

Violet Ray Gasoline Station
799 Alma Street
Palo Alto
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2069

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20043

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS NO. CA-2069

VIOLET RAY GASOLINE STATION

Location: 799 Alma Street (at the corner of Homer Avenue),
Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, California.

USGS Palo Alto Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 10.574360.4143960.

Present Owner: Dee Hileman.

Present Occupant: The two service buildings are used by Hileman's
Automotive Service. They rent the former gas
station to the Kwik Key Lock and Safe Company.

Present Use: The two service buildings are used for automobile
repair and the former gas station is rented by a
locksmith.

Significance: This 1929 service station complex in Palo Alto is
representative of the Spanish Colonial Revival
commercial style, which has been popular in
California and is rapidly disappearing. The Violet
Ray service station consists of the gas station and
two automotive service buildings with its white
stucco buildings and red-tiled roofs of low pitch.
Automotive repairs are still done in the service
buildings. The gas station has been recycled as a
commercial space.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1929. A Notice of Completion was filed by the General Petroleum Corporation on December 2, 1929, stating that the contractor Lindgren & Swinerton had completed the work on December 2, 1929, based on a contract signed October 28, 1929, of a super service station at Alma Street and Homer Avenue. The contractor was responsible for the construction of the three buildings, being a gas station and two service buildings. The contractor also installed all the equipment, plumbing and did the grading. (Book 492, page 328, December 2, 1929.)
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: "A certain lot, piece, or parcel commencing at the intersection of Homer Avenue and Alma Street and measuring 105' x 100'. Portion of Lot 2."

Book 447, page 397. January 31, 1929.

Grantor: Victor Hoelscher, et al.

William Hoelscher and Mispah, his wife, Grant and Charlotte Herscher.

Grantee: General Petroleum Corporation.

"Grant all real property." No price or terms stipulated.

A search of the deed books could not locate to whom General Petroleum leased said property in the 1930s until it was sold to the present owner, Dee Hileman. Hileman stated that he leased the service buildings from General Petroleum in 1940 and bought the property in 1945.

Book 1249, page 248. February 29, 1945.

Grantor: General Petroleum Corporation.

Grantee: Dee G. and Ida E. Hileman

No terms of the sale were included in the deed.

Hileman bought the entire service station complex from Socony Mobil. The terms of the sale were \$20,000 paid over a ten year period with no interest. Note: Socony Mobile acquired General Petroleum Corporation of California in 1926. General Petroleum was operated as a subsidiary until 1960, when it was merged into Mobile (Socony was dropped from the corporate title in 1955). It appears that General Petroleum and Mobile were used interchangeably.

4. Builder, contractor: Lindgren & Swinerton, Contractor, 225 Bush Street, San Francisco, California.
5. Notes on original plan: General Petroleum Corporation leased the gas station complex to A. M. Pringle. The advertisement upon the opening of the Pringle Service Station shows a picture of the whole service station complex. "General 'Violet Ray' Gasoline is dispensed through four of the latest model Martin & Schwartz dial pumps." To the left side of the gas station is a service building which originally had the tire and automotive products show room and two hydraulic lifts and a grease pit. The men's room and dressing room were also in this wing. To the right rear of the gas station is another service building which contained the office, ladies' room and repair bays. Cars entered the repair shop from a door on the west side of the building.
6. Alterations and additions: Hileman, when he bought the gas station complex in 1945, made the following changes: Access to the right rear repair shop was from a single entrance door inconveniently placed. To more effectively utilize this space, three repair bays with overhead doors were created. The ladies' room was removed. On the exterior of the building, the rounded arch door and adjacent two windows were removed. The other service building on the left rear side has been altered very little. The former tire and automotive products show room is now used for storage and has fake wood paneling. The gas pumps were changed several times and were finally removed in 1973, when the gas station closed. The gas station has not been much changed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

A. M. Pringle's Advertisement "Announcing Opening . . . Pringle Service Station," (Palo Alto Times, January 11, 1930), assured motorists "courteous and efficient service." (Ibid.) After a succession of leases of the gas station and the service buildings, General Petroleum leased the repair buildings in 1940 to Dee Hileman for his automotive repair shop. His son, Dee, is presently carrying on the family business, which is celebrating its fiftieth year of operation in 1979. Hileman, Sr. bought the whole complex in 1945. Joe Reems rented the gas station from 1945 for 27 years and was a Mobil dealer. In 1974 and 1975 the former gas station was rented to Melody Radio. Since then, the Kwik Key Lock and Safe Company have been Hileman's tenants.

Interesting features of the gas station complex are the illuminated convex glass gable **occuli** reading, "Mobilgas Special," each with a picture of the Flying Red Horse. Surrounded by Spanish Baroque frames, there are two of these medallions in the gas station, one in right rear building (broken) and one in left rear building.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Palo Alto, City of, Building Permits Records, 250 Hamilton, Palo Alto, California.

Santa Clara County Recorders Books, 70 West Hedding Street, San Jose, California.

b. Published sources:

Sanborn Maps, 1925 updated to 1959. Sanborn Publishing Co., New York, N. Y. Located at the San Jose Historical Museum, 635 Phelan Avenue, San Jose, California.

c. Newspapers:

Palo Alto Times, January 11, 1930. (Advertisement-announcing the opening of the gas station), no page.

Palo Alto Times. April 10, 1945. Mobilgas advertisement.

d. Interviews:

Mr. Dee Hileman, Sr. and Dee Hileman (son), who have operated or owned the service station since 1940. July 1979.

2. Likely sources not investigated: It might be interesting to see if Mobile has maintained any records on this gas station.

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff
Supervisor
Santa Clara County
Historic American
Buildings Survey
July 1979.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a good example of the early twentieth century automotive servicing industry. The relatively unaltered buildings and original logos are of added significance.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: There are three buildings in this service station complex, all of them sitting on a nearly square lot. The gas station measures approximately 17' x 17', the porte cochères of the structure extends out some 12 feet from the building. The north service building or garage measures approximately 20'-6" x 79'-6". The east service building measures approximately 25'-0" x 61'-0". The buildings are all one-story and have irregular bay systems. The two garages are rectangular and the gas station is L-shaped.
2. Foundations: The structures are founded on concrete slab-on-grade foundations.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are stuccoed and painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: The walls are load bearing masonry units of honeycomb tiles, a wall system popular when this building was built. There are wooden rafters and columns, as well as large wooden beams supporting the porte cochère of the gas station. The roofs of the garages are formed by wooden rafters and elementary wooden trusses. Some walls are formed from poured concrete.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: There are concrete slabs with rounded corners beneath the porte cochère where the gas pumps once stood.
6. Chimneys: There are no chimneys in these buildings.

7. Openings:

a. Windows and shutters:

Gas station: There are two metal sliding doors in the gas station, with four lights in them separated by metal muntins. The doors are in the west and south walls of the gas station, are identical, and face the major streets at the intersection. Two windows flank each of the doors. The windows are metal frame industrial windows of twelve lights. The top three and the bottom three lights are fixed in the frame, and the center six lights operate as an awning window. The window in the northeast wall is a metal frame window of twenty lights. There is a doorway at the north end of this structure, since the building has been chamfered at this corner. The door is a modern hollow core wooden door. The window in the northeast wall of the gas station has been closed in with plywood.

Northwest Repair Building: The northwest wall of this building has no openings. The southwest wall has two identical windows of six lights each. Three small fixed lights are over three long rectangular lights in each of the windows. All the sills, heads and jambs are wood, and all panes are fixed. In the southeast side of a modern hollow core door with one light in it. One square headed garage door in that wall has a rolling door of wood and fifteen panels. There are three large arcaded openings, each a garage entrance, all with wooden rolling doors having fifteen panels each. The door to the bathroom in this wall is a modern hollow core wooden door, and immediately to the right of this door is a metal framed window, fixed in the wall, having three panes of frosted glass. In the northeast wall of the northwest repair building, there is another hollow core wooden door and a metal frame window of six frosted panes fixed in the wall.

Northeast Repair Building: In the northwest wall of this building, there is a large rolling metal door. On the southwest wall, in a large square-headed opening, there is a rolling metal door. The largest opening in this wall is the next garage door opening which has a rolling door of fifty panels. The lowest two rows each contain ten panels. The next two rows are fixed glass windows the same size as the lower wood-filled panels. There are ten panels over the windows. All panels are wood, but hinges, springs and movement apparatus are metal. The entrance to the northeast building is a modern hollow core wooden door. The window in that wall is a window of six fixed lights. Three small rectangular panes sit over three vertical rectangular panes in a frame that has wooden sills, heads and jambs. The southeast wall has two windows identical to the one just described. At the northeast wall of this building are two fixed metal frame windows, each with twenty lights, the central six of which operate as an awning window.

8. Roof shape and covering:

Gas station: The gas station has an L-shaped roof formed by the intersection of two gables at 90°. The north corner of the building is chamfered. A small apron roof joins the two porte cochere wings. All of the roofs are tiled.

Northwest Repair Building: The repair shop has a flat built-up roof with a decorative edging of two tile courses in hip-roof like arrangement around the parapet. The motor-parts display room in that building has a gable roof with a small intersecting gable between the display room and the main garage. All these roofs are tiled. The bathroom section of this building has both a shed roof section that is tiled and a flat built-up roof.

Northeast Repair Building: The northeast repair building has a flat built-up roof, except for a decorative shed roof section which is tiled and a small gable portion at its southern end. The shed roof and the gabled roof are tiled.

9. Cornices, eaves: The decorative rafters from both the shed and gabled roof sections extend beyond the stuccoed walls. They have a delicate curve at their bottoms and are painted dark brown. The sheathing is revealed above the rafters.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Gas station: The gas station is a one-room building that is entered from doors in the southeast and southwest walls and from a door in the north wall.

Northwest repair building: One room in this building is entered from a door on the southeast elevation or from a garage door. Two garage bays are entered from the southeast wall. One garage bay is separated from the others by a corrugated metal wall entered from an arched opening on the southeast wall. The employee bathroom is entered from a door on the southeast wall and the public bathroom is entered from a door on the northeast wall.

Northeast repair building: The northeast repair building is one large room with a small office partition set up inside. The building can be entered by any of the three garage doors or one regular door.

2. Stairways: None.

3. Flooring: Most floors are concrete, highly polished. The motor parts display room has a vinyl tile floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The structural honeycomb tile block wall is revealed on the inside of all structures. The wooden rafters, trusses, and sheathing of the roof are seen from the inside.

D. Site:

Located in an industrial neighborhood, the site is very close to downtown Palo Alto's major commercial street. Across the street from the station is the main line of the Southern Pacific railroad.

Prepared by David Schaaf
Architect
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1979.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1979 summer project, the last of a three-year recording project in Santa Clara County, was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect; and Sibyl McCormac Groff, Project Supervisor (Columbia University); with David Schaaf, Architectural Foreman (Carnegie Mellon University); Jan Cigliano (Oberlin College); and student architects William Coppa (University of Virginia), Jon Lourie (University of Maryland), Anne Munly (Princeton University), John Murphy (Texas Tech University), and Matthew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic University), at the HABS Field Office in Santa Clara, California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington Office in the summer of 1979 by architect David Schaaf. The historical and architectural data were edited by Jan Cigliano and Denys Peter Myers, architectural historians on the HABS staff in 1979 and 1981. Photographs were taken by photographer Jane Lidz in the summer of 1980.