

Temelec Hall  
20750 Arnold Avenue  
Sonoma, Sonoma County  
California

HABS No. CAL-1563

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
450 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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TEMELEC HALL

Sonoma, Sonoma County, California

ADDRESS: 20750 Arnold Avenue, Sonoma, California  
OWNER: Temelec (a corporation for building retirement homes)  
OCCUPANT: Same  
USE: Residence (originally); proposed use as Community Center

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Temelec Hall was built in 1858. Its builder and first owner, "Captain" Granville P. Swift, came West with the Kelsey Party in 1843; and was a member of the Bear Flag Party that seized Sonoma and proclaimed California a Republic. The second owner was William Kissane, a fugitive from justice in the East, who had established himself in respectability in Sonoma as "Colonel" W. K. Rogers, and who acquired the property in 1863.

The large two-story house is a superb example of modified Classical Revival, constructed of cut stone and field stone; it is an exceptional example, with its outbuildings, of an elaborate establishment for the place and period. It is State Historical Landmark No. 237.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The cornerstone for this remarkable house was laid on June 19, 1858.<sup>1</sup> Its estimated cost ranges from \$125,000 to \$300,000. The builder was "Captain" Granville P. Swift - a man of rough qualities and high ambition.<sup>2</sup> Swift arrived in California in 1845 or 1846, having

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crossed the plains with the Kelsey Party in 1843. Born in 1822 in Kentucky, he became a notable horseman and marksman; he claimed descent from Daniel Boone. He worked for Sutter at the Sacramento Valley Fort and participated in the Bear Flag uprising at Sonoma. It was here that he received his title of "Captain" - having captained a band of men sent out to rescue Todd from his Mexican-Californian captors. Swift had a cattle ranch at Stony Creek, near Colusa, with Indians as herders. When gold was discovered, he took some of his Indian workers to the Feather River and managed to "work" about \$5,000 or \$6,000 a day, with an eventual total of half a million dollars in gold. This he had coined in his own octagonal \$50 pieces, with a personal mark on them. In 1854, he arrived in the Sonoma Valley with \$350,000 worth of these gold pieces on mule back, and about \$150,000 "in other property". One obituary<sup>3</sup> states that he "purchased the Leonard place of Major Beck, and built on it a costly residence of cut stone...spending...on the building and appointments \$150,000." The property was estimated at 15,000 acres.<sup>4</sup>

His treatment of Indian workers is generally recorded as being extremely cruel, although the overall attitude to slaves at this period was not lenient - whether they were red or black. Various stories have come down of his chaining workers to walls in the basement of Temelec Hall at night, or hobbling them by day with cannon balls around their ankles. Swift attempted to increase his considerable mining fortune with speculations at Washoe, which were disastrous for him. He lost heavily, and was forced to sell Temelec Hall. He then removed to Green Valley in Solano County, where his personality disintegrated in heavy drinking and continued ill-luck. Death came in 1875 to this still ambitious man when, on returning from a visit to a quick-silver mine, he fell from his mule and was not found until some time thereafter. Although his later years were embittered with family dissension, he left an estate of about \$100,000 to his widow; the property was principally in Solano County.

Granville Swift had bitterly hated the Mexican-Californians; and it was, perhaps, to outshine Vallejo's massive Casa Grande at Sonoma or the great Rancho Petaluma (both in adobe) that he built Temelec Hall of stone. Certainly, Vallejo's modest personal residence, "Lachyrma Montis" - a charming Victorian Gothic house of wood - could hardly have excited Swift's jealousy. The existing wooden house on the Temelec property was almost as elegant, if not quite so large.<sup>4</sup> It is more likely that Swift built Temelec Hall as a fitting residence for his new bride, Jane Sears.

In 1863, a "Colonel" William Kissane Rogers (also called "Supervisor" Rodgers in some of the Swift obituaries) acquired Temelec Hall.<sup>5</sup> This man was a person with a checkered past. According to Coblentz' research<sup>5</sup>, he had participated in arson on the river steamer, Martha Washington, in 1852 in Ohio; of this he was acquitted. Later he was convicted of bank swindling in New York, for which he was sent to prison but soon pardoned. He participated in a filibustering expedition to Nicaragua in 1856, and on his return to the United States changed his name from William Kissane to "Colonel" W. K. Rogers. During his time in Sonoma, he became a respected local citizen, and gave no cause for criticism. Unfortunately, during President Ulysses S. Grant's visit to Northern California in 1879, Temelec Hall was chosen as a resting point enroute to Sacramento. In the investigations by secret service men, assigned to protect President Grant, Kissane Rogers' past emerged from the shadows, and he was forced to stand trial, on old charges, in San Francisco. His lawyer brother, who had taken the name of Reuben Lloyd, managed to get him acquitted on the statute of limitations.

Coblentz paints a grim picture of Rogers' old age - broken and humbled by a discrediting past. However, the official obituary in the Hearst paper, the San Francisco Call for May 3, 1913, suggests that he emerged rather gracefully from all the scandal, and lived out a ripe old age in Berkeley, dying at 89 years of age. (He had arrived in California in 1850, and later was at the Comstock. He married Elizabeth Hathaway in Fairfax.) Many of Rogers' descendants still live in the Sonoma area.

Unfortunately, Temelec Hall did not emerge so well from this troubled period. It fell into a dilapidated state, and was almost a ruin when Mrs. E. D. Coblentz (formerly Mrs. Melville Schweitzer of New York) bought it in 1915. She and her famous newspaperman husband, one of William Randolph Hearst's most trusted aides and editors, lived here for many years, reviving much of the splendor of old Temelec Hall. Mr. Coblentz died on April 16, 1959; Mrs. Coblentz sold Temelec Hall to its present corporate owners early in 1963, and moved to a new residence in Sonoma itself. It is now proposed to make the surrounding land into a group of retirement homes, with the house as a community center.<sup>9</sup>

#### NOTES (Historical Information)

1. Letter written by Natalia Vallejo, daughter of General Mariano G. Vallejo, June 15, 1858, from the Vallejo home - *Iachryma Montis*;

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"My own Papa: We are invited to go to the Swift's next Saturday at twelve o'clock and we are bound to go. He is going to lay one of the corner stones, and he is going to put in a little bottle of Sonoma wine. He is to have many ladies and gentlemen there as well as us." (Saturday would be the 19th of June.)  
From The Centennial of Temelec Hall, unpaginated brochure.

2. The most accurate information is in the Society of California Pioneers' Pioneer Scrapbook, pp. 1 and 3 (undated obituary notices, etc.). Hansen and Miller, Wild Oats in Eden, reproduce a photograph of Swift, p. 39; there is a fairly long characterization of him on p. 41, with minor inaccuracies of fact (he was robbed of a large sum of gold in 1860 rather than 1861; he apparently came to the Sonoma Valley in 1854, rather than 1851).

3. Society of California Pioneers, Pioneer Scrapbook, p. 1, (undated).

4. Hansen and Miller, op. cit., p. 41. E. D. Coblenz in The Tale of Temelec Hall (unpaginated) states that the land around the house had belonged to General Perisfer (spelled variously, also, Persifor, Percifer, Persefor, depending on the authority) Fraser Smith, who had obtained it from Mariano G. Vallejo. It was for Smith, according to Coblenz, that the small frame house (probably a pre-fabricated building shipped to California about 1850) "at the end of the lane", north of Temelec Hall, was built. It still stands today.

5. Coblenz, The Tale of Temelec Hall.

6. The name, Temelec, is variously explained. It may be a corruption of the Indian village, Te'mblek, a mile and a half west of Sonoma; or it may, according to Dr. A. Kroeber of Berkeley, be a derivation from Tamuleko, name of the Miwok Indian chief, whose tribesmen are said to have helped quarry the stone for the house. It seems especially appropriate as the name for a retirement community, where the same values of respected old age are present as among the California Indians.

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

### Books:

- California Historical Landmarks, Sacramento, State of California, Division of Beaches and Parks, n.d., Historical Landmark No. 237. (Building "landmarked" by Andrew Eggum, in Clark Wing(ed), California Historical Survey Series, 1940.)
- Hansen, Harvey J. and Miller, Jeanne Thurlow, et al., Wild Oats in Eden: Sonoma County in the 19th Century, Santa Rosa, privately printed by Lawton Kennedy of San Francisco, 1962, pp. 41 and 127.

### Brochures:

- Coblentz, E. D., The Tale of Temelec Hall, privately printed, 1953.
- Coblentz, Mr. and Mrs. E. D., The Centennial of Temelec Hall, Sonoma, privately printed, 1958. (Both of these subsume considerable newspaper research; some facts are incorrect, however.)
- Temelec, a prospectus for retirement homes development, 1963.

### Interview:

- J. A. Baird interview with Richard L. Morrison, June, 1963  
(Morrison is one of owner-developers of Temelec Corporation).

### Newspapers and Periodicals:

- Napa Register, date unknown (ca. 1940; article on Perry Swift, son of Captain Granville P. Swift, at time building was declared a State monument).
- San Francisco Call, May 3, 1913 (obituary of William K. Rogers).
- Society of California Pioneers, Pioneer Scrapbook (collection of old newspaper clippings, mostly undated).

## ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### EXTERIOR AND GENERAL

Temelec Hall is essentially a two storied stone house, with basement and crowning wood cupola and "widow's walk" above a low, hipped roof. The building is oriented with its principal entrance to the east.

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On the north, east and south sides, the exterior is of dressed grayish ashlar masonry (approximately three feet thick) from a local quarry. The west facade is of brownish irregular stone, with corner quoining, and pseudo-quoining framing the windows. Abutting this west facade is a large wing of two stories of the rougher field stone with irregular joints. The windows in this wing are also framed in pseudo-quoining. The main building has a two-storied veranda on three sides (north, east and west). On the first or main story, the squared veranda pillars are of dressed ashlar. On the second story they are white wood Ionic columns. On the north and south sides, there are seven pillars and seven columns, first and second stories. On the principal east facade, there are eight pillars and eight Ionic columns, one above the other.

Other building details are handsome wood balustrades encircling the first and second story verandas, and slightly flattened pediments above the windows on both levels. The first story entablature (of wood, now painted green, as are all the other wood trim details; they were blue) is a simple one with a dentil course beneath the cornice and an abbreviated architrave and frieze. The second story entablature has a more elaborate architrave with horizontal divisions, proper to the Ionic order. The frieze is exceptionally high and has curvetting vine-like scroll work, with the date 1858 in a wreath over the front center, east facade.<sup>1</sup> Under the massive wood cornice are modified modillions (that is, they are not entirely Classical). Between them are rectangular incised panels placed horizontally. On the field stone wing at the west, the first level entablature becomes a simple stone belt course. At the second level, the same entablature as on the main house is repeated around the wing. From old photographs, it is not entirely clear if the "widow's walk" is original; it does not appear distinctly in a photograph which must date from about 1870 (erroneously dated to 1858 by the Coblenz' in The Centennial of Temelec Hall<sup>2</sup>).

At the southeast and northeast corners of the raised terrace at the east front, are two charming field stone gazebos or garden houses. These have dressed ashlar quoining (at the corners) and openings in each face framed in wood Tuscan Pilasters and rising into a wood arch and keystone. A smaller window, framed in wood and rising to an arch and keystone, surmounts the main opening. The openings proper are filled with wood lattice work. Roofs are the intersecting gable type, covered with shingles, and having a rather simple, scooped barge board, and tall finial at the gable top.<sup>3</sup>

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Adjacent to the northwest wall of the field stone wing of the main house is a high stone wall (also of field stone), of indeterminate use. It projects out to the north, and may simply have been a dividing wall (although it is exceptionally strong for such a purpose) or part of an unfinished or now-ruined part of the complex of buildings. Also to the north are the field stone foundations for what would appear to be another large house. These have been filled with water as a kind of lily pond. In their center is a painted cast-iron fountain of swans, modeled after the single swan in the multiple-tiered fountain in front of the main east facade of the mansion.

To the south is a group of buildings of more indefinite historical interest. The oldest part is the stone smoke house, south of the field stone wing of the mansion. This has been converted into a kind of bar-museum of historic California. Adjacent to it, to the south, is a long rectangular wood-room at right angles to the smoke-house (projecting out to the east). This was fitted up by Mrs. Coblenz as an "Early American" (17th century) kitchen, with vast fireplace and implements. Farther to the east, and joined to the "kitchen" (which was actually a kind of social room, rather than a true kitchen) is another wood structure, containing two rooms - now used as offices.

To the west of the smoke-house-bar and "kitchen" are a group of service buildings, probably originally used for washing, baking and trying lard and other fats, as well as a tool shed. A large metal cauldron and bake ovens are still in situ. This group is located across a road which provides the principal entrance to Temelec Hall. Separating the house proper from the road is a field stone wall, with arched entrance adjacent to the smoke house.

The main road comes in from Arnold Drive, westward, and then moves diagonally past a large and very attractive field stone building, with three doors on its east facade, main floor. Mr. Coblenz felt that this was originally a winery, although it seems clearly to have been built as a stable, with a horse's head over the main central door (all doors are double, rectangular under a slightly arched stone opening, filled with lattice work). The second story was obviously designed as a haymow, with folding wood doors in the center and shuttered openings at the sides to acrate the interior. As in all the other field stone buildings at Temelec, the stable has dressed stone quoining. A modest dentil course animates the wood, strip frieze under the cornice.

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The hipped roof is shingled, and crowning the whole building is a large, elegantly simple wood dove-cote of squared shape, with arched windows - one to each face. West of this structure is a one-story adobe building; and just west of this (or slightly northwest) is the old pre-fabricated wood house which was the first structure on the property, probably dating from about 1850. The driveway, which has continued west to the south of the stable, then turns directly south and proceeds past the water tank and great field stone wall to the mansion and its service buildings.

The old row of cypress trees have gradually been replaced with ash trees on the main road; the gardens are not extensive, but a fine modern swimming pool enriches the area east of the mansion - just below the raised terrace with gazebos and a small orange grove.

The stylistic character of Temelec Hall is distinctly Classical Revival. Indeed, it is one of the very rare Classical Revival houses in California, and one of the few in the United States in stone. Being of masonry, it is exceptional for its time, and especially its place.

Although not as strictly Classical as many of the American houses of the period from 1820 to 1850 in the East and Mid-west (lacking, for example, a pediment on its main facade, and having a double veranda rather than the monumental verandas of most Classical Revival houses), it is clearly related to them. The central hall plan links it to the Georgian period; this type of formal, symmetrical plan persisted well into the Classical Revival period. There are touches of the Victorian Gothic on the house itself with the stylized vine-like scroll pattern in the principal frieze (remining one of the crisp, scroll patterns of the Victorian Gothic in the East), and especially on the gazebos with their more typical barge boards. Hints of the Italianate occur in the flattened pediments over the windows of the mansion, and in the modified Classical character of the modillions under the main cornice. The cupola with its brackets under the cornice and plain arched window is also Italianate. Indeed, it is the concession of the designer to the interest in towers in the so-called Italian Villa, which was having such a vogue at this time in the East. However, Temelec Hall is not an Italian Villa nor is it distinctly Italianate, as one might imagine at this period in California. It remains a distinguished, sober and four-square example of modified Classical Revival - one of the fine houses of California.

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Modern modifications to the house are more appropriately treated under the discussion of the interior; but two modifications are apparent from the exterior. The elimination of two of the four chimneys in the main block of building (those in the west of this block), and the addition of servants' quarters above the second story, in wood).

#### INTERIOR

The number of interior rooms in Temelec Hall itself is given as fourteen<sup>5</sup> or twenty<sup>6</sup>. The 20th century revisions of this interior did not architecturally expand it, although they certainly made it more livable. The two rooms on the left and right of the main hallway, first floor, were made into single long rooms. The original fireplace openings have been modified or suppressed.

In the main living room, to the right of the main hallway as one enters the building, a "Norman" fireplace occupies the place of the original fireplace to the east, and the one to the west has been suppressed. To the left of the hallway is the dining room where the fireplace at the east end of the room is original, and the one to the west has been replaced with a dining room cabinet. The flooring on this floor is modern hardwood.

Upstairs, in the main block of building, the bedrooms have been necessarily reduced in size to permit a bathroom to be placed between the front (east) and rear (west) bedrooms on either side of the central hall. The cupola is reached by a stair which ascends from this second floor hall, paralleling the east to west direction of the stair from the first floor.

In the field stone wing, which was essentially a service wing originally, the disposition of the first floor has been modified to permit somewhat more modern kitchen facilities (and service pantries) than were present in the old house. On the second floor, there have been structural modifications to allow a subordinate stair to rise, at the northeast of this wing, to servants' quarters in the attic story. Closets and a modern bath (on the south side) have made the bedrooms here more useful for family and friends. Interior decoration is a personal matter; the present owners will undoubtedly modify that of Mrs. Coblentz.

NOTES (Architectural Information)

1. There is also a carved stone plaque over the front door with "G. P. Swift, 1858" in an oval frame set in a rectangular block.
2. The growth of foliage in the photograph suggests that the photo was taken at least ten or twelve years after construction in 1858.
3. Modern swimming pool cabanas to the east are inspired by these gazebos, although they are rectangular in shape and entirely of wood.
4. The Tale of Temelec Hall, unpaginated.
5. The Tale of Temelec Hall, unpaginated.
6. Inventory of Temelec Hall, HABS, quoting Swift's son.

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