, now 2828 Messilla Valley Road.<sup>47</sup> The Pence Hotel was moved to its current location on June 26, 2006 roughly 420 meters, 0.26 mile, from its original location over fields and the Messilla Valley Road.<sup>48</sup>

Lyn Batt Moore bought the hotel from her father and began to slowly work on restoring the Pence Hotel from years of Gunn family modifications. The hotel was situated on a new foundation of mortared local granite to comply with Butte County building codes because the original foundation consisted of loose local granite and bare earth. The hotel's main and side porch were too deteriorated to move, and an accurate reconstruction was made of each in 2015 and 2016 respectively while following Standard 6 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Restoration for features too deteriorated to repair. A concrete ramp was added to the rear of the

<sup>41</sup> "Place Value of Pentz Ranch at \$31,000," *Oroville Daily Register*, January 28, 1913, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Butte County Clerk-Recorder, Deed Book 138, 191; Butte County Clerk-Recorder, Deed Book 146, 108.

<sup>43</sup> "Pentz Ranch Sold Finally For \$14,000," *Oroville Daily Register*, December 9, 1913, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Meredith J. Cooper, "Resettlement," *Chico News & Review*, July 6, 2006, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Lyn Batt Moore, *Conflicts Between Settlers and Indians in the Northern Sierra Foothills* (Oroville, California: I&L Publishing, 2006), 101; Cooper. "Resettlement," 16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Michael L. Whiteley, "Last Remaining historical edifice of Pentz saved," *Oroville Mercury Register*, June 23, 2006, Accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.oroillemr.com/2006/06/23/last-remaining-historical-edifice-of-pentz-saved/>.

<sup>48</sup> Nicole Pothier, "Hotel gets new life," *Paradise Post*, June 26, 2006, Accessed November 12, 2024, <https://www.paradisepost.com/2006/06/26/hotel-gets-new-life/>.



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side porch for ADA compliance, while the original windows have been refurbished with reconstructed wood screens attached to surviving metal brackets. The Pence Hotel's surviving wood shake roof was replaced with a composite shingle roof in 2015 that added two skylights to the attic, and the slow restoration of the hotel continues in the present.

## **Comparable Properties**

### **Inskip Hotel**

The National Register of Historic Places listed Inskip Hotel, built in 1868 and located on Skyway Road north of Stirling City, California, is the only other surviving fourth-class post office in Butte County.<sup>49</sup> A small store operated out of the Inskip Hotel that featured a fourth-class post office in operation from 1873 to 1915 servicing rural farmers once the mineral wealth of Inskip was extracted and the majority of the population moved elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> The Inskip Hotel remains in its original location unlike the Pence Hotel, however, a two-room rear addition alongside other minor alterations added later on that lessens the building's integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. The Inskip Hotel's original wood shake roof was replaced with corrugated steel sheets at an unknown date, further compromising the building's integrity of design, workmanship, and materials.

The Inskip Hotel and its outbuildings are the last historical remnants of the mining community of Inskip, while the Pence Hotel is the last historic fragment from the agricultural community of Pentz. The Inskip Hotel is not considered significant for its association with postal history, but for association with commerce and transportation as a key stop on the road it remains on. The Pence Hotel still retains its basic layout from the time of historic significance unlike the Inskip Hotel, and features less significant alterations than the NRHP listed Inskip Hotel. The alterations render the Inskip Hotel a lesser example of the fourth-class post office in Butte County, while each resource represents a different small community no longer extant for differing reasons.

## **Historic Integrity**

The Pence Hotel retains integrity for setting under Criterion A, but does not retain integrity for location because it operates under Criteria Consideration B as a moved property. The Pence Hotel retains integrity of setting because it remains in the agricultural and rural Pentz area in Butte County, and because the building, despite reorientation, still faces Messilla Valley Road as it did during its period of significance. Integrity of workmanship and materials is retained because of the ongoing restoration process reconstructing deteriorated vernacular features based upon surviving examples from the Pence Hotel. Nearly all windows retain the original window dressing, and eighteen of the twenty-three windows present are original wood sashes. The

<sup>49</sup> Ruby Swartzlow, "Inskip Hotel (Inn)," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, NPS, 1975), 7.1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.; Salley, *History of California Post Offices*, 101.

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replacement of the wood shake roof lessens integrity of materials and workmanship, but examples remain onsite to facilitate an accurate restoration.

The Pence Hotel retains integrity of design because the building's floorplan and overall features remain the same as the period of significance. The addition of two skylights on the south facing roof and sheathing of the roof with composition shingles instead of wood shakes lessen the Pence Hotel's integrity of design, but the overall historic elements remain dominant. The arrangement of the building's interior has been restored to express its original design, and the exterior restoration has maintained and restored the Pence Hotel's original exterior design after the relocation in 2006.

The Pence Hotel retains integrity of feeling because its materials and overall design remain the same or have been reconstructed along Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Historic Restoration, and these features combined allow the Pence Hotel to express its historic fabric from the period of significance. The Pence Hotel maintains integrity of association because its original and reconstructed elements depict the hotel during its active days as a post office and overnight accommodations lodging. The Pence Hotel retains its overall historic integrity to the 1901-1912 period of significance, and remains the best example of a fourth-class post office in Butte County and only surviving historical element of the vanished community of Pentz, California.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☒ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other  
Name of repository: Butte County Library

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 1.30

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 39.65582 | Longitude: -121.58353 |
| 2. Latitude:          | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:          | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:          | Longitude:            |

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Or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Pence Hotel (APN 041-110-026) is located at 2828 Messilla Valley Road in a rural area in Pentz, Butte County, California. The property is set on Township 21 North, Range 3 East, in a portion of the southeast quarter of Section 24 on the Mount Diablo Meridian. Messilla Valley Road marks the western boundary of the privately-owned property, while a mixture of modern chain link fence, vertical timber board, and older wire fencing marks the northern, eastern, and southern boundaries in a roughly rectangular format.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries were selected because they are the legally defined boundaries of 2828 Messilla Valley Road as APN 041-110-026 of Butte County, California.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: A.R. Fowler, M.A., Public History/CRM Consultant  
organization: Independent Consultant  
street & number: \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town: Oroville state: California zip code: 95966  
e-mail: ARFowler@protonmail.com  
telephone: (530) 712-7138  
date: March 13, 2025

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Pence Hotel

City or Vicinity: Oroville

County: Butte

State: California

Photographer: A.R. Fowler

Date Photographed: November 26, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

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- Photo 1 of 9:** CA\_ButteCounty\_PenceHotel\_001  
Camera facing northeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 2 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_002  
Camera facing southeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 3 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_003  
Camera facing southwest, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 4 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_004  
Camera facing north, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 5 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_005  
Camera facing north, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 6 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_006  
Camera facing west, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 7 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_007  
Camera facing east, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 8 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_008  
Camera facing northeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.
- Photo 9 of 9:** CA\_Butte County\_PenceHotel\_009  
Camera facing east, Pence Hotel, exterior view.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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## Photographs



**Photo 1.** Camera facing northeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



**Photo 2.** Camera facing southeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



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**Photo 3.** Camera facing southwest, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



**Photo 4.** Camera facing north, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



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**Photo 5.** Camera facing east, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



**Photo 6.** Camera facing west, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



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Photo 7. Camera facing east, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



Photo 8. Camera facing east, Pence Hotel, exterior view.



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**Photo 9.** Camera facing northeast, Pence Hotel, exterior view.

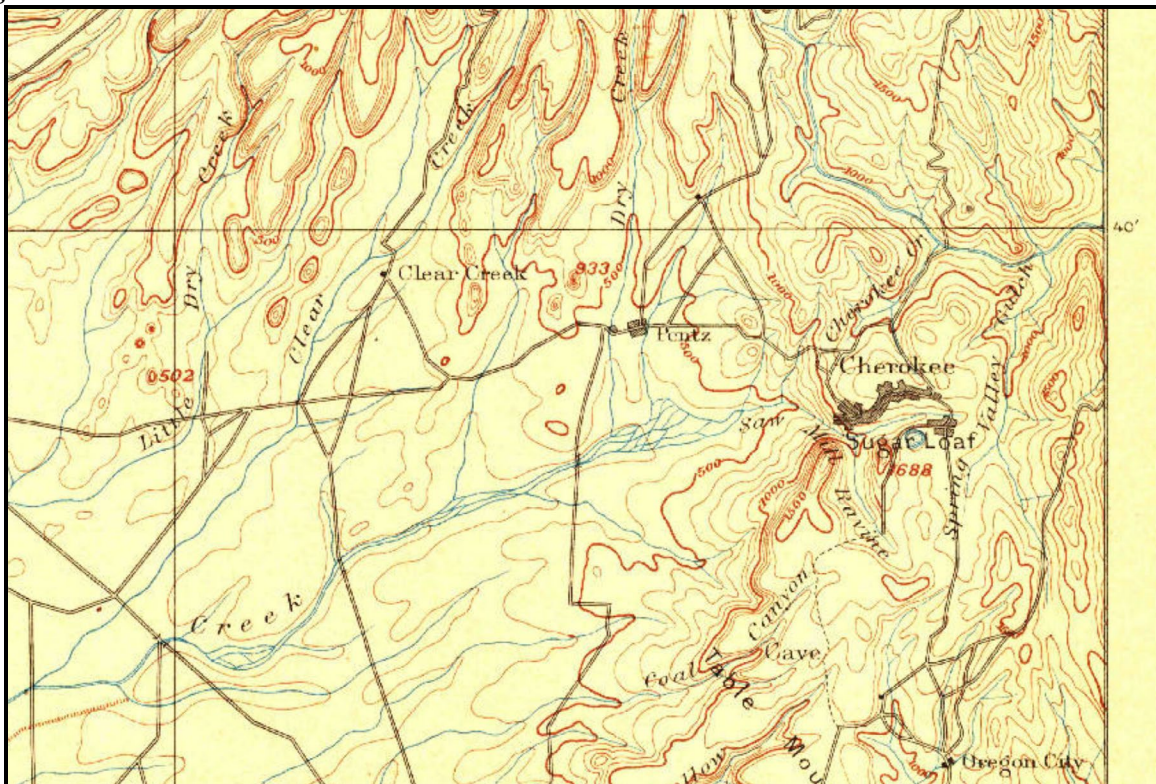


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## Figures

**Figure 1. Pentz's defined boundaries in 1901.**



Source: USGS, *California, Chico Sheet* [map], 1:125,000, 1895, revised 1901.

**Figure 2. Original Location of Pence Hotel**



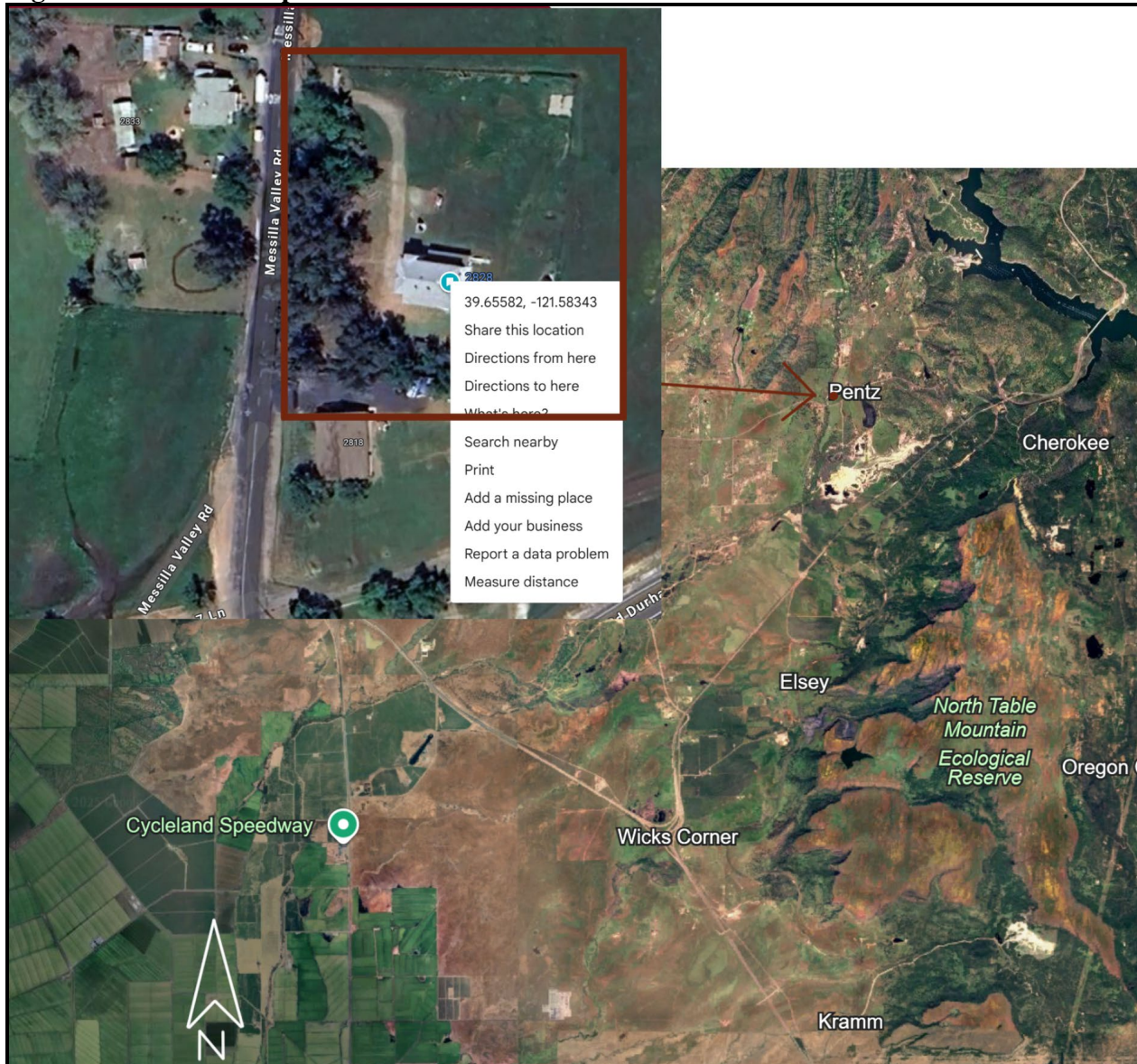


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Source: GoogleEarth.com, satellite capture August 8, 2005.

**Figure 3. Location Map**

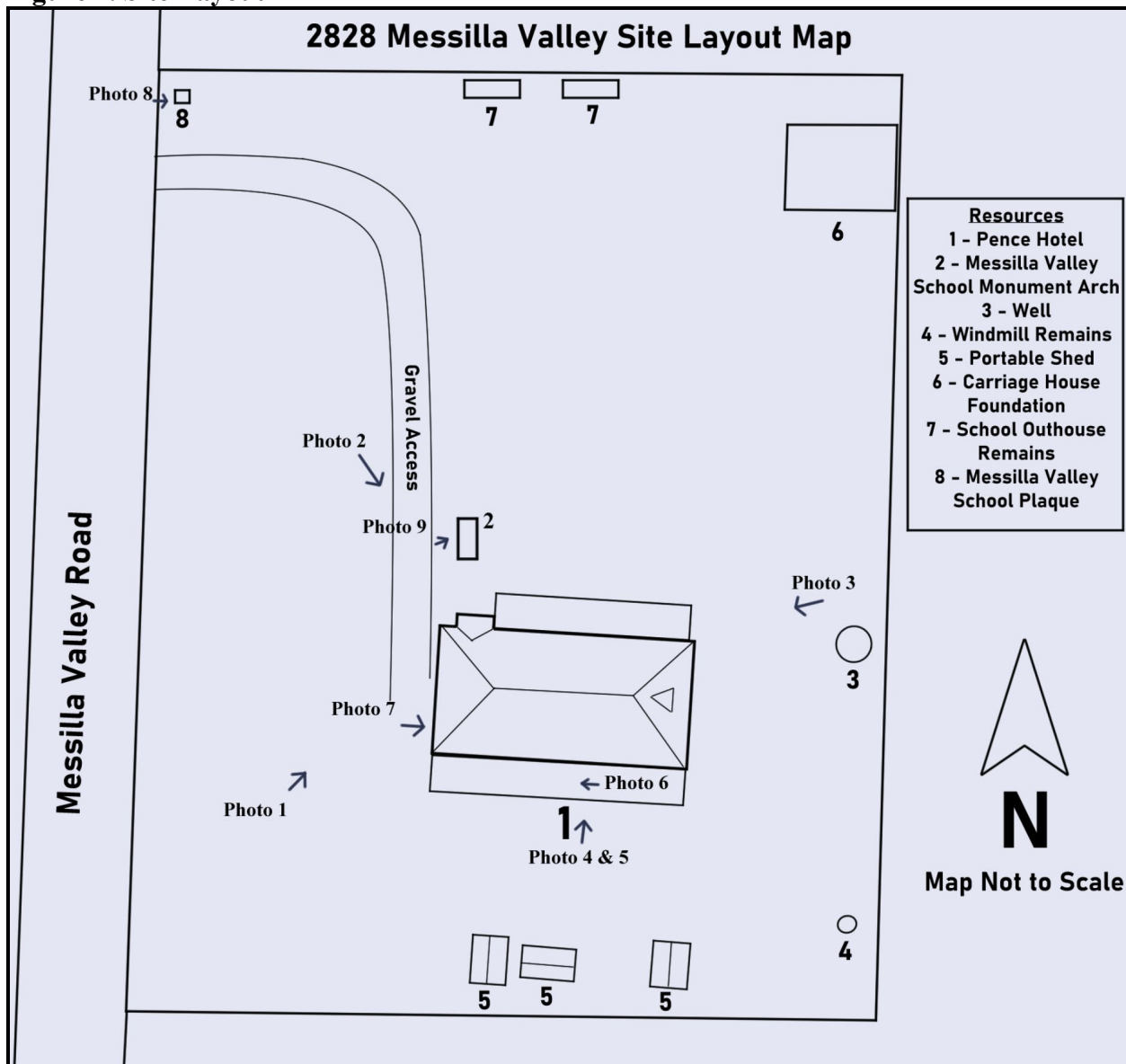


Source: GoogleMaps.com.

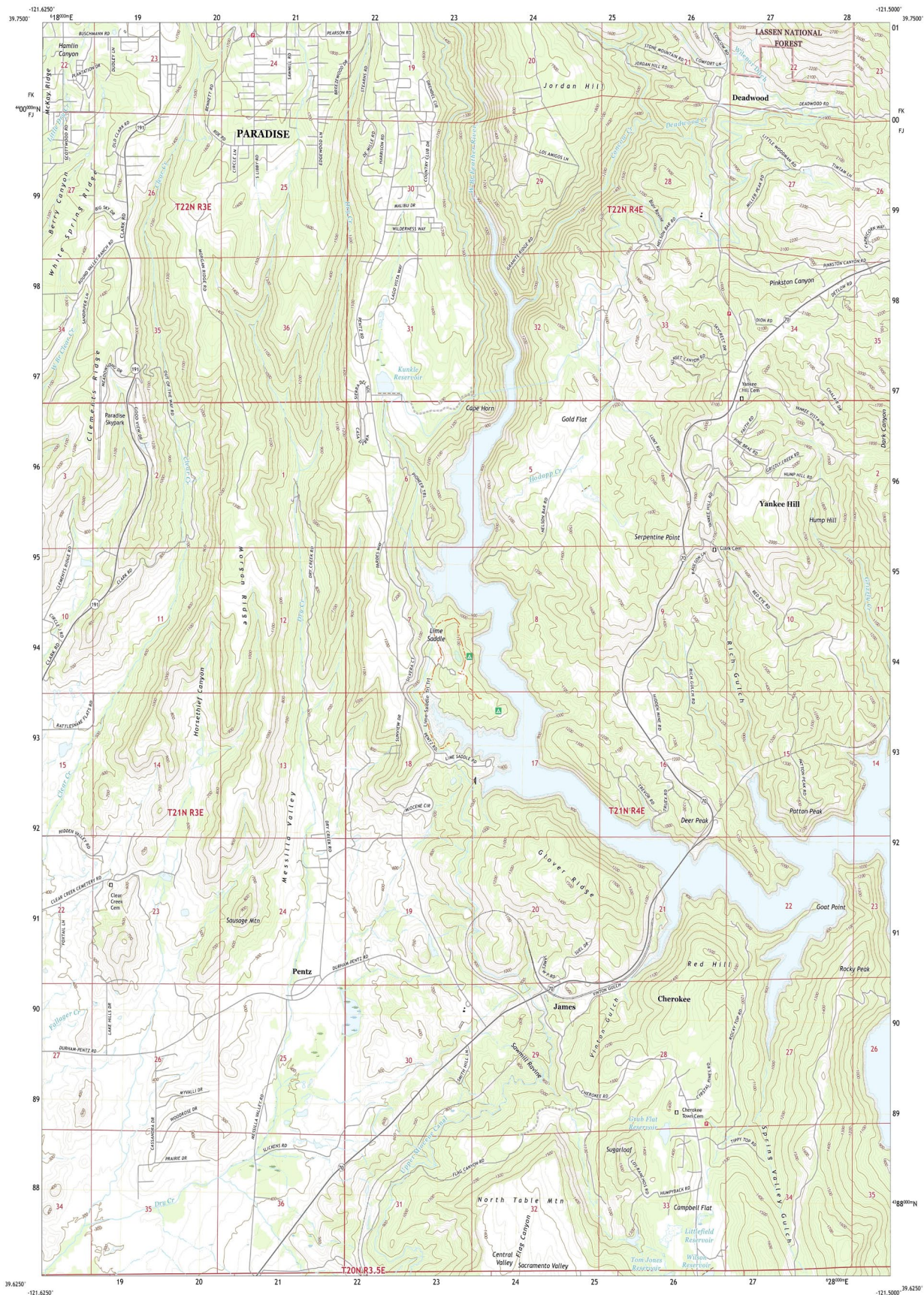
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Figure 4. Site Layout



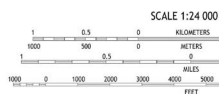




**Produced by the United States Geological Survey**

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)  
World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS84) Projection and  
1:50,000-scale geotransformations. Zone 10S.  
This map is not a legal document. Boundaries may be  
generalized for this map scale. Private lands within government  
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Imagery: NADP, July 2020 - July 2020  
Roads: within US Forest Service Lands: 2014 - 2016  
with limited Forest Service updates. Not available  
Names: NADP, 1981 - 2021  
Hydrography: National Hydrography Dataset, 2001 - 2021  
Contours: National Elevation Dataset, 2020  
Boundaries: Multiple sources; see metadata file 2017 - 2021  
Public Land Survey System: BLM, 2020  
Wetlands: FWS National Wetlands Inventory 1974 - 1976



CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET  
NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1983  
This map was produced to conform with the  
National Geospatial Program US Topo Product Standard.



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for current travel conditions and restrictions.

CHEROKEE, CA  
2022

