

Standard Oil Warehouse
918 Cedar Street
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HAER No. CA-2265

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Oakland, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

STANDARD OIL WAREHOUSE
HAER NO. CA-2265

Location: 918 Cedar Street, Oakland, Alameda County, California

USGS 7.5 minute series – Oakland West, Calif.
UTM Coordinates: 10 . 561470 . 4184890

Date of Construction: 1889

Engineer: Unknown

Present Owner: Jerry C. Wang and Y. Ying
103 Orchard Avenue
Hayward, California 94544

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Standard Oil Warehouse is a rare surviving example of a nineteenth century warehouse in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is significant for its association with the growth of a corporation that played an important role in California's economy. The building was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990, under criteria A and C.

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I. DESCRIPTION

The Standard Oil Warehouse is a one story, rectangular building of brick construction, 100' long by 75' wide. It was constructed with a minimum of openings and 16" thick walls to provide for security against fire, an important consideration due to the highly combustible materials that the building was constructed to house. The brick walls are laid in common bond with a header course for every five stretcher courses. The north and south walls have twin, stepped parapets with slight corbelling at their tops, which hide the paired gables of the low-pitch roof. The walls are approximately 18' high to the tops of the parapets. The four walls are tied together at the corners, where circular iron tie-plates with raised star patterns are visible on the exterior. Regularly spaced, vertical rows of smaller iron tie plates are visible on the east and west walls, where they tie the brick walls to the interior wood posts. On the west façade can be seen the faint remnant of a large painted sign advertising the Spears-Wells Machinery Company, which occupied the building from about 1923 through the mid-1960s. There is also a large hole in this wall, approximately nine feet wide and six feet high, near the building's south end.

The building has no windows, and only two doors. Near the center of the east wall is a large entrance that would accommodate deliveries by horse-drawn wagons, and later by truck. This entrance has a sliding door of wood clad in sheet metal, hung from an interior track. On the north façade is a narrower entrance, with a segmental-arch head. Six skylights illuminate the windowless interior.

A wood beam and row of wood columns, running down the center of the building from north to south, support a structure of two parallel gabled roof sections. The roof trusses, constructed of relatively lightweight lumber, run east to west and carry the roof system of closely spaced purlins and wood planking. Two columns were added at a later date, approximately 9' to the east of the central row, to provide additional support for the two trusses adjacent to the east entrance bay. It appears that these additional columns were installed in response to a split in the bottom chord of one of the trusses.

The building has a wood floor and interior walls of exposed, unpainted brick. There is an elevated platform of wood construction, approximately 7' above the floor, along the west wall. It appears to be a later addition, based on the way it is roughly framed into

the original structure. The building was originally a single, open space with no interior partitions. There are some existing partitions in the northwest corner of the building that are clearly of recent construction.

The Standard Oil Company originally owned the entire southwest quarter of the block bounded by Ninth, Cedar, Tenth, and Pine Streets, as well as a portion of the northwest corner of the block. This provided considerable open space to the south and east of the warehouse, where storage tanks for oil and gasoline were located. Arranged along the south and east property boundaries were several small buildings, including an office, wagon shed, and stable. None of these buildings are extant. The open area to the north of the warehouse had a rail siding from the adjacent Southern Pacific lines, which terminated near the building's north façade.

The area to the north of the warehouse was later occupied by another industrial enterprise, so that the entry in the building's north façade now leads directly into an enclosed storage yard. A small, metal-clad building was erected adjacent to the south façade of the warehouse, and a large industrial building was erected in the formerly open area to the east, leaving only a narrow alley along the east side of the warehouse. As a result of these later changes to the building's setting, only the west façade and a portion of the south façade can be easily seen from the public right-of-way.

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Standard Oil Warehouse was constructed in 1889 as part of the company's expansion of its distribution facilities in the Western United States. Standard Oil opened its first marketing office on the West Coast in San Francisco in 1878. Prior to that time, the company's products, primarily kerosene for lighting and oils for lubricating machinery, had been distributed through various wholesalers. The company was dissatisfied with this system, however, and began to develop its own distribution networks in the western states. Standard's objective was to create a completely integrated corporation that would control not only the extraction and refining of crude oil, but also the marketing and distribution of the finished products. In the early 1880s, Standard Oil built a small warehouse at Third and Townsend streets in San Francisco for distribution of the company's products within the city. Standard expanded its

facilities in California between 1882 and 1884, building a larger warehouse at Fifth and Berry streets in San Francisco, as well as stations in Sacramento, Stockton, and Oakland.

To further their objective of developing their own marketing and distribution system in the West, the Standard Oil Company of Iowa was formed in 1885. This new corporation was organized from the merger of the Continental Oil & Transportation Company with Standard of Ohio, which then split off its business in the Western states as Iowa Standard. The Continental Oil & Transportation Company had been established in 1877 to distribute and sell oil products refined by other companies. By 1882, Continental had outlets in eight California cities as well as Elko and Reno, Nevada; Tucson, Arizona; and Portland, Oregon. The new corporation, Iowa Standard, had only a paper connection to the state of Iowa and was administered from San Francisco, and ultimately controlled from the Standard Corporation headquarters in New York.

Iowa Standard began with six stations on the West Coast: Portland, Sacramento, Stockton, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and a secondary depot in Oakland. Between 1885 and 1900, the company expanded throughout the West, including Hawaii, Canada, and Alaska. In 1887 the Oakland station was elevated from a depot of the San Francisco main station to a substation, and the present warehouse was constructed two years later. The company's growth was rapid during the last years of the nineteenth century. By 1900, Iowa Standard had fifteen main stations and 58 substations between the Mexican border and Alaska.

Prior to the formation of Iowa Standard, the company's products were shipped to the West Coast primarily in two-gallon and five-gallon cans. The merger with Continental Oil & Transportation brought that company's more efficient bulk distribution methods to Iowa Standard. Oil and kerosene from Standard's refineries in Cleveland were shipped to California by tank car, and distribution to retailers was by horse-drawn tank wagons, which could supply the retailers' refillable barrels. Tank and barrel sales gradually replaced the earlier five-gallon cans, a cheaper and more efficient method of distribution that greatly reduced the number of containers needed. The Oakland warehouse was used to store the five-gallon cans and cases of smaller cans, while bulk products were stored in outdoor tanks adjacent to the warehouse. From these tanks, bulk liquids were pumped into barrels or tank wagons for delivery to customers. The warehouse also held products that were typically shipped and sold in smaller

containers, including lubricating oils and painters' supplies such as turpentine and linseed oil.

Workers in a variety of occupations were necessary for the operation of each of these stations. Iowa Standard's facility in Portland, which was larger but similar to the one in Oakland, had nineteen employees in 1894: a special agent (manager), a cashier, two clerks, an office boy, two traveling salesmen, eight warehousemen, three teamsters, and one pumper and cooper. The Oakland Warehouse probably had a smaller number of employees, but the same basic tasks.

The first decades of the twentieth century brought numerous changes that altered Standard Oil's methods of distribution as well as the types of products sold. Gasoline became an increasingly important part of the company's product line, as evidenced by the eleven gasoline tanks shown adjacent to the warehouse on the 1902 Sanborn map. At the same time, improvements in electric lighting reduced, and eventually eliminated, the demand for kerosene. In addition, trucks began to replace horse-drawn tank wagons in 1910, and the greater range of motorized vehicles further reduced the number of distribution facilities needed. The later development of pipelines and tank farms replaced the warehouse system, and the company's older facilities were gradually abandoned. The Oakland warehouse remained in Standard Oil's ownership until about 1923, when it was sold to the Spears-Wells Machinery Company, dealers of construction equipment. Spears-Wells used the building to store its equipment at least into the mid-1960s. The building has been vacant in recent years.

The Standard Oil Warehouse is significant for its association with the history of an important corporation and the development of the oil industry as a major sector of California's economy. It is also significant as a rare surviving example of a nineteenth century warehouse in the San Francisco Bay Area. While nineteenth century San Francisco, from the Gold Rush forward, has been widely recognized as a city of warehouses, few of these have survived, and there are even fewer surviving nineteenth century warehouses in Oakland.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

City of Oakland and Alameda County tax rolls and block books, 1869-1960.

City of Oakland building permit records.

Husted's Oakland-Berkeley-Alameda Directory. 1892 through 1910.

Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey. Historic Resources Inventory forms for the Standard Oil Warehouse, 1990. In *Historic Property Survey Report for the Proposed I-880 Reconstruction Project (Volume 2)*. Oakland: California Department of Transportation, 1990.

Polk's Oakland-Berkeley-Alameda Directory. 1911 through 1941.

Sanborn Map Company, *Oakland, California*. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1889-1901, 1902-11, 1912-51.

White, Gerald T. *Formative Years in the Far West: A History of Standard Oil Company of California and Predecessors Through 1919*. New York: Meredith Publishing, 1962.

IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The collapse, in 1989, of the Cypress Structure portion of Interstate 880 during the Loma Prieta earthquake has led the California Department of Transportation to replace the collapsed facility with a new freeway on a new alignment. The new freeway will be located to the west of the Standard Oil Warehouse, with a new frontage road constructed between the freeway and the warehouse. The railroad tracks on the west side of Cedar Street in the vicinity of the warehouse will be relocated. These changes will have an adverse effect on the warehouse by altering its formerly industrial setting and its historic association with the railroad. This documentation is intended to comply with part of the mitigation requirements for the construction of the new freeway, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

V. LOCATION MAP

