

Butt Valley Dam, Gate Tender's House
(Ben Goon House) (PG&E Building No. 3869)
Butt Valley Reservoir Road
Caribou Vicinity
Plumas County
California

HAER NO. CA-189-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

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**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
BUTT VALLEY DAM, GATE TENDER'S HOUSE
(Ben Goon House, PG&E Building 3869)
HAER No. CA-189-A**

Location: Butt Valley Dam
Butt Valley Reservoir Road
Caribou vicinity
Plumas County, California

U.S.G.S.: Caribou, 7.5' Topographic Quadrangle, 1979
UTM Coordinates: Zone 10 657980 E, 4441890 N

Date of Construction: 1922-23

Builder: Great Western Power Company (GWP)

Present Owner And Occupant: Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)
77 Beale Street
San Francisco, California 94106

Present Use: Dam Residence

Significance: Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House was built by GPW for the use of its employees. The house's most noteworthy resident was Ben Goon, a long-time GPW employee and well-respected gate tender and patrolman of the Butt Valley-to-Caribou Powerhouse flume. Although built in a simple folk style, the house represents a rapidly disappearing architectural type associated with the 1900s hydroelectric development and is one of the few extant gate tender's houses built at the inception of the Almanor/Caribou power system.

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Date: November 1997

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I. DESCRIPTION

Located in Plumas County, California, the Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House is situated on a rise above the dam, overlooking the southwest edge of Butt Lake. The house has a north-facing primary facade, is set on a gentle slope set amongst large pine trees and has attractive views of Butt Lake. The house is part of a small residential complex that also includes a shed and a barn (see HAER No. CA-189 photographs for views to and from the Gate Tender's House).

The house was erected by GPW in 1922-23 using construction methods and materials that were typical of the period. The house is a two-story, rectangular, wood-shingle-sided building with a pyramidal, hipped roof that has enclosed eaves and is surfaced with corrugated metal sheets. Originally, a metal stovepipe protruded from the south (rear) surface of the roof. This pipe was removed when the kitchen was remodeled. An existing stove pipe protrudes from the east surface of the roof and vents a wood stove added in the 1980s. The building is covered with random-coursed wood shingles. Windows and doors are symmetrically placed on the north (front) facade. Having been built on a slight slope, the house is elevated above grade to the north on square concrete piers to create a level base for the first floor.

This building has been well cared for over its life and is in good condition, especially considering the severe winter conditions that exist in this portion of Plumas County. There have been some additions and changes to modernize the interior and exterior of the building over the years. Some of these changes have modified the historic fabric of the building. In general, though, the building mass is intact.

The area immediately behind (or west of) the house is landscaped. A patio area of slate slabs extends east from a wooden walkway that connects the house with an associated shed (see HAER No. CA-189-C for written documentation and photographs of the shed) (CA-189-A-7, CA-189-A-10). The south side of the patio has domestic vegetation, including shrubs, irises, daffodils, tulips and a rose bush. Stone steps cut into the slope lead south from the house toward an associated barn (see HAER No. CA-189-B for written documentation and photographs of the barn). The area to the front (north), east and west sides of the house is cleared of brush and includes tall conifers.

II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House, despite mostly cosmetic and utilitarian modifications made throughout its lifetime, retains the original form, design and materials of its 1922-23 construction by GWP. The house has a rectangular, central hall plan and is about 30 feet long from north to south and is approximately 30 feet long from east to west, not including the porches. The front upper- and lower-story porches extend out about five feet from the north wall of the house and the rear porch extends out about five feet from the south wall of the house. The

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house is two stories high and its total height from first floor level to rooftop is an estimated 30 feet (CA-189-A-1).

The house's structural support system is provided by a concrete pier foundation which carries a two-story balloon frame of mainly wood studs and joists, which, in turn, supports a common hip roof structure of wood rafters. At one time the roof framework suffered from a fire. As a result, sister joists have been attached to the original roof joists and new internal cross-bracing, made of two-inch by six-inch boards, has been installed.

Since the house is placed on a slight slope, it is built on concrete piers of varied height to create a level base for the first floor. This foundation structure is obstructed from view by wood frame walls constructed around the perimeter of the resulting crawlspace area. These walls are clad with random-coursed wood shingles that cover the original exterior shiplap siding (CA-189-A-2). The crawlspace area varies from three to six feet in height and has an earthen floor. It is accessed by a small wooden door/doorway at the east side of the house. There is a small interior room in this area that is framed in wood, covered with wide wood boards, and contains an icebox that is about three-foot-square and surfaced with horizontal board siding. This room was probably used for cold storage (CA-189-A-18).

The exterior walls of the house above the foundation are of wood frame construction with one-inch-thick by eight and one-half-inch-wide shiplap siding covered on the exterior by random-coursed wood shingles, the same surfacing as on the basement/crawlspace area. The date that the exterior surface was altered is unknown.

The north (front) facade has two levels of full-width covered porch (CA-189-A-1). The first story porch has tongue-and-groove board flooring and is entered from ground level by a centrally-placed stairway that includes five wooden stairs and two lower concrete stairs. This lower porch is covered by the floor of the second story porch which is surfaced beneath with tongue-and-groove boards and is supported by six equally spaced, square wood columns. Simple wood railings with cross-bracing extend along the north (except for the central bay), east and west sides of the porch. This porch allows access to and from the centrally-placed main entry door/doorway to the house (CA-189-A-6).

The second story porch at the north (front) facade has shiplap board flooring and is entered through the centrally-placed, second floor door/doorway. This upper porch is covered by an extension of the main hipped roof and is supported by six evenly-spaced, square wood columns which align with the columns of the first floor porch area below. Simple wood railings with vertical board infill panels extend along the north, east and west sides of the second story porch. It is possible that the railings were originally cross-braced just as they are at the first story (CA-189-A-8).

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The south (rear) side of the house has a single story full-width porch, which is covered by a hip-style roof supported by six equally-spaced square wood columns (CA-189-A-3). Flooring consists of wood boards. Simple wood railings with cross-bracing extend along the porch's east side as well as the four easternmost bays of the south side. This rear porch is accessed by a small wood ramp at the west side and a wood walkway to the south of the westernmost bay (CA-189-A-7).

All extant paneled doors and 2-over-2 single hung windows are original to the building. The windows, according to archival information, were salvaged from the old Miller Hotel which was constructed in the 1860s and purposely burned down before the reservoir was raised in 1923.

The main entry door to the house is located at the first story of the north (front) facade. It is centrally-placed and is entered off of the first story front porch (CA-189-A-1). The door is wood with two vertical panels topped by one cross panel at its lower half and single-light glazing with molded sill at its upper half. A second story door is also located on the north (front) facade. This door provides access to the second story of the front porch (CA-189-A-1). It is also centrally-placed and is of the same type as the first story door described above (CA-189-A-14). Both doors at the north (front) facade are fronted by screen doors with wood rails and stiles (CA-189-A-6, CA-189-A-8).

The north (front) facade has a total of six windows that are symmetrically placed (CA-189-A-1). At the first story a set of two 2-over-2 single hung windows with decorative molded-wood surrounds and sills is located to each side of the entry door. The glass is distorted and wavy, and the wood muntins are thin and molded. Combined window height is 68 inches. These windows apparently were salvaged from the ca. 1860 Butt Valley Hotel for reuse on this house. At the second story are two 2-over-2 single hung windows of the same type as the first floor windows described above. One first story and one second story window are fronted by screens.

The south (rear) side of the house has two doors that are entered off of the single-story porch at this side. The westernmost door accesses the laundry room. It is a wood door with five cross panels (CA-189-A-7). To the east of this door is another door which accesses the kitchen. This door itself is a newer plywood door and lacks decorative elements (CA-189-A-3, CA-189-A-7). This side of the house has four windows (CA-189-A-3). A modern sliding window with aluminum sash is located at the central portion of the first story. The second story has a 2-over-2 single hung window identical to the north (front) facade windows at each end and a small modern sliding window with aluminum sash that airs the bathroom.

The west side of the house consists of five windows – three at the first story and two at the second story (CA-189-A-4). The first story has two 2-over-2 single hung windows, identical to the north (front) facade windows, which are located at the east side's northern half (CA-189-A-5). The southern half of the first story contains one sliding window with wood sash and decorative wood surround, sill and muntins. The two windows at the second story are symmetrically placed, are identical to those at the north (front) facade, and are each fronted with a screen.

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The east side of the house consists of six windows, four at the first story and two at the second story (CA-189-A-2). The first story has two 2-over-2 single hung windows (identical to the north facade windows) which are located at the west side's northern half. The southern half of the first story contains one small, square single pane window that provides light to the north pantry and one 2-over-2 single hung window (identical to the north facade windows) located at the southern end which provide light to the south pantry. The two windows at the second story are symmetrically placed, are identical to those at the north facade, and are each fronted with a screen.

The main roof, as well as the roofs extending over the north and south side porches, are hipped in form, are surfaced with corrugated metal sheets, and have enclosed eaves (CA-189-A-1, CA-189-A-3, CA-189-A-4). An original metal stovepipe that protruded from the south (rear) surface of the main roof has been removed. The existing stovepipe protrudes from the east surface of the roof (CA-189-A-2).

The house's interior is based on a central hall plan (see attached first floor and second floor plan of the Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House). The first floor plan is designed around a central entry hall which is entered from the north (front) covered porch (CA-189-A-12). A stairway leading to the second floor is located in the entry hall.

There are three main first floor rooms accessed from the entry hall; an approximately 12-foot by 17-foot living room to the west (CA-189-A-10), the approximately 12-foot by 17-foot dining room to the east, and the approximately 13-foot by 16-foot kitchen to the south (CA-189-A-13). Two additional areas are accessed from the kitchen area; the approximately eight and one-half-foot by 13.5-foot laundry room is to the west and north and south pantry areas are the east of the kitchen and together encompass an eight and one-half-foot by 13.5-foot space (CA-189-A-14). Built-in shelving units, counter-tops, drawers, hinged storage bins, and cabinets in the pantry areas appear to be part of the house's original construction (CA-189-A-14).

The wooden, newelled staircase is located to the west side of the main entrance hall and leads up to the second floor (CA-189-A-12, CA-189-A-16). It has six-inch-square newel posts with decorative caps and simple handrails and balustrade. There are sixteen steps. Both treads and risers are stained wood. A wood gate has been installed at the top of the stairs.

The second floor is accessed by the stairway that leads up from the first floor entry hall to the second floor central corridor (CA-189-A-16). The second floor consists of four bedrooms, each about 13 feet by 11 feet and a nine and one-half-foot by seven and one-half-foot bathroom, all accessed by the central corridor (CA-189-A-17).

The attic is full-sized and is accessed by a trap door in the middle of the hall ceiling at the top of the second story stairs. The attic has baseboards similar to those downstairs but is otherwise unfinished.

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All first floor rooms retain their original hardwood flooring and some wood thresholds, or saddles, remain. The northern pantry area hardwood floor has been covered with red patterned linoleum. All second floor rooms retain their original hardwood flooring and also have wood thresholds, or saddles. The bathroom floor has been covered in nine-inch-square asphalt tile with a brown and cream marbled pattern.

All original interior walls and ceilings are lathe and plaster. The laundry room walls appear to be gypsum board with a thin coat of plaster. The original lathe and plaster ceiling in the kitchen has been covered with gypsum board (or sheet rock.) Some areas of the kitchen ceiling are water damaged from the bathroom above (CA-189-A-10). The bathroom has also been sheet-rocked.

The doors leading into the living and dining rooms from the entry hall are wood with four vertical rectangular panels and have black glazed ceramic doorknobs (CA-189-A-12). Wood thresholds, two-and-one-half-inches-wide, are present. A small closet, accessed from the first floor entrance hall and located under the stairs, has a small four-panel wood door with a brass knob. The kitchen is separated from both the entry hall and the pantry area by a wood door with five cross panels and a brass knob (CA-189-A-13). The second floor bedrooms are entered through wood doors with four vertical panels, black-glazed ceramic knobs and "Corbin" brand lock boxes. Each room has a closet. All closet doors are wood with five cross panels and have ceramic knobs (CA-189-A-17).

Interior trims include baseboards and door and window surrounds which are all very simple and relatively undecorated (CA-189-A-15). The newel posts of the main stairway are plain six-inch-square posts with simple decorated caps (CA-189-A-12, CA-189-A-16).

There is very little hardware of unusual character in this building. Door hardware, including glazed ceramic doorknobs, brass doorknobs, lock boxes and hinges, are probably original to the house. In the north pantry the cabinet and storage bin hinges, as well as at least one storage bin metal handle are likely original. Many of the original handles and knobs related to the north pantry built-in furniture have been removed and in some cases replaced (CA-189-A-14). The kitchen appears to have been remodeled around the 1970s and has built-in cabinets with hardware of that era (CA-189-A-13). The same is true of the bathroom. There is a modern medicine cabinet with glass inset in the bathroom.

The original mechanical systems consisted of heating and natural ventilation only. An original stove/stovepipe that had been located at the southern portion of the house was removed by 1982. The dining room has a wood stove that is set on a flagstone hearth. This stove was installed in 1982 and required altering the ceiling to allow for the stovepipe to extend to the roof. The stove is embossed on the front with "PG&E" and "Sweet Home Stove Works" on a plaque depicting pine trees and mountains. Natural ventilation, through the use of operable windows, is the only existing means of cooling the building.

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This house was designed to make use of an abundance of natural light. The large number and size of the original windows is evidence of this. The house's original knob and tube electrical wiring was partially replaced with modern conduit wiring. Original porcelain electrical sockets as well as modern electrical outlets exist in several areas of the house. A wood box which has a wood, cabinet-like door and contains electrical fuses and switches is attached to the east end of the second story north (front) facade wall (CA-189-A-9). There is a sub-panel on the interior basement wall. This panel is lined with sheet metal and has copper circuit breakers with 60 amp tubular fuses.

There are many types of lighting fixtures represented in this house. The living room has a ceiling light fixture. It is probably 1980s vintage and consists of a white milk glass globe over a chrome circular fixture (CA-189-A-11). In the first floor entry hall there is another ceiling light fixture that is a modern globe with a chrome fixture. The kitchen is lit by two 1970s-vintage ceiling light fixtures with glass globes and chrome plates (CA-189-A-13). The north pantry has an old brass circular light fixture which includes a brown knob that reads "PERKINS" over a little shield. The south pantry and laundry room each have single, ceiling-mounted porcelain light sockets.

Plumbing features at the first floor include a "WESIX" brand electric water heater in the south pantry area, a porcelain sink with fixtures in the kitchen, and a soapstone double sink with cast iron legs and cast iron plumbing fixtures with PVC replacements in the laundry room. The second floor bathroom consists of a flush wall-mounted cast iron sink with porcelain cover and new fixtures beneath, a modern bathtub, and an "American Standard" toilet. The only fixture remaining in the kitchen is the porcelain sink which is set into a new linoleum countertop (CA-189-A-13).

III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Butt Valley Gate Tender's House, built circa 1922-23, was constructed as a result of events related to the development of hydroelectric power in the valley (see HAER No. CA-189 for contextual history of the hydroelectric system and Butt Valley Dam). In 1902, the WPC began developing a hydroelectric system on the north fork of the Feather River in Plumas County, California. The original system was designed to create two reservoirs; Lake Almanor and Butt Lake. Together they would provide a year-round water supply to power plants on the Feather River. After some initial construction, work was stalled until WPC was reincorporated in 1906 as the GWP (WPC 1902:n.p.; Wickman 1972:30).

As the demand for electricity surged during the 1910s, GWP made plans to expand their power generation capacities. They built a small dam and power plant at Butt Valley to generate power for the hydraulic sluicing used to create Almanor Dam. Water from Lake Almanor was fed by tunnel to Butt Valley to the southwest. By 1911, GWP had nearly 100 men working in the valley, 30 of whom had their families in residence there (Wickman 1972:30).

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The GWP used the Butt Valley Hotel for their headquarters during dam construction and subsequent dam operation. The hotel became part of a town site known as Camp 5, which catered largely to GWP and also included a barn for workhorses, a hospital, a schoolhouse and a series of cottages. The old, two-story hotel was built by William and Lena Miller during the 1860s and was operated by the family until Lena sold their ranch to WPC in 1902. The hotel was used for many years to house some of GWP's employees, as well as construction firms they hired. By 1917, for example, GWP gate tender and flume patrolman Ben Goon (sometimes spelled Gung) and his family lived there (Kramar 1963:11-12, 19; Quadrio 1996).

The demand for electricity continued to grow during the 1910s. The firm of Stone and Webster was hired from 1919 to 1921 to build the Caribou Powerhouse downstream from Lake Almanor and to improve the Butt Lake storage capacity and dam. Further improvements to the dam in 1923 would eventually raise the reservoir to a level that covered the site of Butt Valley, also known as Camp 5, including the old Miller Hotel where Goon resided (Mardel 1933:n.p.; Quadrio 1996; Shoup and Cornford 1987:15, 17).

In 1923, the GWP hired Neils Schultz of the Schultz Construction Company of San Francisco to raise Butt Valley Dam to ensure a continued supply of water to Caribou. Many families left the valley with these improvements. Cottages, barns, the local school and the Butt Valley Hotel were salvaged and burned. Windows and hardware removed from the hotel were used in constructing a new two-story caretaker's, or gate tender's, house at Butt Valley. A barn was also moved near the new house from the area to be covered by the rising reservoir. Ben Goon and his family moved into the new house (Kramar 1963:19; Quadrio 1996).

Ben Goon was a local Chinese man who had long tended cattle in the valley. Goon married a local half-Indian woman and together they raised their four children, Chester, Tillie, Eleanor and Mamie, in Butt Valley (Siler 1996). Goon's early careers in Plumas County included dishwasher, farmhand, cowboy and storekeeper before he entered the electric industry (WPC) between 1901 and 1903 (The Plumas County Historical Society 1981:35; Siler 1996). After Goon began working for the WPC the Goons lived in the Butt Valley Hotel and housed summer tourists that came to fish in the valley. His daughters prepared and served food to their guests (Siler 1996).

Ben was somewhat of a local legend amongst the residents and power company employees in the Butt Valley and Lake Almanor area. His work for the power company (after it became Great Western Power Company) included help in the construction of the Butt Creek Powerhouse and, afterwards, patrolling the flume that carried water to the Butt Creek Plant. He also helped build the Butt Valley Dam from 1919-21 and a few years later helped in enlarging the dam. After the dam was enlarged, Ben was granted residence at the new caretaker's house and was given his full-time post as gate tender and patrolman of the flume bringing water into and out of Butt Valley Lake (The Plumas County Historical Society 1981:35-36).

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Ben earned a reputation for hard work and daring. His job as gate tender required him to walk the old Caribou mining flume that perilously clung to the Feather River canyon walls as it carried water from Butt Valley Lake to the Caribou Powerhouse. A fellow worker reported:

He was quite a guy. He'd do anything and, boy, the chances he used to take on that flume! We'd call him up in the middle of the night, a terrific storm going on. Ben would get up and walk down that flume under those bluffs with those boulders hanging over, any time of the night. Come down there and find out where the boulder had gone through one side of the flume, or something, and he'd get his gang and start to work regardless. He was sure a trusty old guy (The Plumas County Historical Society 1981:35).

Ben reportedly died at the house on November 25, 1932 (The Plumas County Historical Society 1981:35). However, his grandnephew reports that Goon lived at the nearby PG&E maintenance camp with his daughter, Tillie, and son-in-law, Frank Siler, during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Another daughter of Goon, Mamie, and her husband, Bob Ross, lived at the caretaker's house from 1936 through at least 1938 while Ross worked at the Caribou power plant in the canyon below (Siler 1996).

During the 1930s, and probably long before and after, the caretaker's house was a refuge for line inspectors who skied the power line rights-of-way checking for problems. These men would come to the house during winter storms to have a meal or spend the night. Some employees who worked at the Caribou power plant also stayed at the house, although they often left during the severe winter months (Siler 1996).

In 1938, 2,200 feet of new domestic water line was laid from Benner Creek to the Butt Valley house, replacing the original pipe (Peterson 1938). The kitchen and bathroom were enlarged and remodeled in the 1970s. The Butt Valley Gate Tender's House continued to be used as a residence and work site into the 1990s. It is now vacant and is owned by PG&E of California.

IV. SOURCES

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original architectural drawings for the building could be located at PG&E archives, headquarters or field offices.

B. Historic Maps and Views:

The Chester Museum has one historical photograph of the house taken circa 1923 around the time the building was constructed. This photograph was not available for duplication.

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Anonymous

1933 Map depicting Butt Valley Dam and associated elements including the gate tender's house, shed, and barn. On file, PG&E, San Francisco, California.

C. Interviews:

Quadrio, Marilyn

1996 Telephone communication with Mary Maniery, PAR Environmental Services, Inc., April 30, 1996.

Siler, Harry

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1987 *The Caribou 1 Powerhouse: An Historic Overview and National Register of Historic Places Evaluation*. Prepared for Pacific Gas and Electric Company, San Francisco.

Western Power Company (WPC)

1902 *Report of Construction at the End of October, 1902*. Western Power Company, Prattville. On file, WRCA, University of California, Berkeley.

Wickman, Bill Herman

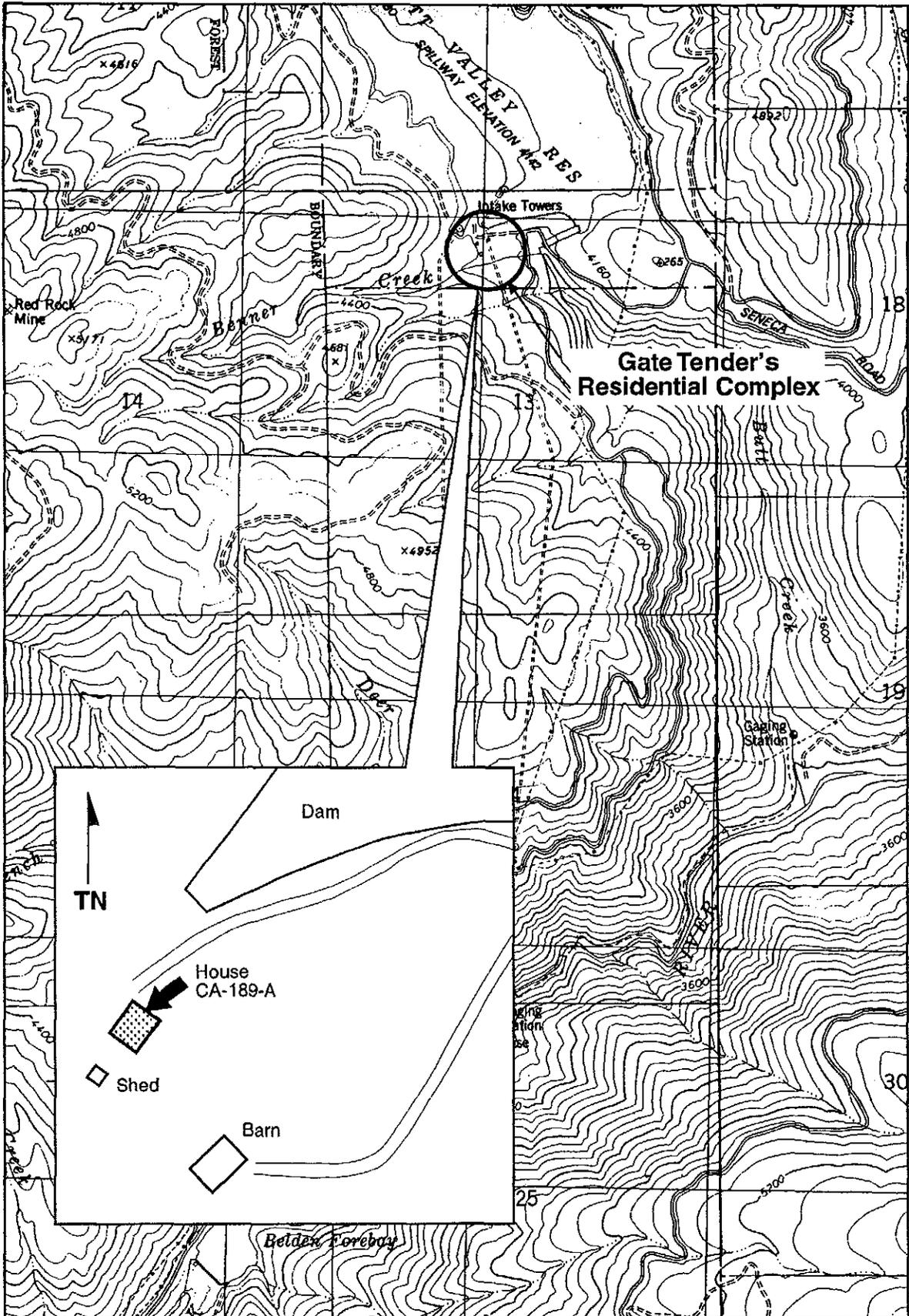
1972 *Man on the Lake Almanor Basin: A Study in Environmental Modification*. Thesis, Chico State College. On file, Special Collections, Meriam Library, California State University, Chico.

PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

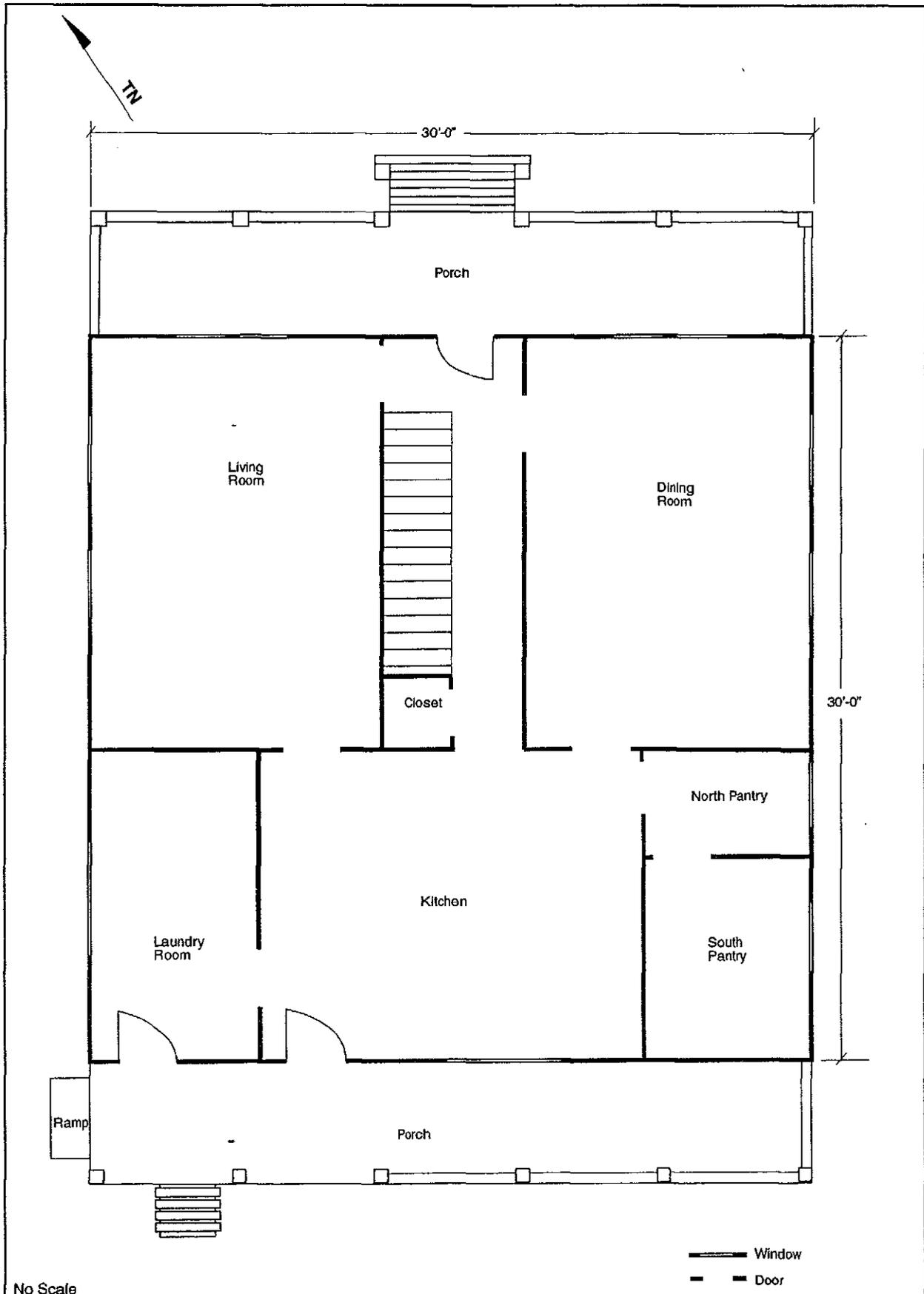
The Butt Valley Gate Tender's House is part of a small complex of buildings owned by PG&E near the company's dam at Butt Valley Reservoir. PG&E is currently seismically retrofitting the Butt Valley Dam and intends to remove the house. PG&E is recording the house according to the HABS/HAER standards, and is filing documents with the State of California Office of Historical Preservation and the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California. This recordation has been prepared to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Cindy L. Baker, Historian. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by Mary L. Maniery and Tracy Bakic. Floor plans were drafted in the field by Blossom Hamusek and were drawn by Claire Warshaw. The preceding are all employees of PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California. Documentation is based on previous investigations conducted by PAR Environmental Services entitled *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation of Butt Valley Dam, North Fork Feather River Hydroelectric System, Plumas County, California* (1996), and *State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation Primary Record Form and Building, Structure, and Object Record Form for PG&E Building 3869/Butt Valley Gate Tender's House* (1996).

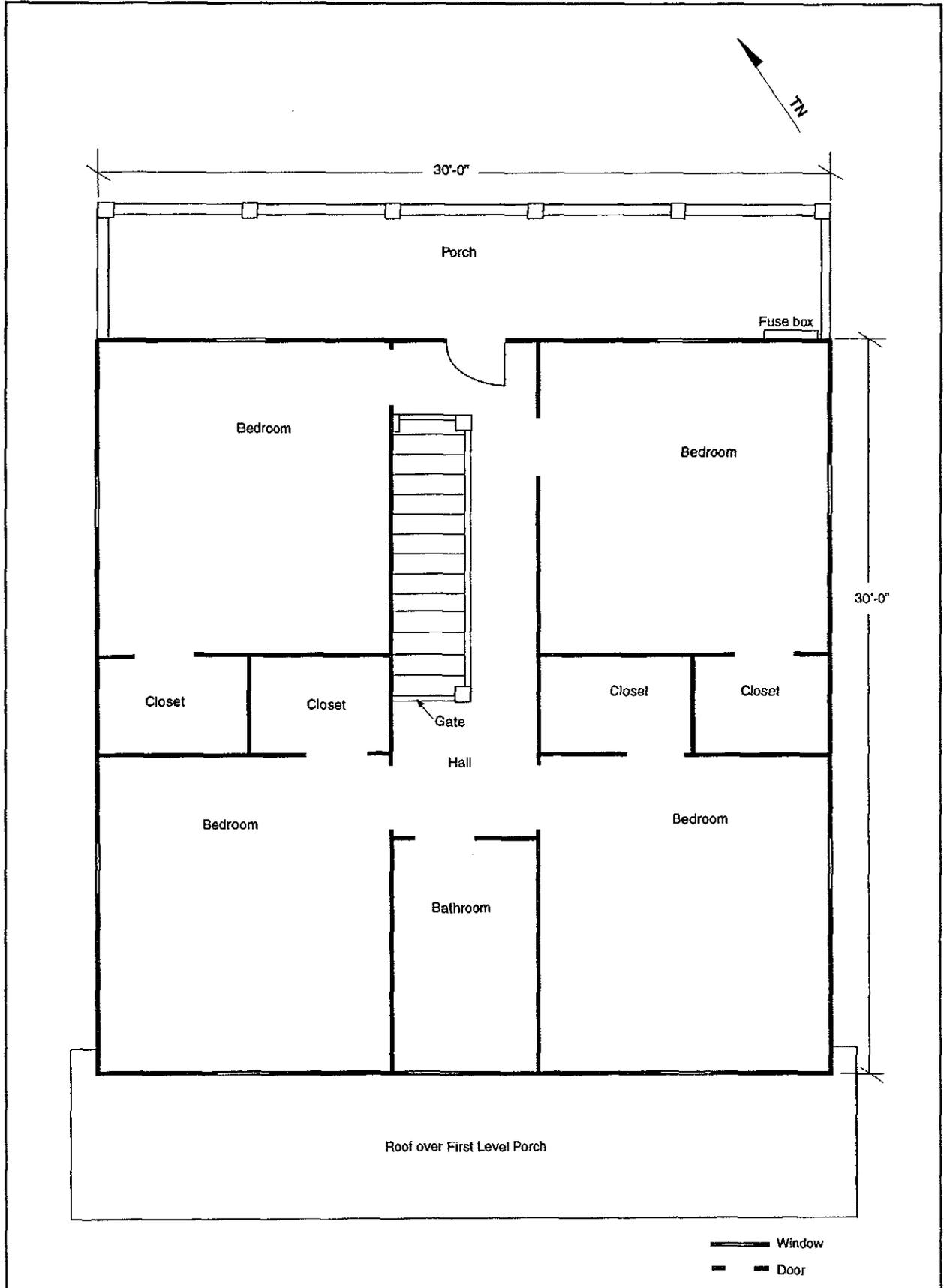
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Location Map and Site Plan (Inset) of Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House
(USGS: Caribou, CA, 7.5' Topographic Quadrangle 1979)



First Floor Plan of Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House
(Field Drawing by Blossom Hamusek and Final Drawing by Claire Warshaw, 1996)



Second Floor Plan of the Butt Valley Dam Gate Tender's House
(Field Drawing by Blossom Hamusek and Final Drawing by Claire Warshaw, 1996)