

April 24, 2025 rev. July 22, 2025

1850 ALAMEDA DIABLO **Historic Resource Evaluation**

The following report summarizes and develops the subject property's historical resource status for the purposes of applying for the Mills Act's historic preservation tax incentive.

1850 Alameda Diablo is a single-family property (assessor's parcel #195-200-01) and residence located within the unincorporated community of Diablo on the western side of Mt. Diablo in western Contra Costa County (figs.1-2). First mapped as lot #139 in the Mt. Diablo Estate tract (fig.3), 1850 Alameda Diablo is an identified contributor to the California Register and Contra Costa County register *Diablo Historic District* (fig.4).

Research efforts underlying this evaluation report have included the collection and review of deed and permit records from Contra Costa County; historic telephone directories (at the Library of Congress, loc.org), newspapers (at the CA Digital Newspaper Collection, CDNC.org and at the San Francisco Library, sfpl.org), and censuses (@heritagequest.com), along with site visits to record the property, its context and conditions. The current effort is also based upon previous research and documentation, by the present author, of another Diablo property (1897 Calle Arroyo), also for the purposes of the Mills Act.

As highlighted herein, this revised report has been updated as requested by Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development Staff, dated July 15, 2025, as follows:

- a. A revised *Proposed Scope (Rehabilitation Plan)* that specifies when the work would take place over the course of 10-years.
- b. A revised *Secretary of Interior's Standards analysis* that expands #6 in providing specific material choices.

Summary Descriptions

Site and Exteriors (figs.5-24, sketch plan fig.31)

The subject lot is a generally rectangular, .42 acre parcel, its 103 foot northern frontage on Alameda Diablo, its parallel side lot lines some 216 feet (west) and 200 feet (east), its rear lot line bent inward to reflect a curve of Diablo Rd. to the south. The property has a generous front yard accommodating a wraparound driveway with interspersed landscape beds. The 1 to 2 story house lies in the middle of the parcel, its entry via a raised brick-paved terrace that is canted (i.e., crooked), as is the front façade.

Along with multiple canted-gabled roofs, the canted form is a primary design characteristic of this house. In plan, the original house was a square with the living room wing canting from its northeast corner. A detached carport/garage, rebuilt in 1988, stands at the east side of and orthogonal to the body of the house. Additions were also completed in the 1980s and that wraparound its rearward half, including wraparound porch roofs at the west side and rear of the original house, as well as a 2-story family and bedroom add at the rearward east side, their roofs complexly integrating with the original roof forms.

A primary characteristic of the site is the creek channel that crosses from west to east at the rear of

the original house, which is largely covered by a wood deck while also flowing beneath the family room addition to the east, yet with an open portal and wooden footbridge at the west side yard. To the south of the decked-over creek is a built-in oblong swimming pool, added in 1974, with a fieldstone paved apron, the south side apron raised with a stone clad face above the pool and which apron transitions into stone steps at the pool's east end. Across the whole of the property's rear is a stone retaining wall at the base of a steep wooded bank, as Diablo Rd. lies a couple of stories above the level of the house. A range of trees stand in that steep bank at the top of which a concrete masonry wall forms the southern property boundary. A small, manufactured garden/pool shed stands just behind the southeast corner of the house.

As inferred above, the exterior form is multi-faceted yet uniformly treated. Exterior walls of the house and garage are painted wood shingles with wood trims. Doors and windows are wood, also painted, with multiple lites plus a few picture windows in the living room, where the eastern window is in the form of a shallow projecting bay capped with a sloped roof. The one exceptional door is the unpainted oak panel with beveled glass lite at the front. Plain windows in one of the west gables and at the south side of the main house are anomalies.

A central front feature is the field stone chimney that stands at and rises above the canted front façade. Wood trimmed roof eaves overhang walls, with metal gutters at level eaves. Deeper roof overhangs with turned wood posts cover outdoor space at the west side and returning to the south. There is another covered porch at the west side of the rearward family room wing, which wing has a shingle clad chimney standing at its south wall. All roofs are wood shake. Entered via a narrow passage between the east side of the living room and garage, an small open court lies in the middle of the house, where there is are secondary entries into the surrounding spaces, including a gabled entry portal wedged between the main house and family room wing. A range of ornamental light fixtures are mounted to exterior walls.

Interiors (figs.25-30, sketch plans figs.32-33)

The house Interiors consist of living spaces – living, dining, kitchen, office, laundry – and a bedroom suite at the first floor of the main house. In the middle of which a stair ascends to a second floor bedroom suite that occupies the spaces of the gabled dormers. A central stair also descends to a small basement below the kitchen at the rear. From the east side of the kitchen and from a second entrance way from the exterior court, the rear wing includes the family room with a covered porch, a large bedroom suite, a half-bath with access from the rear exterior, and pantry. As depicted, the interiors reinforce the architectural quality and character of the house. However, as this is a private residence, no interior spaces or features are identified herein as having historic importance.

Summary History and Summary of Historic Significance

As noted, 1850 Alameda Diablo is an identified contributor to the California Register and Contra Costa County register listed *Diablo Historic District*. The extant historic district records provide some information about the home's origins as one of a pair of directly neighboring houses built for sisters Ruth Morse John (#1850) and Susan Louise Morse Melvin (#1842), the two homes together known as "The Twins." ¹

¹ The historical inventory form identifies the originator of the two houses as William Letts Oliver and for his daughters, which information is not correct, though it is very possible Letts may have done so on the Diablo lots his family then owned.

The following are excerpts from the previous historical records for 1850 Alameda Diablo (attached).

From CA Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) from 523 A&B for 1850 Alameda Diablo, dated 2/1/2001:

"Built in 1917, this English Cottage-style house has decorative latticed windows and a pitched shingled roof of intersecting gables. Its exterior is cedar shingles painted a soft moss green. There is a rock chimney. A brick walk and arbor, partially restored, connect this house to its mirror image home next door. The two homes built as summer cottages and are still called The Twins. The home, in nearly original excellent condition, has a garage and guest quarters addition. In 1970 the house underwent renovation and additions, nearly doubling the size of the home. Roof lines were matched, shingles were hand cut, interior matches were also made. The front door, and many of the windows and street facing features are original. The interior oak floors have a rich patina. Wood shingled exterior with multi-gabled wood shake roofs, multi-lite wood windows and a prominent front chimney of field stone.

A portion of the brick terrace still exists in the front yard. Both "twins" have been renovated and added to, but from the street, they have changed little. They are charming, livable, unique homes. This house is an excellent example of an English Cottage style house, it has strong associations with its neighbor and the site and it is a contributor to the Diablo Historic District."

From *Diablo's Treasures: The Historic Homes & Heritage Oaks of Diablo*, 2021 (p.15):

"Twin Creeks"

1850 Alameda Diablo

Original Owners: Jenkin and Ruth Morse Bevan John

Architectural Style: English Cottage

Built: 1917

"Twin Creeks is one of two neighboring creek-side homes that locals call "The Twins" or the "Sister Houses." As their monikers suggest, the homes look alike: both are in the English Cottage style with brown shingle exterior cladding punctuated with the same pleasing arrangement of paned windows. Prior to additions to both homes, their geometric massing formed a symmetrical unit with each home the mirror image of the other. From the street, the mirror image sections can still be discerned. The names also hint at the relationship of the Oakland residents who built the homes: Mrs. Jenkin Bevan John, formerly Miss Ruth C. Morse, and her husband built Twin Creeks in 1917. Her sister, Susan Louise Morse Melvin and her husband, California Supreme Court Associate Justice Henry A. Melvin, built the other Sister House.

Completing their mirror images in landscaping, each of the Sister Houses had a red brick terrace. Befitting the sisters' close relationship, each terrace was connected by a pergola to a shared teahouse midway between the homes. A small portion of Twin Creeks' brick terrace remains, hinting at the home's fascinating past.

A substantial 1970 addition to Twin Creeks was a study in sensitive renovation.

Importantly, the picturesque streetscape was kept very close to the original by continuing existing roof lines and pitches. New cedar shingles were hand-cut and painted to match the old. The front door, unique paned windows, rock chimney, and interior oak floors were preserved as testaments to the craftsmanship of former times. Since 1996, Ted and Barbara Barstad have lovingly preserved Twin Creeks' unique architecture, a jewel for all to behold."

As were most of the originally developed homes in Diablo, 1850 Alameda Diablo was built as a country home for its city residents, Jenkin B. and Ruth M. John, who resided in Oakland then San Francisco in the brief period of their ownership, 1917-1920. From 1920-1927, the property's subsequent owner, Helen S. Dinwiddie, likewise resided elsewhere, in her case Berkeley. It was the third owner, Harriett S. Campbell, who made this her residence and which single-family use has continued under its successive owners.

From the time of its mapping in 1916 until the mid-1960s, the street name was Camino Tassajara, thereafter Alameda Diablo.

No original or early plans or photos of this residence have been located. While the original owners are known – Jenkin B. John, a real estate broker, and Ruth M. John, who acquired the parcel directly from the Mount Diablo Villa Homes Association in June 2017 – no original designer is identifiable. The earliest building permit record dates to 1967, at which time it is assumed that the property was still largely original. Since, as permit records indicate, there have been a range of alterations and additions – all, as the historic record states in the following, in accord with the character of the original residence. Such permit records include:

<i>date</i>	<i>work</i>	<i>owner</i>
1967	Repair carport (storm damage)	Tompkin (?)
1974	Add pool, garage repair, add deck and bath, int. remodel	Baender
1986	Addition, int. remodel	Holt
1988	Carport rebuild, foundation repair/replace	Holt
2002	Reroof	?
2007	Bedroom and bath add	?

Based on the record and a current site visit and inventory, historic character-defining features of the site and building are:

@ Site

- Generous and generously landscaped front yard with wraparound drive and walks of exposed aggregate concrete and raised, brick and stone paved entry terrace
- Creek channel bisecting the site, with associated wood bridge, railings and decking
- Designed relationship to adjoining residence

@ Residence

- Primary exterior forms including canted building front and multiple canted-gabled roof forms
- Rustic wood shake roofing
- Rustic fieldstone clad front chimney
- Wood wall shingles and wood trimwork, painted
- Multi-lite wood windows, painted
- Ornamental wood front entry door with beveled glass lite
- Attic vents in gables, painted
- Ornamental exterior lighting
- Contributing additions:
 - Garage
 - Family room
 - Shed roofs with turned posts at west side

As noted above, no interior spaces or features of this private residence are character-defining.

10 Year Mills Act Recommendations

The subject residence and property are well cared for and in good condition. Current and near-term rehabilitation of historic features includes:

Proposed scope	Estimated cost
1. Reroofing, roof drainage and flashing repairs	\$110,000
2. Repair and selective replacement of wood shingles, overall repainting	\$15,000
3. Door and window maintenance and repair	\$5,000
4. Cleaning, repair and repointing of brick and stone front porch	\$4,000
5. Cleaning and maintenance of aggregate concrete paving	\$4,000
6. Repair/replacement of wood deck, railing and bridge at creek	\$30,000
7. <u>Tree maintenance (to reduce falling hazards)</u>	\$12,000
Total est. rehab and maintenance cost: \$184,000	

Proposed Mills Act Rehabilitation Summary

The outline of proposed rehabilitation work associated with the Mills Act application includes:

Exterior Feature/Materials Rehab Work

at House

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| a. Wood siding and trim - painted | Repair, selectively replace and repaint |
| b. Roofs, roof drainage and flashing | Replace roofing, flashing and roof drainage assemblies equal to existing |
| c. Wood doors and windows - painted | Repairs, selective replacement and maintenance |

at Site

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| d. Brick and stone front porch | Clean, repair and repoint |
| e. Aggregate concrete paving | Repair and maintain |
| f. Wood deck and bridge at creek | Repair and rebuild deck and bridge |
| g. Trees | Trim (to reduce falling hazards at buildings) |

Rehabilitation work items a, b, f and g are proposed to be completed within 5 years (by 2031); items c, d and e are proposed to be completed within 10 years (by 2036).

Rehabilitation Project Evaluation

The following evaluates the proposed rehabilitation work relative to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Standards)* and, specifically, the Standards for Rehabilitation, which is defined as follows:

"When repair and replacement of deteriorated features are necessary; when alterations or additions to the property are planned for a new or continued use; and when its depiction at a particular period of time is not appropriate, Rehabilitation may be considered as a treatment."

The following lists the ten *Standards for Rehabilitation* and analyzes the proposed project with respect to each.

1. *A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.*

The subject property was historically a single-family residence. The proposed work intends to

retain and rehabilitate the single-family residential use. As such, *Standard 1* is met.

2. *The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*

The proposed work retains all identified characteristic forms and individual features of the house and its property, so *Standard 2* is met.

3. *Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*

The proposed work fully respects the overall form and individual characteristics of the historic house and its associated site. The proposed work does not add or copy any features or elements from this or other historic properties. Thus, the project meets *Standard 3*.

4. *Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*

The identified character of the subject house dates to the period of its origins and early history. Its deck and bridge at the creek are either original or early structures that, as they are directly associated with the original and early property, have gained significance in their own right and which, like the house, are proposed to be rehabilitated, so *Standard 4* is met.

5. *Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.*

All identified character defining forms, features, finishes, examples of construction techniques and craftsmanship embodied in the house and its site are proposed to be retained and rehabilitated or selectively replaced in kind. Consequently, the proposed work meets *Standard 5*.

6. *Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.*

The rehabilitation program proposes to repair and maintain deteriorated exterior features and materials of the house and site along with selective replacement of irreparable features and materials, as required, to match existing, including:

- Wood roof shakes to be replaced with composite, fireproof shakes that equal the appearance of the existing shakes.
- Wood sidewall shingles to be replaced with new wood shingles to match existing.
- Wood decking to be replaced with either fire treated wood to match existing or composite wood that equals the appearance of the existing decking.

As historic features will be repaired rather than replaced except where the severity of deterioration requires replacement, where the new feature will equal the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials, and as no missing features are to be replaced, the proposed rehabilitation work meets *Standard 6*.

7. *Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.*

At this planning stage, all potential treatments of identified historic materials are anticipated to be careful and protective in order to avoid damage. As such, the project also meets with *Standard 7*.

8. *Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.*

The proposed rehabilitation program has no potential to disturb archeological resources.

9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

As summarized, the subject house and associated site are proposed to be retained and rehabilitated without alteration of its identified characteristic forms or features. No new work, new additions or new construction is proposed. Thus, the proposed rehabilitation work meets *Standard 9*.

10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in a such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Again, no new additions or new construction is proposed, so the proposed rehabilitation work also meets *Standard 10*.

In conclusion, since the proposed work program meets each applicable Standard, then the proposed project readily meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Signed:



Mark Hulbert
Preservation Architect

attached: figs.1-30 (pp.8-22); Sketch plans (pp.23-25); DPR forms, 04/24.2025; pages from Diablo Historic District & Diablo Treasures; MH qualifications



Fig.1 – 1850 Alameda Diablo (highlighted) – Location aerial (Google Earth 2024)

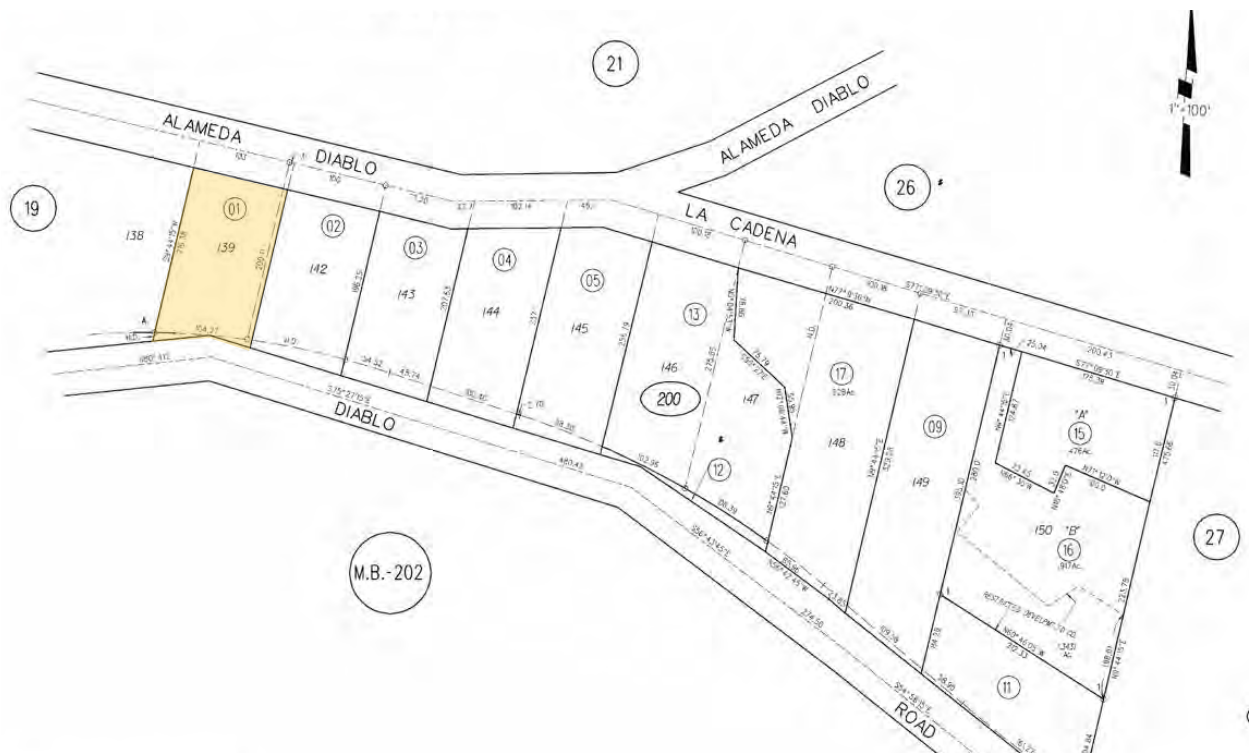


Fig.2 – 1850 Alameda Diablo (highlighted) – from Assessor's parcel map

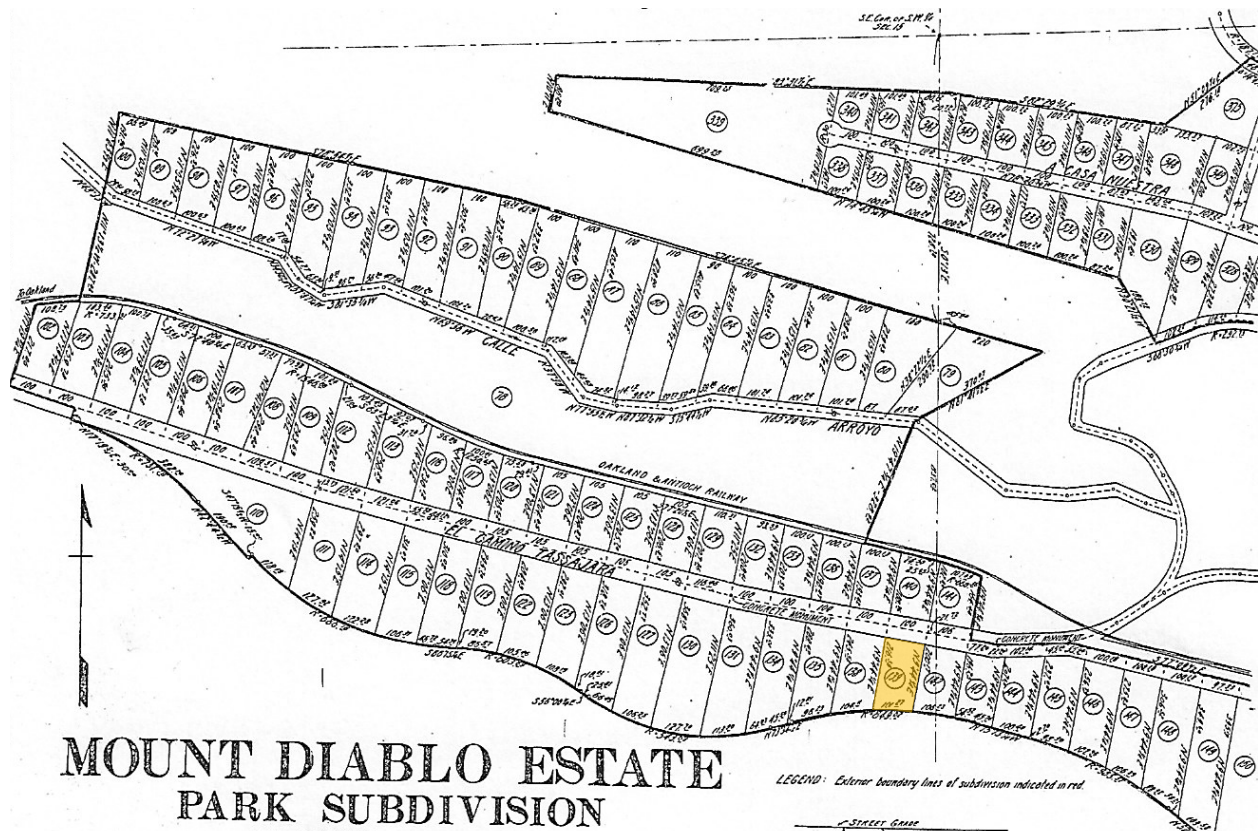


Fig.3 – 1850 Alameda Diablo (highlighted) – 1916 Tract map

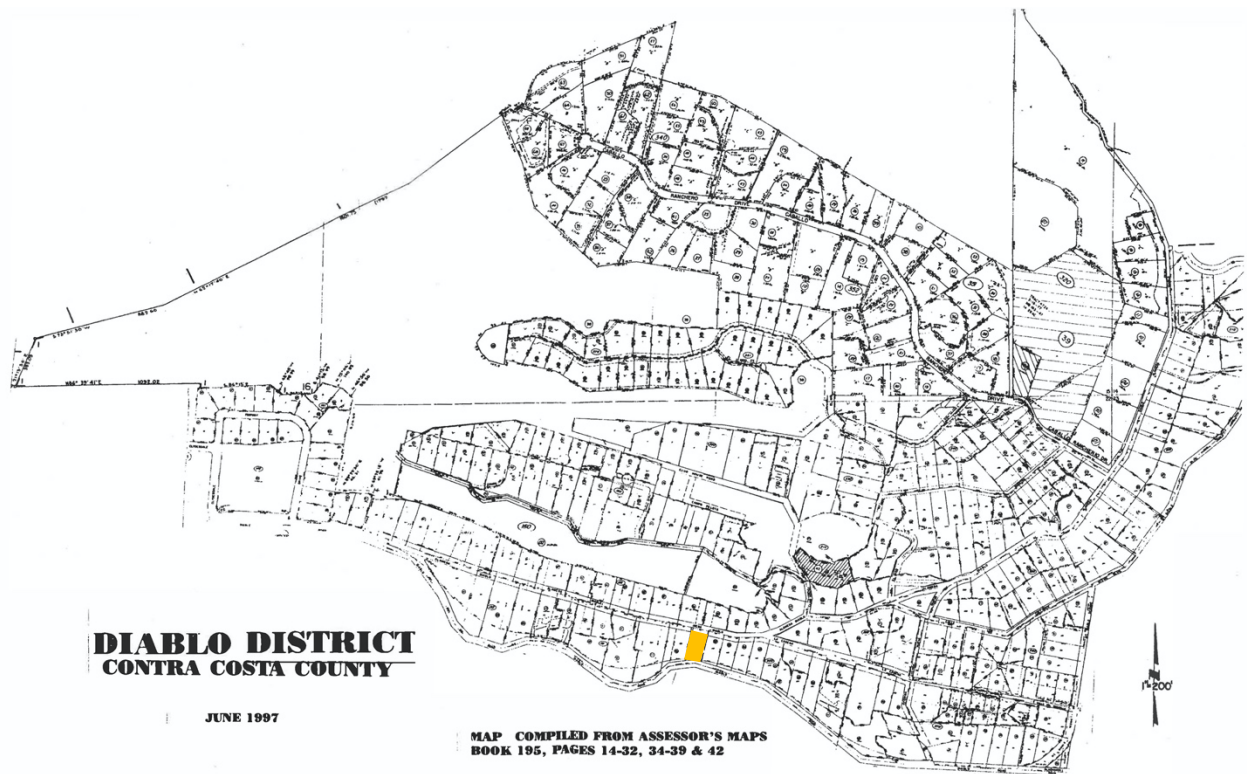


Fig.4 – 1850 Alameda Diablo (highlighted) – Diablo Historic District map, 2002



Fig.5 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Site aerial depicting original house and carport (bright orange) with rearward additions (north is up)



Fig.6 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Front (north) of house from west driveway at street (figs.6-24, MH 2025)



Fig.7 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Front of garage (north) from east driveway at street



Fig.8 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Canted front (north) façade and front garden, looking south



Fig.9 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Canted front (north) façade and walks, looking southwest



Figs.10-11 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Canted front façade and entry (left); Front entry terrace (right)



Fig.12 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Garage front and east side of living room wing



Fig.13 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – West side from creek bridge



Fig.14 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Rear of house (left and center) and family room wing (right)



Fig.15 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Overall rear of house from upper rear yard, looking northeast



Fig.16 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Overall rear of house from upper rear yard, looking northwest



Fig.17 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Rear of house with creek deck, creek portal and bridge (at upper left) and pool



Figs.18-19 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Rear yard looking east (left) and southeast (right)



Figs.20-21 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Creek portal and bridge



Fig.22 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – South side, living room wing from interior court



Figs.23-24 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Interior court looking south (right) and east (left)



Fig.25 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Living Room, looking north towards front (figs.25-30, Redfin)



Fig.26 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Living Room, looking east and south



Fig.27 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Dining Room, looking east



Fig.28 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Kitchen, looking south



Fig.29 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Family Room, looking southwest



Fig.30 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Office, looking west

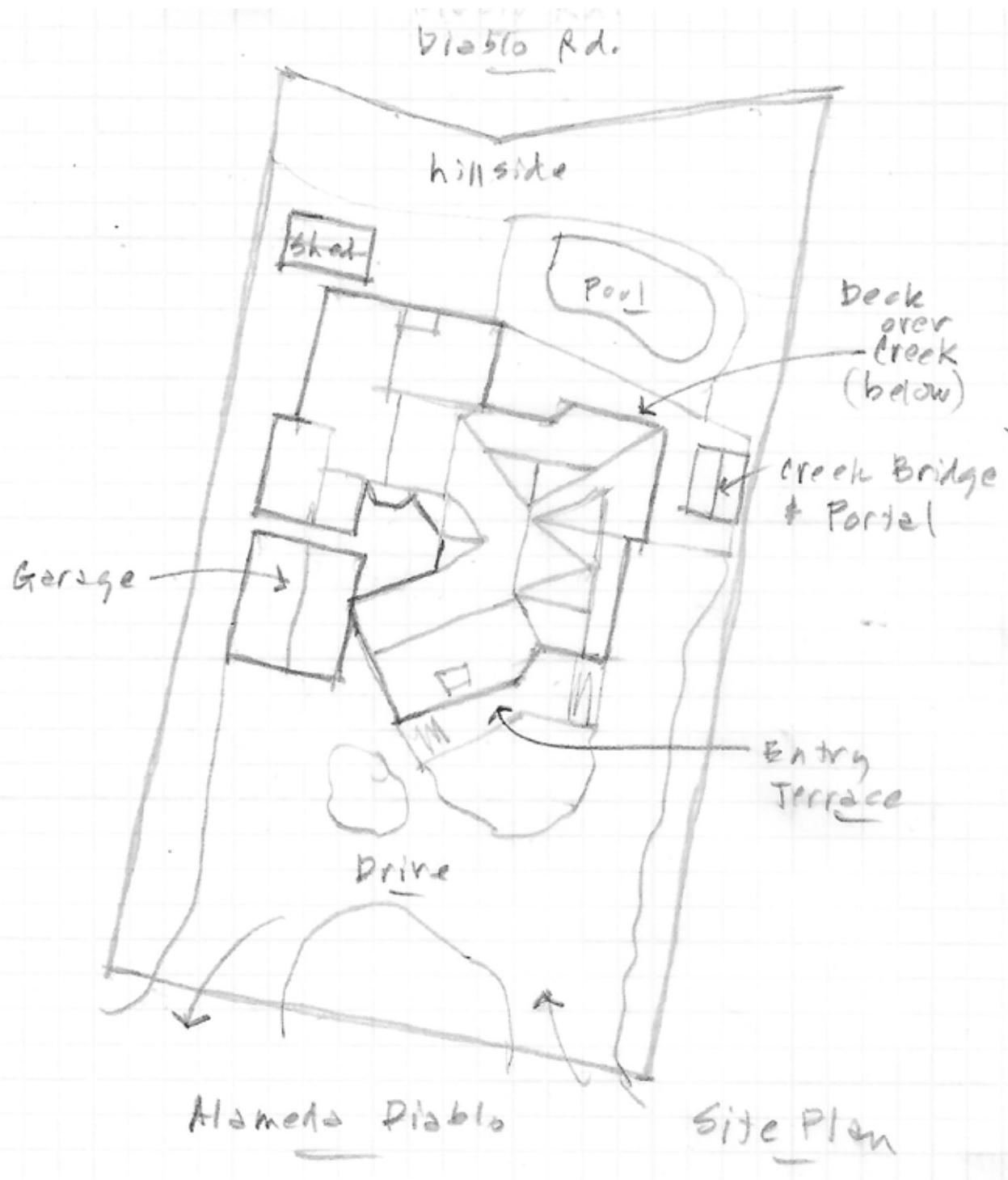


Fig.31 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Site plan (note: south is up)

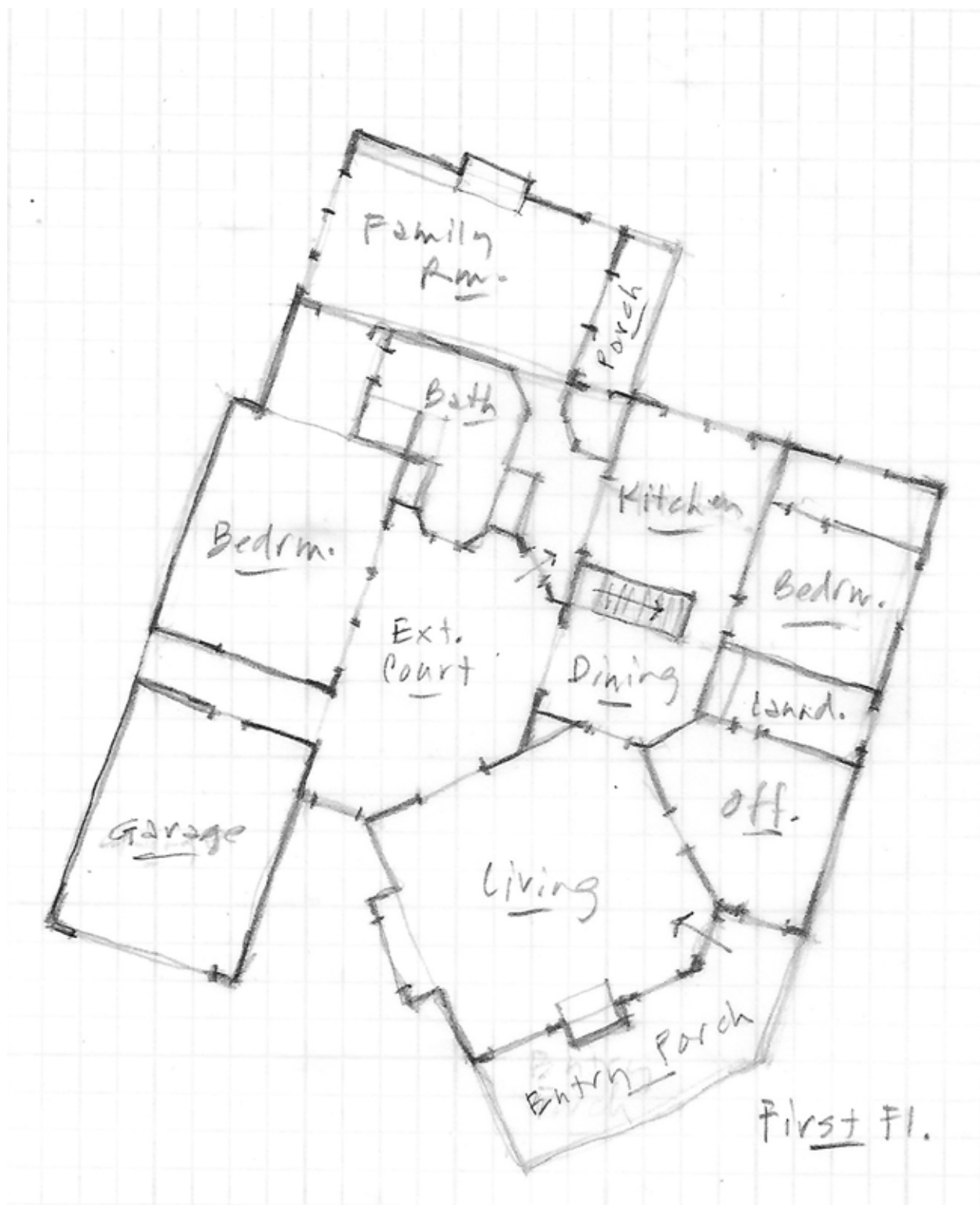


Fig.32 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – First floor plan (south is up)

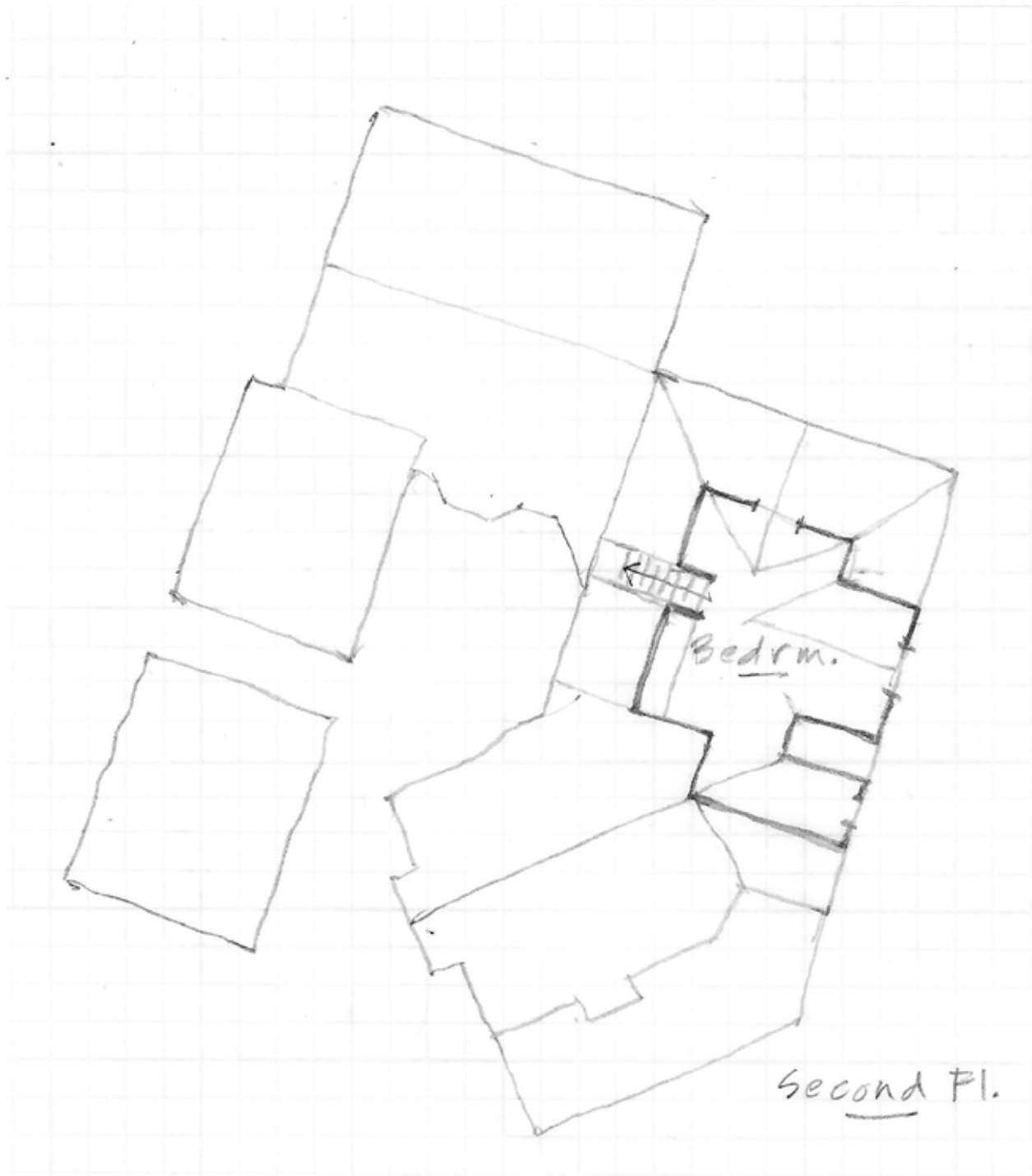


Fig.33 – 1850 Alameda Diablo – Second floor plan (south is up)