



Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows  
Name of Property

San Mateo County, CA  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Non contributing	
		buildings
		sites
		structures
247 original eucs 32 original elms +77 new contributing elms	146 non-historic eucalyptus and 55 other	Objects (trees)
<b>356</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>Total: 557</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)  
N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**OTHER:**  
**Land development promotion through beautification of the roadway**  
**LANDSCAPE: Windbreak**

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**LANDSCAPE**

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation:  
walls:  
roof:  
other:

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## Narrative Description

### Summary Paragraph

The Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows flank El Camino Real (State Route 82) through the cities of Burlingame and Hillsborough, in the northern portion of the former Rancho San Mateo and the southern portion of Rancho Buri Buri. The original design intent of landscape gardener John McLaren was to beautify and protect from wind the portion of the County Highway leading to the grand estates of several San Francisco Peninsula property owners, the most prominent of whom were landowner George H. Howard and capitalist William C. Ralston. The tree planting, undertaken between 1873 and 1876, was comprised primarily of English elms, interspersed with eucalyptus, the latter planted to nurse the elms by protecting them from the relentless winds. Once 4 miles in length, the resource area is 2.2 miles long, bounded by Peninsula Avenue on the southeast end of the highway and Ray Drive/Rosedale Avenue on the northwest end. Of the 557 trees contained within these boundaries, 356 are considered contributing trees. The vast majority of these, 247 (approximately 70%) are mature blue and manna gums from the original planting, reaching well over 100 feet in height and 5 feet in diameter at breast height. Also contributing to the resource are 32 mature elms, as well as 77 new elms comprised mainly of plantings from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in 2006 and 2008, and a generous grant to Burlingame from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) planted on Arbor Day, March 7, 2011. These new plantings are noteworthy because the elm species had been the predominant tree type specified in McLaren's original landscape plan.

### Narrative Description

The resource consists of two rows of trees, one row planted on either side of State Route 82 within the Caltrans 60 to 66-foot right-of-way along the historic highway. The vast majority of trees in the resource are situated within the city of Burlingame. Sixty-three percent of the eucalyptus trees in the rows are mature specimens with thin bark that curls as it sheds and long, narrow leaves and numerous seedpods. Blue gums (*E. globulus*) account for about two-thirds of the old trees, and manna gums (*E. viminalis*) comprise the remainder. Mature English elms account for roughly 12% of the historic trees in the resource area. Non-contributing trees within the resource include mature redwood, sycamore, horse chestnut and liquidambar trees. Although the eucalyptus have become established as primary trees within the rows, disease-tolerant elm trees 'Frontier' (*Ulmus parvifolia*-USDA 1972) and 'Accolade' (*Ulmus accolade*-TM 'Morton' 1986) have been planted beginning in 2006, in keeping with John McLaren's original design. Traditional American and European elm trees have a vase-shaped crown with limbs terminating in slender, often pendulous branches, typically reaching between 70 and 90 feet in height, and spreading 50 to 70 feet.<sup>[1]</sup> Though slightly smaller in scale, Accolade and Frontier hybrid elms were chosen as the two most appropriate and promising varieties currently available, representing traditional elm characteristics while being less likely to get the diseases typically associated with elms since the 1930s. The staked saplings installed by Caltrans have been 15-gallon size or greater.

The matter of how many tree rows were originally planted along the route remains inconclusive. In a letter from 1938, six decades after the planting, McLaren describes to Dr. Stanger, San Mateo County's foremost historian, the original plan as having consisted of three rows of alternating gums and elms.<sup>[2]</sup> The earliest photos of the still unpaved county road through Burlingame, taken around 1900, appear to show two tree rows of eucalyptus, one on either side of the dirt road, with wooden fencing erected immediately behind them (See Figure 1). A

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Ulmus americana: American Elm, Fact Sheet ST-649* (Florida: Environmental Horticulture Department, October 1994), 1.

<sup>2</sup>John McLaren, Letters to F.M. Stanger, 3 and 12 March 1938. At the San Mateo County Historical Association Archive, Redwood City, California.

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### **Narrative Description (cont.)**

thicket of indistinguishable trees is visible behind the tree rows and fencing. Another early photo taken in the Mills Estate area of Burlingame in the 1920s, shows what appear to be medium-sized elms poking through front rows of eucalyptus that line the paved road.

The current placement of tree rows varies in its relationship to the highway throughout the resource. In most places, there is sidewalk between the tree row and the street curb while in other areas the trees are within a planter strip, in some instances protruding into and over the roadway curbing. A small area on the southwest side of El Camino Real, located between Bellevue and Floribunda, borders the Town of Hillsborough where there are no sidewalks. Here the trees are planted in a wide unpaved swath of land used as a footpath by the public. Fencing from adjacent property owners has been erected just west of the trees. At three locations: the west side of El Camino Real south of Willow Avenue, the east side of El Camino Real north of Palm, and the west side of El Camino Real north of Arc Way, the trees are planted within retaining walls raised 2 feet above the adjacent sidewalk, and run along the road for a distance of 75 to 300 feet.

Further north, in the area bordering Highway Road, on the east side of El Camino Real, elms and eucalyptus are planted in very wide islands, roughly half the width of which fall within the Caltrans right of way. Continuing northward on the west side past Adeline, there is an embankment on which the trees are planted, in some areas with longer gaps between mature trees resulting from the removal of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) afflicted elms, while on the east side, from the creek to the end of the resource at Rosedale, the tree rows are planted in a very large unpaved area resembling parkland. This city-owned area contains several elms planted by Burlingame in the 1990s to assess disease resistance. The relatively wide swaths of greenery and trees give the north entrance to the resource a strong, park-like feel. An area just north of the resource was likewise used to test elms in a cooperative research project by UC Extension and the US Department of Forestry (1992), part of the ongoing study of disease-tolerant elms.

On both sides of the roadway within the resource boundaries, most of the flanking properties are residential in nature: homes, condominiums and apartment buildings, interspersed with some commercial buildings and churches. Most properties are screened to some degree by trees that soften the visual impact and help mask overhead utilities. Properties are typically set back several feet from the Caltrans right-of-way, resulting in mostly mature landscaping that contributes to the park-like feel of the roadway. While residential properties have traditionally faced El Camino Real, commercial properties in Burlingame tend to be oriented to face secondary streets, making them appear less prominent. The vast majority of city streets that adjoin El Camino Real are lined with mature street trees.

The Tree Rows have long defined the 2-lane highway El Camino Real through Burlingame, the roadway width of which has stayed relatively constant since its initial paving through the city in 1913, measuring roughly 43.5 feet curb to curb.<sup>[3]</sup> The narrow gauge of the resource area is unique to this portion of El Camino Real and is in stark contrast to areas north of Rosedale and Ray, where the roadway was widened considerably and trees removed for development in the 1950s. In some areas, such as those south of the Willow and Forest View areas, the dense look seen in vintage photographs persists; heritage eucalyptus have matured to within just a few feet of one another. In others, particularly those close to the adjacent commercial business streets, such as the Broadway area, the spacing becomes more sparse. Generally, most trees are spaced anywhere from 10 feet to 40 feet apart. Though the original spacing planned by McLaren is unknown, notes made in his Day Book from

<sup>3</sup> City of Burlingame, California, Street Card Index, Department of Public Works (Burlingame: circa 1955).

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### **Narrative Description (cont.)**

1876 refer to the planting of similar windbreaks on the avenues in San Mateo, "...gums and poplars alternating, and planted 10 feet apart." By McLaren's own description, in the case of the El Camino Real plantings, gums were to be removed after the elms had become established.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Review of Existing Integrity of the Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows**

Caltrans initially replaced unhealthy older trees with eucalyptus of other varieties, including orange gum (*E. bancroftii*) planted in 1985, and desert box (*E. microtheca*) planted in the late 1990s. Although they are similar in bark and leaf size, both of these species are significantly smaller than the original gums selected by McLaren, reaching just 30 feet in height, and up to two feet in diameter. As such, they do not contribute to the tree rows and have not been planted since that period.

In 1999 Caltrans mapped and documented the Tree Rows, including levels of integrity, and found them to be both a historic resource under CEQA and eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2004, Caltrans has had an ongoing agreement with SHPO regarding removals and replacements of trees within the Resource Area.<sup>[5]</sup> In 2008 Caltrans conducted a comprehensive GPS study of the area from Rosedale Avenue/Ray Drive to Peninsula Avenue, plotting the location of each tree, its type, circumference at breast height, total height, maturity and whether it contributed to the resource. The trees within the resource boundaries were subsequently numbered and tagged for future tracking.

In keeping with McLaren's original design intent, as trees have had to be replaced, elm trees have been planted and will continue to be planted in the future. Since 2006, Caltrans has planted 44 non-historic, contributing elm saplings to rehabilitate the resource. Burlingame Planning Commission requirements led to the planting of 5 more elms in 2009-10. Cal Fire has planted 33 additional contributing elm saplings in March 2011. Of the 82 total, 5 have died, leaving 77 new contributing elms. New elm trees are considered to be contributing elements of the resource and will only continue to strengthen the integrity of the Tree Rows as they carry out McLaren's original design of a landscaped, shaded avenue.

Though the original landscape design was thought to have contained three rows of trees for a distance of 4 miles, the remaining portion of the resource is less than 2.2 miles with a single row of trees on each side. Since having been last assessed in 2008, ten DED-afflicted elms and three blue gum eucalyptus have been removed from within the resource area. Enough heritage trees remain in the section running through the City of Burlingame and Town of Hillsborough, however, to create the visual coherence of the Tree Rows when driving on El Camino Real. Since McLaren's original design of the Tree Rows was intended to be viewed from horse and carriage, the visual integrity is intact.

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<sup>4</sup> John McLaren, Letter to Henry W. Poett, December 14, 1935. At the San Mateo County Historical Association Archive, Redwood City, California.

<sup>5</sup> Mara Melandry, Office of Cultural Resources Studies Chief, California Department of Transportation, Letter to Dr. Knox Mellon, State Historic Preservation Officer, Sacramento, California, 22 December 2003.

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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.)

- 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.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

- 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.)

Community Planning and Development

Landscape Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1873-1930

**Significant Dates**

1873 - year of original planting

1930 - Burlingame election prohibiting commercial development on the highway to protect trees

**Significant Person**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

John McLaren- landscape gardener

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The Period of Significance of the Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows is from 1873 to 1930. The 1873 date is established with the creation and implementation of McLaren's original landscape plan that took roughly three years to complete. The pivotal election of 1930 resulted in zoning that prohibited commercial development of the highway in order to save the McLaren trees.

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**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

Planted by famed landscape gardener John McLaren for property owners George H. Howard and William C. Ralston in the mid-1870s, the Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for their association with the founding of the cities of Burlingame and Hillsborough, California. The Tree Rows directly influenced Burlingame's first laws, most notably zoning ordinances specifically crafted to protect the trees from destruction due to development. For over a century, citizens and elected officials have recognized the importance of the Tree Rows to local identity and history. Long the epicenter of tree-related activism and preservation, the Howard-Ralston Tree Rows are significant to Burlingame's sense of local history and development, having set aesthetic standards that have influenced decades of Burlingame's tree planting and management policies. Recognized as a valuable local resource by the City of Burlingame, the Tree Rows have a long history of protection within the city limits.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Tree Rows are also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, as an excellent example of master landscape designer John McLaren's early work. McLaren masterfully created a sheltered, park-like environment in an otherwise largely barren landscape. Planted between 1873 and 1876, these Tree Rows substantially predate the earliest California Highway Tree Planting Program, begun in 1921<sup>[7]</sup>, and serve as a reminder of McLaren's foresight in the area of roadway beautification. The trees also express the importance of El Camino Real as the main overland route to the City of San Francisco, dating from California's Spanish era into the 1930s.

**Narrative Statement of Significance: CRITERION "A"**

The eucalyptus and elm Tree Rows that flank El Camino Real (State Route 82) in Burlingame and Hillsborough were planted by landscape gardener John McLaren for property owners George H. Howard and William C. Ralston in the mid-1870s to create a sheltered grand entrance to their great estates and draw people into the newly surveyed territory. At that time, Ralston was planning the real estate subdivision that later became the City of Burlingame, while Howard and his family were living at their country estate, situated in what later became the Town of Hillsborough. McLaren had recently arrived in San Mateo County from his native Scotland to work as head gardener for Howard.

The landscape plan interspersing rows of eucalyptus and elm trees along a four-mile stretch of El Camino Real, commonly known as County Road, between San Mateo Creek and modern-day Millbrae was conceived one evening in the early 1870s, when the area's largest property owners gathered in George H. Howard's home. For Ralston, the incentive was the creation of an attractive boulevard, making the area more hospitable and attractive to future investors.

McLaren in 1935 recalled the participants in this meeting in a letter to Henry W. Poett:

"...a meeting took place in Mr. George H. Howard's dining room and at which plans were made for the planting of trees along the County Road [El Camino Real] in San Mateo County. Present at this conference

<sup>6</sup>William Kostura, *Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Row State Historic Resource Evaluation Forms*, State of California Resources Agency, Primary Record, (Oakland, California: Caltrans, 1999), pp. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.6.

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**CRITERION "A"(cont.)**

were your father [Alfred Poett], Mr. George H. Howard, Mr. W.C. Ralston, Mr. D.O. Mills, Mr. Redington, several other local people and myself. All of us were equally enthusiastic about the scheme....”<sup>[8]</sup>

McLaren remained at El Cerrito until 1887 when he left to become assistant superintendent (later superintendent) of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. During his tenure of roughly fourteen years in San Mateo County, McLaren planted hundreds of thousands of trees in the area, including several groves designed as windbreaks. In Burlingame what once was a wind-swept prairie became a city of tree-lined boulevards boasting a park-like atmosphere, promoted as one of most coveted addresses on the San Francisco Peninsula. Of all his plantings in San Mateo County, the Ralston-Howard Tree Rows, designed to create a beautiful and protected entrance to the then sparsely populated area, are his best-known surviving work, having become the distinctive feature and pride of Burlingame by the turn of the 20th century. Following the 1906 earthquake, refugees from San Francisco began flooding the area, then home to only about 200 people. As anticipated by Ralston, the tree-lined El Camino Real was a major attraction for many, and subdivided properties of second-generation landowners began to sell; the population of the town swelled to 1,000 in one year.<sup>[9]</sup>

The Tree Rows are particularly significant because of Burlingame’s extensive history of activism and ensuing legal protection associated with them. The first documented protection of the Tree Rows came just two months after Burlingame’s incorporation, in 1908. Heeding a request of the Burlingame Woman’s Club to protect what many already believed to be the town’s most important asset, Mayor Treadwell and the Trustees enacted an ordinance “prohibiting the cutting, injuring or destroying of trees on public streets, highways or parks of the Town of Burlingame.”<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1913, shortly after the highway paving was completed, the Burlingame Advance proclaimed:

“Hereafter ‘El Camino Real’—the King’s Highway, if you please. A more beautiful avenue cannot be found and no more fitting name can be found for this most beautiful thoroughfare. It is a big advertisement for Burlingame, for thousands and thousands will see it and admire its beauty and talk about it...Remove the trees and it is no more a king’s highway, but an ordinary country road.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Later that year, in response to numerous petitions by property owners to cut trees on El Camino Real, Mayor McGregor declared the trees’ historical significance to the town: “These trees are not alone an ornament, they are of historic importance and were planted by the pioneers of this region.”<sup>[12]</sup> He then ordered the arrest of anyone found cutting trees on the highway. A suggestion by Mayor Moores in 1916 to remove all eucalyptus from public streets was met with a storm of protest, and rebuffed by fellow Trustees and the Parks Commission.<sup>[13]</sup>

By the early 1920s, concern about the indiscriminate cutting of trees along the highway came to a head, resulting in the framing of an ordinance imposing substantial penalties for cutting trees without a permit. In the

<sup>8</sup> John McLaren, Letter to Henry W. Poett, 14 December 1935. At the San Mateo County Historical Association Archive, Redwood City, California.

<sup>9</sup> Beverly Evans, “Historical Background,” *Burlingame Lively Memories* (Burlingame, California: Burlingame Historical Society, 1977), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> City and Town of Burlingame (California), Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees, Meeting of 20 August 1908.

<sup>11</sup> “The King’s Highway,” *Burlingame Advance*, 14 July 1913.

<sup>12</sup> “No Tree Cutting on King’s Highway,” *Burlingame Advance*, 26 September 1913.

<sup>13</sup> “Destroying the Avenues,” *Burlingame Advance*, 4 February 1916.

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**CRITERION "A"(cont.)**

pivotal election of April 1930, Burlingame voters overwhelmingly elected candidates supportive of zoning ordinances enacted in the early 1920s that prohibited commercial development of El Camino Real, seen as a significant threat to the Tree Rows.<sup>[14]</sup> By creating zoning ordinances to protect the trees and continuing to resist the State's desire to widen the road for traffic, commercial development was forced to occur in other areas that had succumbed to pressure.

By the mid-1950s, when widespread development of the former Mills Estate near Millbrae resulted in highway widening and tree removal, there was an outcry of disapproval and removals stopped, though not before a significant number of trees had been removed near the northern border of the City. In 1958 an unsuccessful attempt was made to widen the highway through Burlingame. This may have been the last significant threat to El Camino Real's Tree Rows, for in 1965 Alan S. Hart, an engineer with the State Highway Department's District 4, said that El Camino Real in Burlingame was now virtually a city street, and that the department would make no further move to widen it unless asked by the city.<sup>[15]</sup>

When the City completed designs for its new City Hall in the late 1960s, it also commissioned a new city logo. The design by A. Woods Giberson depicted "new City Hall, a Eucalyptus tree, and the word 'Burlingame,' to predominate."<sup>[16]</sup>

Finally, in 1975 the trees were formally recognized by the City of Burlingame and by the San Mateo County Historic Sites Committee, by virtue of their historical significance and other qualities, thus providing them with legal protection from destruction.<sup>[17]</sup> This designation marked the culmination of decades of conflict and activism on behalf of the Tree Rows. The long history of esteem for and protection of Burlingame's trees that started with the McLaren highway plantings has resulted in Burlingame's designation as a Tree City USA since 1979 and the well-known moniker, "Burlingame: City of Trees." In addition to privately owned trees, nearly 15,000 trees adorn Burlingame's city parks and public streets, including those planted on El Camino Real.<sup>[18]</sup>

**Narrative Statement of Significance: CRITERION "C"**

The Ralston-Howard Eucalyptus Tree Rows are the most important of several avenues planted by John McLaren as ornamental windbreaks in San Mateo County. They represent McLaren's earliest work in California and comprise the first highway landscaping in the State, predating the California Highway Tree Planting Program by 50 years. In 1872 the State Board of Agriculture called attention to an Act approved in 1868, encouraging plantings of various shade and fruit trees, including eucalyptus and elm, upon the public roads and highways of the State.<sup>[19]</sup> Eucalyptus had become available in seed form in California by the mid-1850s. It did not take long for the hardy, fast growing trees to attain an almost mythical reputation: as practical and attractive windbreaks, as a source of wood for a variety of purposes, as well as oil for numerous medicinal uses. With these qualities in mind, McLaren conceived of a sheltered tunneled entrance to the Burlingame-San Mateo area, created by maturing elm trees that would minimize the dust in dry months, and protect the route from storms in winter. The park-like atmosphere set itself apart from the otherwise windblown, barren

<sup>14</sup> "Voters Decide On No Commercialism For El Camino Real." *Burlingame Advance Star*, 15 April 1930.

<sup>15</sup> William Kostura, *Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Row State Historic Resource Evaluation Forms*, State of California Resources Agency, Primary Record, (Oakland, California: Caltrans, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> City of Burlingame (California), Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees, Meeting of 15 September 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Burlingame City Council, *Heritage Grove Designation* (Burlingame, California: 4 November 1975).

<sup>18</sup> Davey Resource Group, *City of Burlingame Tree Inventory Report*, (Burlingame, California: May 2011).

<sup>19</sup> "A Good Work," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 October 1872.

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### CRITERION "C"(cont.)

landscape. McLaren's foresight and talent in roadway landscaping caused him to be recalled from Golden Gate Park in 1902 to supervise the design of what had been part of the Howard Estate, where his concepts were to be expanded beyond the limits of El Camino Real to the upscale San Mateo Park subdivision. His large-scale forestation for climate control subsequently inspired other early roadway plantings on the Peninsula, including the portion of El Camino Real through San Bruno as well as the Bayshore (Highway 101) plantings through Burlingame begun in 1930.<sup>[20]</sup> Drawing inspiration from McLaren's original designs, more than a century later, in 1981, the Garden Study Club of the Peninsula donated funds for dozens of eucalyptus to be planted along El Camino Real, north of the resource, where decades before McLaren's trees had been destroyed in the development of the Mills Estate. Stately and gracious, the Tree Rows have retained their sentinel presence in Burlingame for over a century while the city of Burlingame has grown up around them. Only in Burlingame has there been sufficient public pressure exerted to preserve McLaren's creation.

### Developmental history/additional historic context information

The City of Burlingame and Town of Hillsborough are located along San Francisco Bay, in San Mateo County, California. With less wind and fog and a warmer climate than cities to the north, the area has long been considered an ideal place to live. The earliest inhabitants were the Ohlone Indians. Tribes lived in fixed village locations, subsisting by hunting, gathering and fishing along the marshes that lined the bay. Today, little remains of the original landscape in which they lived.

California's El Camino Real has its origins in 16th century Spain, where the system of roads leading to the king's residence was the envy of Europe. Transplanted to the New World in the late 18th century by the Spanish explorers and missionaries, this system provided the foundation for El Camino Real, covering some 600 miles linking the missions from San Diego in the south to Sonoma in the north, and creating the only overland route up the Peninsula to San Francisco until the early part of the 20th century.

In 1834, the Mexican government, having gained independence from Spain in 1821, seized the church's lands and gave them away to secular interests. Over the next twelve years the government gave away over 500 land grants, including Rancho San Mateo and Rancho Buri Buri, totaling about 13 million acres. Owners of the "ranchos" became California's rancho elite, many of whom sold or lost their land to well-to-do American immigrants after the Mexican-American War and California statehood.

In 1847, W.D.M. Howard, a prosperous San Francisco merchant, and his partner Henry Mellus, purchased Rancho San Mateo from Cayetano Arenas, a young clerk working for Governor Pio Pico. The Governor had awarded Arenas the rancho as payment for a debt a year before.<sup>[21]</sup> The land grant included over 6,000 acres in today's Hillsborough, Burlingame and northern San Mateo. By 1850, Howard had bought out Mellus's share and would retire to his country home "El Cerrito," the first of the grand country estates on the San Francisco Peninsula. He died in 1856 at 37 years old, leaving his 23-year old widow and their young son.

Ralston, a businessman and financier, had made a fortune in the Comstock Lode. Together with Darius Ogden Mills, he founded the Bank of California, which became the most powerful bank in the west, and he used his personal fortune to stimulate the creation of numerous local industries and real-estate developments.

<sup>20</sup> City of Burlingame (California), Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees, Meeting of 3 March 1930.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell P. Postel, *San Mateo: A Centennial History* (San Francisco, California: Scottswall Associates Publishers, 1994), 15.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information (cont.)**

Two others, Gold Rush banker D. O. Mills and his brother-in-law, Ansel Ives Easton, each purchased 1,500-acre portions of the Buri-Buri rancho creating their own great estates north of Howard's estate. From the land holdings of these men, the development of the Tree Rows and the City of Burlingame would one day take shape.

After the death of W.D.M. Howard, his brother George H. Howard married W.D.M.'s widow, Agnes Poett Howard, and inherited much of his property. The remainder of the property passed to W.D.M. Howard's son and to his father-in-law, Dr. Joseph Henry Poett. Anson Burlingame, for whom the City is named, later purchased a portion of Poett's land with the intention of living there, but he died before he could carry out his plans. In 1872, Mills, acting on behalf of Burlingame's children, sold part of Burlingame's holdings to William C. Ralston, who would develop a subdivision scheme by hiring civil engineer Alfred Poett (Agnes's brother) to survey and subdivide the land, creating curving avenues and large residential lots.

It was during this period, in 1873, that George H. Howard hired landscape gardener John McLaren as head gardener at El Cerrito. McLaren, an emigrant from Scotland, stayed for 14 years, engaging in a large number of projects for Howard and other local property owners, including James C. Flood and Leland Stanford. Keeping terse yet meticulous entries, McLaren documented his daily activities. Following the death of George H. Howard in 1878, Agnes married Henry Bowie in 1879 and the two spent most of their time in Europe, monitoring McLaren's activities from afar, and regularly exchanging names of new and exotic plants and seeds to import and plant at El Cerrito. Supervising several Chinese and Irish workers to accomplish his work, McLaren worked six days a week repairing roads and fences, installing irrigation systems, raising thousands of trees from seed in greenhouses, transplanting and staking them as windbreaks, maintaining El Cerrito's vast gardens, as well as selling fruits, nuts, and vegetables produced on the Howard Estate. McLaren also helped maintain the dairy lands inhabited by dairy herds east of El Camino Real, and planted 70,000 trees on Coyote Point alone, a fair number of which were felled to produce firewood for sale. This forested area is now a San Mateo County Park.

In the late 19th century, wealthy Peninsula-area landowners, including William C. Ralston and George H. Howard, recognizing the significance of El Camino Real, commissioned John McLaren to transform several miles of this dusty trail through a barren and windswept area into a beautiful tree-lined boulevard leading to their great estates and proposed communities.

McLaren wrote in 1938 of the plan:

"I was charged with the actual task, and the cost was borne by each property owner for his own frontage on the highway. The original plan was that of the three rows of trees so planted, the eucalyptus should only remain as a shelter and windbreak for the elm trees until the latter became properly established and attained some growth. However, the eucalyptus, as you know, are still in place."<sup>[22]</sup>

The Tree Row plantings eventually transformed the largely barren landscape, providing beauty while functioning as a windbreak. William C. Ralston died suddenly in 1875, resulting in the passing of the Burlingame property to his associate, William Sharon, with whom he had built San Francisco's Palace Hotel in 1875. Sharon was unable to find buyers for the Burlingame lots. After Sharon's death, his son-in-law and heir,

<sup>22</sup> John McLaren, Letter to F.M. Stanger, 3 March 1938. At the San Mateo County Historical Association Archive, Redwood City, California.

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### **Developmental history/additional historic context information (cont.)**

Francis Newlands, hit upon a scheme to attract well-to-do San Franciscans to the area by founding the Burlingame Country Club in 1893, located in present-day Hillsborough. Most of the Club's founders were originally from the East, but had made their fortunes in California. They continued to look to the East and to Europe for their cultural and aesthetic standards, including leafy landscaping and English country-style architecture. To make the newly founded Club more accessible and impressive to wealthy businessmen, a unique mission-style train station was built in Burlingame in 1894, funded by the Club's membership. Others drawn to the new station were refugees of the 1906 earthquake who established the town of Burlingame.

Among the earliest advocates and protectors of El Camino's Tree Rows were members of the Burlingame Woman's Club. Recognizing the beauty and shelter the McLaren trees provided, the group endeavored to plant 600 additional street trees as its Arbor Day gift to the town in 1908, making sure trees would remain an integral part of the developing suburb.<sup>[23]</sup> In the weeks following Burlingame's incorporation in 1908, the Woman's Club requested that Mayor Treadwell and the Trustees enact one of Burlingame's first ordinances, protecting all city and highway trees from injury or destruction. The ordinance was crafted and passed immediately. In February 1909, a Parks Commission was created by the Trustees.<sup>[24]</sup>

In 1909 El Camino Real became part of the state road system, originally called Legislative Route 2. In 1910, the Town of Hillsborough incorporated, distinguishing its rural, bucolic atmosphere from the developing city life in Burlingame. As streets and sidewalks were paved in Burlingame, resolutions were passed allocating funds for the planting and care of street trees.

By 1912, the paving of El Camino Real through the San Francisco Peninsula had begun. The American Automobile Association (AAA) published its first strip maps of the route from San Diego to San Francisco. The highway section through Burlingame, unique in the state because of the Tree Rows, would rapidly become a renowned motorist destination (See Figure 2). The following year, a prominent architect was commissioned by Burlingame leaders to create massive ornamental stone pillars at both ends of El Camino Real in Burlingame indicating the city limits while highlighting the area within which speeds would be reduced, and the leisurely traveler would be enveloped by the tunnel of mature trees (See Figure 3). Photos from this era reveal that the eucalyptus trees were already becoming the visually dominant species on the highway, having grown much faster than the elms and displaying extraordinary height and girth.

Pressures from property owners along the highway, the growing demand for easily accessible commercial services, coupled with the proliferation of the automobile, resulted in increasing pressure to develop and widen the highway. The City of San Mateo succumbed to these pressures and removed the majority of its Tree Rows. In Burlingame, however, efforts to institute tree removal policies continued to be met with political resistance. In 1923, the City Trustees and Parks Commissioners framed an ordinance imposing substantial penalties for cutting trees without a permit.<sup>[25]</sup> Later that year, perceived favoritism by the Trustees towards certain business projects prompted citizens to vote for an ordinance permitting the extension of the Burlingame Avenue and Broadway business districts, limited to a defined area.<sup>[26]</sup> Elsewhere the city was to remain strictly residential, including along El Camino Real.

<sup>23</sup> Beverly Evans, "Historical Background," *Burlingame Lively Memories* (Burlingame, California: Burlingame Historical Society, 1977), p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> City and Town of Burlingame (California), Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees, Meeting of 4 February 1909.

<sup>25</sup> City of Burlingame (California), Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees, Meeting of 5 March 1923.

<sup>26</sup> "Ballot Battle is in Progress," *Burlingame Advance*, 12 September 1923.

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### **Developmental history/additional historic context information (cont.)**

By the 1926 election, however, there was renewed pressure to develop the highway. Just days before the election, the *Burlingame Advance Star* reminded the citizenry of the uniqueness of the highway through Burlingame:

“The State of California, famed throughout the world for the beauty of its vistas, has no more inspiring portion of highway than Burlingame’s grand boulevard...After the sordid miles of soft drink shanties and barbecue stands, this portion of the highway suddenly comes to view as an avenue into paradise.”<sup>[27]</sup>

So proud was the community of the El Camino trees that there was even a proposal by some in the Chamber of Commerce to install bright lights to advertise the section of roadway through Burlingame.

“I cannot imagine anything more out of place,” wrote a resident, “than a glare of lights that would entirely kill the beautiful arch of trees that can be seen now, especially on a moonlit night.”<sup>[28]</sup>

Keenly aware of the importance of Burlingame’s leafy image, one community group appealed to the City Trustees, encouraging each property owner to plant at least one tree in his yard:

“The preservation of the suburban atmosphere, which is one of Burlingame’s most delightful assets, will be heightened and preserved by this work.”<sup>[29]</sup>

Charles A. Buck, President of the Chamber of Commerce and outspoken proponent of zoning that would keep commercial enterprises off the highway, was elected Trustee in 1926, though the zoning issue itself would remain unresolved for four more years.

In a 1928 newspaper article, John McLaren urged the citizens of Burlingame to resist the newest plan to remove the trees on El Camino Real, and to continue to plant trees on the city streets.<sup>[30]</sup>

In the key 1930 election, candidates for the City Trustees who wanted to turn El Camino Real into a commercial strip were soundly defeated, ending nearly a decade of zoning debates (See Figures 4 and 5). Zoning regulations in place since 1930 regulate development of El Camino Real almost exclusively to residential construction, which has limited commercial development to the areas along the east side between Howard Avenue and Chapin Avenue and at the Broadway intersection. Projects in these areas require strict oversight of the City, including plantings consistent with Burlingame’s Urban Forest Management Plan.

By the 1960s Dutch Elm Disease (DED) had begun its spread throughout the area, devastating elm trees on El Camino Real, the effect of which is still in evidence today. The eucalyptus endured, however, maintaining the framework of McLaren’s design.

<sup>27</sup> “Save the Highway Trees,” *Burlingame Advance Star*, 9 April 1926.

<sup>28</sup> “The Letter Box: Wants to Preserve Highway Beauty,” *Burlingame Advance Star*, 9 April 1926

<sup>29</sup> North Burlingame (California) Community Club, Club Scrapbook, “Civic Section of North Burlingame Community Club Plan Program.” *Burlingame Advance Star*, c. 1927.

<sup>30</sup> “John McLaren Tells of How City Appeared Without Trees,” *Burlingame Advance Star*, 19 March 1928.

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### **Developmental history/additional historic context information (cont.)**

The long history of preservation activism on behalf of the Tree Rows on El Camino Real in Burlingame culminated in a Heritage Tree ordinance for the City in 1975. The trees on El Camino Real were designated as a “Heritage Grove” in that year; the designation cited the trees’ historic significance, their character, beauty, and rarity, and that they had been designated a “Point of Historic Significance” by the San Mateo Historic Sites Committee.<sup>31</sup> The 1975 designation applied only to the Tree Rows within Burlingame and not the short section adjoining Hillsborough.

Beginning in 2003, representatives from Caltrans District 4, the City of Burlingame Parks Department, and the Burlingame Historical Society met to discuss ways in which future eucalyptus and elm removals could be mitigated in a sensitive manner, using historically accurate elm varieties. The timing was serendipitous; just a decade or two before, selection of disease-tolerant elms for such an ambitious project would have been a challenge. By the mid-2000s, however, there were nearly a dozen promising elm hybrids being studied by experts for use in similar projects all over the United States. Locally, this ongoing process will ultimately reinvigorate McLaren’s original vision over the next several decades as the heritage eucalyptus and elms gradually reach the end of their lifespan.

<sup>31</sup> Burlingame City Council, *Heritage Grove Designation* (Burlingame, California: 4 November 1975)

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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: Caltrans
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Linear 2.2 miles  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>10</u>	<u>558 112mE</u>	<u>N4158 635mN</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>555 020mE</u>	<u>4160 420mN</u>
	Zone	Easting:	Northing:	Zone	Easting:	Northing:
2	<u>10</u>	<u>557 120mE</u>	<u>4158 930</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting:	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing

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

- 1) Intersection El Camino Real and Peninsula Avenue
- 2) Change of direction between intersections of Bellevue at ECR (El Camino Real) and Floribunda Avenue at ECR
- 3) Intersection of El Camino Real with Rosedale Avenue and Ray Drive

**Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows**

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

The boundaries of the nomination reflect the original scope of McLaren’s plantings through Burlingame with the omission of the former Mills Estate area at the northern end of the City. Widespread development of the area during the 1950s involved substantial widening of El Camino Real and resulted in the destruction of many of the historic trees. The northern end of the resource thus ends where Rosedale Avenue and Ray Drive intersect El Camino Real, approximately one mile south of the original McLaren boundary. These boundaries have been designated on the Continuation Sheets of the Primary Record (Caltrans 2008).

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(cont.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jennifer Pfaff, President  
organization Burlingame Historical Society date July 31, 2011  
street & number PO Box 144 telephone 650-348-7961 650-340-9960  
city or town Burlingame state CA zip code 94011  
e-mail jjpgf@pacbell.net (residence only)

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location. **(X)**  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map. **(X)**
- **Continuation Sheets: Vintage photos attached (X)**  
Vintage photographs have been digitally scanned and are shown on the Continuation Sheets.

**Photographs:**

-Current photos of the resource (enclosed) have been taken using a conventional camera with black and white film. They have been keyed to enclosed sketch map.

Name of Property: Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows

City or Vicinity: El Camino Real, Burlingame (*#5 includes segment of Town of Hillsborough on right*)

County: San Mateo State: California

Photographer (of current photographs): Mary Packard

Date Photographed: July 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 6: El Camino Real between Ray Drive and Adeline Drive looking south.
- 2 of 6: El Camino Real between Lincoln Avenue and Easton Drive looking north.
- 3 of 6: El Camino Real between Broadway and Carmelita Avenue looking south.
- 4 of 6: El Camino Real at Fairfield Road looking north.
- 5 of 6: El Camino Real just south of Floribunda Avenue looking south. (*Includes segment of Hillsborough.*)
- 6 of 6: El Camino Real at Burlingame Avenue looking south.

Howard-Ralston Eucalyptus Tree Rows  
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---

**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

---

name California Department of Transportation *(District 4 contact: Beth Krase Greene)*  
street & number 1120 'N' Street telephone 916-653-7136 / (510-286-5612)  
city or town Sacramento state CA zip code 95814

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications 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.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of