

REPUBLIC CAFE
Name of Property

MONTEREY, CA
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name REPUBLIC CAFE
other names/site number _____



2. Location

street & number 37 SOLEDAD ST. N/A not for publication
city or town SALINAS N/A vicinity
state CALIFORNIA code CA county MONTEREY code 53 zip code 93901

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____
Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/restaurant

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Other: Spanish Colonial Revival with Chinese Influence

Materials (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Weatherboard, Stucco, Ceramic Tile

roof: Clay Tile, Asphalt

other: Iron, Wood

Narrative Description

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(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Located in Salinas, California, the Republic Cafe is a two-and-a-half-level building located on Soledad Street in between East Lake Street and Market Way. It is a pour-in-place concrete structure with a narrow, rectangular layout, and a façade characterized by a Mexican clay tile fake mansard roof, and various Chinese designs and patterns. The walls are bounded by reinforced concrete and finished with stucco and some wood weatherboards. There is a flat asphaltic roof with a small penthouse at the top. The foundation and front balcony are built of reinforced concrete and Chinese metal decorative railing. The interior of the building reflects the typical narrow structures built in the 1940s. To the South of the building is the physically attached structure Mi Cantina, formerly named the Lotus Inn, a cocktail lounge and boarding house constructed in 1940. The West façade opens out to Soledad Street while the North façade is adjacent to an empty lot. To the East of the building is Lake Alley, a one-lane road.

Although the building has retained its original layout since 1942, much work is needed to restore the interior and stabilize the structure. Needed repairs or replacements include a leaky roof, broken windows, and the electrical and plumbing system. A comparison between historic and contemporary photographs reveals that the elements of the façade remain essentially unchanged.

Narrative Description

(See Continuation Sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.)

Asian Ethnic Heritage

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.

Period of Significance

1942 - 1957

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.

Significant Dates

1942

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.)

Significant Person (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Property is:

A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance reflects the most active years of Republic Cafe's operations.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

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The Republic Cafe, built in 1942, was the response of the Ahtye family to the area's growing need for a large restaurant capable of hosting frequent gatherings of up to 150 people. The building and the history associated with it portray perfectly the unique and complex past of Salinas Chinatown. Through the building, we get a glimpse of a bustling past where the restaurant offered both banquet feasts and small, private, curtained booths, providing a gathering place for the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities to celebrate their cultural heritage. When the Federal Urban Renewal Program arrived in Salinas in the late 1950s and early 1960s, many of the buildings in the Chinatown area were declared unsafe, and consequently torn down. The Republic Cafe withstood the test of time and customer loyalty. It was one of the last active businesses in the district prior to its closing in 1988. The Republic Cafe is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Asian Ethnic Heritage at the local level of significance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

(See Continuation Sheet)

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

(See Continuation Sheet)

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
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
Name of repository: National Steinbeck Center

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	10	620520	4059860	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	

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

Property in the city of Salinas, Monterey County, California, described as follows:
Parcel No. 002191012000. Roughly 26 feet along Soledad St; 124 feet along north side of building next to an empty lot; 26 feet along Lake Alley; then 124 feet along south side of building adjacent to the Mi Cantina structure.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Boundary includes the whole of the Republic Cafe building plus a small "backyard" on the eastern end, next to Lake Alley.

11. Form Prepared By

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name/title_ Yi-Ching Hwang

organization Salinas Downtown Community Board

date November 2010

street & number 538 Watson St.

telephone 858-342-5056

city or town Monterey

state CA

zip code 93940

e-mail yhwang@miis.edu

The street address, phone number, and e-mail address shown in section 11 are those of Yi-Ching Hwang herself, who prepared the application for the Salinas Downtown Community Board. Its office is at 22 Soledad St. Salinas, CA 93901. Its phone number is 831-770-1770. Its e-mail address is Ken_Feske@csumb.edu.

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.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

Continuation Sheets

- Section 7: Narrative Description
- Section 8: Statement of Significance
- Section 9: Bibliography
- Additional Documentation:
 - Figure A: SKETCH MAP (Additional Documentation Page 1)
 - Figure B: FLOOR PLAN 1 Kitchen and Restaurant (Additional Documentation Page 2)
 - Figure C: FLOOR PLAN 2 Wally's Parents' Floor (Additional Documentation Page 3)
 - Figure D: FLOOR PLAN 3 Exploded Axonometrics (Additional Documentation Page 4)
 - Figure E: HISTORIC PHOTOS (Additional Documentation Page 5)
 - Figure F: HISTORIC PHOTOS (Additional Documentation Page 6)
 - Figure G: HISTORIC PHOTOS (Additional Documentation Page 7)
 - Figure H: HISTORIC PHOTOS (Additional Documentation Page 8)
 - Figure I: FEE SIMPLE OWNER LIST (Additional Documentation Page 9)

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Republic Cafe

City or Vicinity: Salinas

County: Monterey

State: CA

Photographer: Elmer A. Dolera

Date Photographed: 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 5. front façade, looking west, camera facing east

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- 2 of 5. front façade with side wall view, camera facing south east
- 3 of 5. Lake Alley street plus back yard view, camera facing slightly south west
- 4 of 5. rear view, camera facing south west
- 5 of 5. Soledad St. view, camera facing north

Property Owner:

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

name Wallace (Wally) Ahtye Jr.
street & number 45 St. Francis Way telephone 831-422-6074
city or town Salinas state CA

Note: Additional owners are listed on the Continuation Sheet, Additional Documentation Page 9

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 this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Setting

The Republic Cafe is located in an impoverished and nearly abandoned neighborhood that is currently characterized by drug-dealing and other criminal activities. The front of the cafe opens out to Soledad Street, once a bustling main thoroughfare, but now a one-way street barely frequented by autos or pedestrians. From the back of the building, the cafe opens out to a small alley.

The cafe was one of the last active businesses in the Chinatown area prior to its closing in 1988. Aside from a leaky roof, the cracking of the second floor ceiling due to water damage, and general deterioration due to its standing idle for so many years, the Republic Cafe still contains much of its historic fabric.

Primary (West) Façade, Soledad St

This simple reinforced concrete building is characterized most strongly by its façade on the west end. The western façade opens out to a two-lane street of about 12 meters. This façade is adorned with traditional Chinese decorative architectural elements. The most notable elements are wood rafters and a clay tiled roof reminiscent of Chinese architecture, orange-colored mosaic ceramic tile inlays just above ground level, a refurbished neon sign that reads Chop Suey Republic, and a second floor partially recessed balcony with decorative Chinese iron work. The balcony is about three feet recessed and two feet hanging. According to David Chuenyan Lai's article "The Visual Character of Chinatowns," most Chinatowns, at least those in North America, contain a blend of both Chinese and Western architectural features.¹ This absence of a "homogenous" Chinatown style in fact, becomes in and of itself an architectural style. Lai further describes that the common elements that often define Chinatown architecture are "recessed or projecting balconies, upturned eaves and roof corners, extended eaves covering the main balconies, sloping tiled roofs, smooth or carved columns topped with cantilevered clusters of beams, flagpoles and parapet walls bearing Chinese inscriptions."²

Below the balcony are two entrances: the small entrance to the north is a private entrance that leads to the owner's quarters, and the entrance with double doors is the main entrance to the restaurant. Above the small entrance is a Chinese-patterned neon sign that lights up at night with the words: Chop Suey Republic. The neon sign was refurbished in 2009 by funds from various fundraising activities. Currently the doors and windows are covered by artwork from a community project performed by participants of the nearby homeless soup kitchen called Dorothy's Place.

Plain Wall (North) Façade, Empty Lot

The North Façade, a plain wall without windows or doors, currently fronts an empty lot filled with unruly weeds. The lot has been empty since the demolition of the wooden structure under the Federal Urban Renewal Program in 1960s; prior to the building's demolition, it was a small family-run Chinese restaurant.³

Rear (East) Façade, Lake Alley

The eastern end of the building has a utilitarian look with east-facing windows and a rear service door to Lake Alley, a typical behind-the-buildings street characteristic of old town Salinas. This one-lane alley once served as a rear entranceway for homes and businesses; it was the "backyard" where children played and pets lingered. At one time, the rear entry provided direct access from the Buddhist Temple, which is located behind the Republic

¹ David Chuenyan Lai, "The Visual Character of Chinatowns [Vision, Culture and Landscape]." *Places Journal*, 7(1)(1990): 29.

² *Ibid.*

³ Wally Ahtye, Phone interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

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Cafe across Lake Alley. People from the Temple would exit the Temple's compound via a small gate and proceed to make orders directly to the restaurant's kitchen through the Lake Alley rear entrance.

Adjoining Building (South) Wall

The South Façade of the Republic Cafe is joined to Lotus Inn, a cocktail lounge and boarding house, built in 1940, also by the Wallace Ahtye family. The upstairs contains twelve rooms, all of which were rented out. The ground floor was the cocktail lounge. Wallace Ahtye and his property partner Bow Chin entered a partnership with Hank Mar and Gonzales Gutierrez where Wallace and Bow provided the property while Hank and Gonzales took responsibility of the day-to-day operations of Lotus Inn. In the 1960s, the beer license was sold to Marion Lopez who then ran the operation for about 10 years.⁴ In the early 1980s, unable to sustain the operation, Lopez left the business; a Spanish family named Chavez leased out Lotus Inn and renamed it Mi Cantina.⁵ Mi Cantina was only in operation for about four or five years before it shut down; the deteriorating condition of Salinas' Chinatown in the 1980s prevented Mi Cantina from obtaining any beer licenses.⁶ The boarding rooms started to empty with the gradual decline of Chinatown; the whole Lotus Inn building was shut down along with the Republic Cafe in 1988. The Republic Cafe and Lotus Inn are considered two distinct structures joined wall-to-wall; the two structures have separate power sources and roofs. Figure H in Additional Documentation Page 8 shows the Lotus Inn as a stand alone building before the Republic Cafe was built. In 1942 when the cafe was built, one of the wooden rafters on the Lotus Inn roof was removed to give a more continuous look to the shared Lotus Inn and Republic Cafe façade. At one time during World War II, the two buildings shared a makeshift interior doorway. This situation existed because of a mandate that all saloons serve hot meals like restaurants. By having a door between the two buildings, the mandate was fulfilled. After World War II, however, the door was sealed and all interior connections between the two buildings were once again closed off.

Interior

The interior of the cafe is separated into four different levels. The first level contains the main room of the cafe, measuring 1,293 square feet. This seating area of the restaurant has a 14'8" raised ceiling and is connected to the kitchen by a small hall that accesses the men's and women's restrooms. The kitchen has a cooler and seven stoves lined up next to each other, against the northern wall. Beyond the kitchen are four small rooms: two of the interior rooms were used for storage and two of the end rooms with windows facing the eastern wall were used as an office and a prep room. (This information is depicted in blueprints in the appendix to this document, see Additional Documentation page 2.)

Stairways to the west of the men's bathroom leads one to the next level, the mezzanine, which contains additional seating space, measuring 541 square feet. Seating at the mezzanine provided a partial view of the main restaurant space below. A separate component of the mezzanine has its own stairway located behind the kitchen. This other mezzanine, also located on the second floor, is a private space that once provided housing to Republic Cafe's cooks. Originally the cafe hired three cooks, who all stayed in this "cooks' quarters" as room and board was part of their compensation. However, with the years, as Chinatown became more desolated, the number of cooks were reduced to one, until the Cafe finally ceased to provide a residential purpose in 1988. The "cooks' quarters," which include four rooms for the cooks and a furnace room, measure around 541 square feet as well. (See Additional Documentation Page 3.)

⁴ Wally Ahtye, Personal interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 12 Aug 2010; Wally Ahtye, phone interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010

⁵ Wally Ahtye, Phone interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

⁶ Wally Ahtye, Personal interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 12 Aug 2010.

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The third level is the area used as the primary residence of the Wallace Ahtye family. This level was used by Wallace Ahtye and his wife until they passed away, Mr. Ahtye in 1967 and Mrs. Ahtye in 1988. Two sets of stairways provide access to this part of the building. There is a direct access from the private entrance as described previously in the Primary Façade paragraph. Alternatively, one could also access this third level through a set of stairs from the Cooks' Quarters. This third level totals 1420 square feet and includes a partially recessed balcony, living room, study, dining room, kitchen, and one bathroom. (See Additional Documentation Page 3.)

The fourth level is an extension of the Ahtye family residence. This level includes two rooms and a bathroom and measures around 553 square feet. When the Wallace Ahtye family first moved to the Republic Cafe in 1942, Wallace Ahtye Jr. (Wally) and his brother Warren Ahtye lived on this fourth level while their parents resided below. Then in 1953, when Wally Ahtye got married and since Warren Ahtye had already moved out a few years prior, Wally and his newlywed wife renovated the space to make it more roomy and comfortable. The two-bedroom "apartment" was converted into a 1-bedroom "suite" by knocking down the wall that separated the two bedrooms. Wally and his wife would call this space their home until 1957 when they moved away. This level has remained unoccupied since 1957.

On all levels, natural lighting and airflow is provided through skylights and light wells, and through windows and doors located on the eastern and western end. The walls of the interior are plastered and painted.

Historic Integrity

With the shut down of operations in 1988, the Republic Cafe has remained standing in its former location with very few alterations to its physical infrastructure, though most of the interior artifacts, furniture, wooden panels and dining booths have been removed. After going through a period of decline, specifically regarding its business volume and also its building maintenance, the Republic Cafe is expecting to undergo renewal in preparation for its conversion into a cultural center and museum. A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) project has been approved and implementation is underway pending some last-minute legal issues. As of November 2010, the involved parties – the HUD grant recipient and City of Salinas Redevelopment Agency – are finalizing a Memorandum of Agreement.

Phase I of the project will comprise an initial building assessment, stabilization, and environmental remediation; the focus will be on removing asbestos and lead paint, repairing the leaky roof, and electrical and plumbing systems. The restaurant, hall way, and bathroom area that comprise the first floor will be replastered and repainted and will open as a public exhibition space for cultural artifacts and oral histories. The original wood paneling of the now nonexistent dining booths, which once lined the sides of the first floor dining space, is being researched to recreate at least one booth. The proposed roof renovations have been carefully coordinated with an architectural specialist to ensure that the selected materials, workmanship, and design will respect and protect the historic integrity of the building.⁷

Phase II will focus on the kitchen/cook space. The woks and cooking equipment will be renovated or replaced to allow function; the prospect of having an operational kitchen would provide the possibility of generating income to support the operation of the cultural center and museum.⁸

⁷ Ken Feske, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang. 20 Dec 2010.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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Phase III will focus on the upstairs floors. The current plan is to reproduce the cooks' living quarters to reflect their environment, similar to what the East Side Tenement Museum in Lower Manhattan, New York City has done. The Ahtye family living space will be renovated and may serve as a casual space for small group meetings. For example, it will allow the five member Executive Committee of the Salinas Downtown Community Board, and the nine member Asian Festival Planning Team to convene.⁹

Though the precise details of the adaptation of the Republic Cafe is a work in progress, the overall plan is to refurbish the space to its original state while providing flexibility of the space to accommodate community gatherings and celebrations. Much of the physical infrastructure of the interior of the building remains and will remain intact from its period of significance. Some historically important artifacts will remain as well. For example, on level one, the seven stoves are all originals from 1942. As described above, during Phase II of the project, when the kitchen undergoes renovation, attempts will be made to preserve the woks as museum artifacts. The Chop Suey neon sign was also refurbished with much care, restoring it to its original condition.

An evaluation of the setting indicates that because the neighborhood has been abandoned and overtaken by homeless people, it is no longer the thriving Chinatown it used to be. Thus the setting is considered lacking in historic integrity. In the area of feeling and association, the building partially retains historic integrity. Its distinct Chinese architectural elements continue to distinguish it from other structures and hints at its rich history as a Chinese restaurant. But because the building has not been maintained and because the windows and doorways are covered by paintings from a nearby homeless shelter service project, the cafe has taken on a temporary flavor not part of its past. The Republic Cafe building retains full historic integrity in the areas of location, design, materials and workmanship.

⁹ *Ibid.*

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Salinas, CA, under Native American and later Mexican rule in the early 1800s, consisted mostly of "hilly swamps with horse-high mustard" fields.¹⁰ It was not until the 1860s that Salinas began to take on a more town-like characteristic, with its residents being mostly cattle ranchers and in the later part of the decade, Swiss and Danish dairy farmers who migrated to the area attracted by its fertile land.¹¹

Agriculture and land cultivation increased in the 1870s with the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad and related commercial and political businesses.¹² Under the provisions of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, Chinese workers immigrated and settled in the area.¹³ The development of the Monterey Bay Region, and specifically the Salinas Valley, depended on the availability of these Chinese laborers. Where few white workers offered to work on the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad, the Chinese did.¹⁴ Where clearing swamps knee deep in slime and filth was too much for white men, the Chinese shouldered the task.¹⁵ And as the number of Chinese laborers grew, the newly erected Chinatown provided them with needed services. According to a brief historical guide written by Kent Seavey for the Monterey County Historical Society, in the 1870s, the Chinese accounted for about ten percent of the total Salinas population.¹⁶ Despite their limited numbers, the Chinese contributed significantly to the area's agricultural and financial development. For example, land worth \$28 in 1875 more than tripled in price two years later after being cleared by Chinese laborers.¹⁷

The first Chinatown in Salinas had a short life of twenty-one years. Established in 1872, it was completely destroyed by a fire in June of 1893.¹⁸ Within four days of the big fire, Chinese merchants re-established a new Chinatown just a few blocks to the east, right on Soledad Street in between East Lake Street and East Market Street. This time, as the buildings were built and owned by the Chinese, they purchased and stored 450 feet of fire hose, in case another fire should occur.¹⁹

The unique features of Salinas Chinatown in its early days were that it consisted mostly of men, single Chinese-born males without families. There were no families that resided in Chinatown at that time. The occupational patterns as documented by the 1880 census showed that "Salinas Chinatown began as a small service community for the seasonal Chinese" laborers and the white community.²⁰ The 1880 census showed that of the 91 residents in Salinas Chinatown, over half were laborers, including agricultural laborers; nearly one quarter were cooks, and the rest comprised a multitude of service positions including merchant, prostitute, barber, interpreter, physician, etc.²¹

The demographics of Salinas Chinatown started to shift after 1910, as a sizable group of Japanese farm laborers arrived to settle in Chinatown.²² Additionally, the population of Chinese merchants increased while those of

¹⁰ Kent Seavey, A Short History of Salinas, California. Monterey County Historical Society. 2009.
<<http://mchsmuseum.com/salinasbrief.html>>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ David Anderson, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

¹⁴ Sandy Lydon, Chinese Gold (Capitola: Capitola Book Company, 1985) 79-80, 85.

¹⁵ Lydon 287.

¹⁶ Seavey <<http://mchsmuseum.com/salinasbrief.html>>

¹⁷ Seavey <<http://mchsmuseum.com/salinasbrief.html>>

¹⁸ Lydon 294, 300.

¹⁹ Lydon 302.

²⁰ Lydon 295, 447.

²¹ Lydon 294.

²² Lydon 449.

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Chinese farm laborers decreased.²³ Several factors contributed to this transformation. First, immigration restrictions such as California's Alien Land Laws and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 worked together to create a scenario where Chinese farm laborers faced tougher immigration laws than Chinese merchants and students.²⁴ The farm laborers were prevented from becoming farm owners and establishing financial independence. Second, while the Chinese laborers faced increasing difficulties in getting settled as U.S. residents, Chinese merchants had some freedom to travel back and forth between China and the U.S., to continue their business in Salinas while bringing their wives to the United States.²⁵ Third, as more and more Chinese merchants had U.S.-born children, they were able to purchase lots under their children's names. The ownership of properties allowed the merchants to become further established in their businesses.

Most of the Chinese farmers who were unable to get established ended up returning to China. Meanwhile, the Chinese merchants who were flourishing in Salinas Chinatown continued to serve other farm laborers— first the Japanese, then the Filipinos, and later the braceros and Mexicans.²⁶ With the change in immigration patterns, Salinas' Chinatown and its Chinese inhabitants, instead of moving away or becoming marginalized by the new wave of non-Chinese immigrants, strengthened their presence in Chinatown by erecting stores, restaurants, laundries, and other businesses that responded to the need of these incoming non-Chinese populations.²⁷ In that process of maintaining a livelihood, the Chinese preserved their identity by remaining in the area, and also by continuing to serve the remaining Chinese population with some very specific cultural services. There was the Joss House where children attended Chinese School and adults worshiped various gods at an elaborate temple.²⁸ Chinese tongs and their leaders, much like the Godfathers of the Italian mafia, maintained a certain order within Chinatown. The two biggest tongs in Salinas Chinatown, Bing Kong Tong and Suey Sing, offered protection for those Chinese without papers, helped them obtain jobs, represented them in court, and assisted many financially.²⁹ In addition, each tong had its own hall where colorful rituals and conventions were held, along with fraternal projects and the occasional mahjong games.³⁰

In the 1920s and 1930s, Chinatown reached its peak period of prominence. Soledad Street and its surrounding few blocks flourished with cigar stores, cafes, hotels, bars, and pool halls. In addition, there were illegal gambling and opium houses, which were periodically raided by law enforcement and forced to shut down, usually for no more than a day. Non-Chinese flocked to open houses and fireworks displays during Chinese New Year celebrations on Soledad Street.³¹

The Wallace Ahtye family moved from San Francisco to Salinas in the 1920s looking for business opportunities. Since San Francisco Chinatown was already saturated with restaurants and ample Chinese stores and services, to those entrepreneurial Chinese businessmen, Salinas was a community of opportunity.³² Upon arrival in Salinas, Wallace Ahtye and his friend Bow Chin purchased various properties and soon embarked on the hotel, gambling, and restaurant business. Since Bow Chin was not a U.S. citizen at that time, his partnership with Wallace Ahtye was based on trust that his share of financial investment would be respected albeit the partnership was not legally written into a contract.

²³ Lydon 449-450.

²⁴ Lydon 452.

²⁵ Lydon 452.

²⁶ Lydon 450-451.

²⁷ David Anderson, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

²⁸ Wellington Lee, Salinas' Historic Chinatown (Salinas, California: John Steinbeck Library, 2010)

²⁹ Wally Ahtye, Personal interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 12 Aug 2010.

³⁰ Wellington Lee, Salinas' Historic Chinatown (Salinas, California: John Steinbeck Library, 2010)

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² David Anderson, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

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One of Wallace Ahtye and Bow Chin's first businesses was the Republic Hotel, a big building located on the corner of today's Market Way and Soledad Street. A two-story building, the Republic Hotel was a gambling hall on the ground floor and a hotel on the upper level. The Wallace Ahtye family lived in the back of the gambling hall. In the 1960s, when Bow Chin received his citizenship and hence became eligible to own property, he and Wallace Ahtye divided up ownership of the Republic Cafe, Lotus Inn, and the Republic Hotel so that Wallace Ahtye received the cafe and Lotus Inn while Chin received the hotel.

In 1939, Wallace and Chin purchased 37 and 39 Soledad Street from Wing Gee and Ming Gee, and began to replace the existing wooden structures by constructing the Lotus Inn, now Mi Cantina. Two years later, they started building the Republic Cafe and subsequently began operating the area's largest Chinese restaurant.

In 1942, Wallace Ahtye and his family of four moved in and started residing above the newly built Republic Cafe. Throughout the years, up until circa 1957, the Republic Cafe served as the venue that kept the Chinese a close-knit community. The Republic Cafe was a place where people gathered to celebrate Chinese New Years, birthdays, weddings, after-funeral gatherings, and sometimes the ritual of shaving a month-old baby's hair.³³ In addition to hosting banquets for Chinese families and organizations, luncheons and dinners were served to Filipinos, Japanese, Caucasians, Hispanics, and African Americans. Friends and families gathered for enjoyment of the delicious food, camaraderie, friendship, and companionship. During the bustling, thriving days of Salinas Chinatown, the Republic Cafe was one of the few places where families and friends could hold large gatherings. The Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities frequently held gatherings of up to 150 people in the Republic Cafe.

The Republic Cafe, along with other important, longstanding community institutions such as the aforementioned Bing Kong Tong, and Suey Sing, as well as the Chinese Confucius Church, and the Japanese Buddhist Temple, all played important and complementary roles in making Chinatown a culturally vibrant and thriving place from the 1920s thru the 1950s. Prominent authors such as John Steinbeck, Carlos Bulosan, Sandy Lydon, and Lani Ah Tye Farkas have all written about Salinas Chinatown, often citing it as the go-to place in the 40s and 50s for excellent Chinese food.

Beginning in 1957, there was a gradual but evident decline in customer flow at the restaurant. Under the Federal Urban Renewal Program, many of the wooden structures in Chinatown were deemed unsafe and torn down. Most of the Chinese families had moved away and Chinatown became more deserted. Like many others, Wally Ahtye and his wife also moved away; however Wallace Ahtye and his wife stayed on and resided above the Republic Cafe until their deaths; they operated the Republic Cafe together until 1967 when Wallace passed away. After that, Wally's mother operated the cafe with the help of Wally's aunt (who lived in an apartment complex a couple of blocks away) and two cooks until her death in 1988. That year, the Republic Cafe closed its doors, representing one of the last businesses in Chinatown to cease operation. The Republic Cafe has been vacant since 1988.

Today, Soledad Street, which was once the main thoroughfare of Chinatown, has become a neglected one-way lane, separated from the rest of Salinas Chinatown by a prohibiting fence along the railroad tracks. The Republic Cafe stands exactly where it was in 1942. Not much has changed except that the sounds of restaurant laughter, shouts of meal orders, and clanging of Chinese spatulas against iron woks have been replaced by silent spider webs hanging over bolted doors and windows sealed off by wooden planks. A pensive silence echoes through the mostly empty interior. Republic Cafe, though a bit deteriorated from years of standing idle, is a well-built structure that proudly stands awaiting its time to shine and serve again and to recount history through its conversion into a cultural center and museum. Similarly, Soledad Street and Salinas Chinatown await their moment of cultural and economic renewal to begin welcoming visitors and retell their rich history.

³³ Wellington Lee, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 5 Aug 2010.

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Rina Benmayor, historian and professor at California State University – Monterey Bay (CSUMB), has been working to help preserve and revitalize Salinas Chinatown. An active member of the Asian Cultural Encounter (ACE) task force since 2007, Benmayor has been engaging her oral history students to gather memories and life stories of the various ethnic group members who grew up in and around Chinatown. “The Republic Cafe, perhaps the most iconic landmark on Soledad Street, serves as a touchstone for Chinatown memories for all of our narrators,” notes Benmayor.³⁴

In her article “Contested Memories of Place: Representations of Salinas’ Chinatown,” Benmayor touches upon the concept of “historical representation,” which challenges the reader to think deeply about how history is written and represented. In the article, she probes the reader with important questions such as: “What kind of narrative experience will be represented? Will Chinatown be codified only by the fond memories of the past? Who will determine what gets exhibited and what does not?”³⁵

The ACE task force, formed in 2005 by a group of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino leaders, meets once a month in the Chinese Confucius Church on the corner of E. Lake Street and California Street to discuss revitalization efforts of the Salinas Chinatown. City planners from the City of Salinas, Franciscan workers who run the nearby homeless soup kitchen, Dorothy’s Place, and faculty and staff from CSUMB joined the ACE task force.

Ken Feske, Chinatown Renewal Project Director of CSUMB, has been involved in the revitalization effort since January 2007. As the Project Director, Feske oversees a computer lab located a few buildings down from Republic Cafe, adjacent to Dorothy’s Place. The purpose of the computer lab is to provide a learning center for neighborhood residents and persons who utilize social services in the neighborhood. Computer literacy and access, life and job skill training, and financial literacy are some of the learning activities. CSUMB students assist the project by providing service learning in the areas of business, environmental science, oral history, museum studies, and technology. The computer lab provides computer training for the marginalized and homeless people who are eager to learn new skills to advance their employment prospects.

“The renewal and conversion of the Republic Cafe into a cultural center and museum is just one of the many projects on our list. Our long-term goal is to completely revive the Salinas Chinatown area. One building at a time, we hope to turn this into a historic district where students, scholars, tourists, and historians can come and learn about the area’s history,” remarked Feske.³⁶

David Anderson, professor of history at CSUMB and former president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations acknowledged the importance of revitalizing and preserving Salinas Chinatown specifically because, of the many local Chinatowns like the one in Salinas that “once existed in agricultural and commercial towns throughout the American West, today most are gone, erased by so-called urban renewal” programs after World War II. Hence, Salinas Chinatown is a historically important and symbolic representation of the “rich cultural mosaic that is California and the West,” further stated Anderson.³⁷

The Chinese-American Citizens Alliance (CACAA), the Chinese Association of Salinas (CAS), and the Salinas Downtown Community Board (SDCB) are three other community groups in the area that support the cultural and historic renewal and revitalization efforts in Salinas Chinatown. For example, in 2009, CACA held a major fundraising event that contributed to the renovation of the Chop Suey neon sign of the old Republic Cafe. The fundraising event included the attendance of community members and guest Chinese American authors at a gala

³⁴ Rina Benmayor, “Contested Memories of Place: Representations of Salinas’ Chinatown.” The Oral History Review: Journal of the Oral History Association, Vol. 37 No. 2 (2010): 230

³⁵ *Ibid*: 233

³⁶ Ken Feske, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang. 11 Nov 2010.

³⁷ David Anderson, Email interview by Yi-Ching Hwang, 14 Dec 2010.

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Chinese banquet. Around the time of the banquet, for a period of three days, three Panda Express franchises donated 20% of all purchases to the restoration efforts.³⁸ Currently four CAS members are active participants in ACE, SDCB, and the overall Chinatown Renewal efforts. As an association comprised of most of the Chinese adults in the Salinas area, CAS members' interest in renewal efforts is evident in the members volunteering their time and dedication to chair ACE and co-chair SDCB.³⁹

Dolores Hayden, prominent author, poet, and professor of Architecture, Urbanism, and American Studies at Yale University, notes how "the power of place – the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory – remains untapped ...for most ethnic history..."⁴⁰

Adapting the Republic Cafe is an effort to revitalize the neighborhood and rediscover history, and more importantly, it is also a process to create community based on a shared sense of history. Under the leadership of those at ACE, and through projects such as those led by Feske and Benmayor, the revitalization effort is and has been tapping into the memory of those living nearby as well as the Salinas Chinatown diaspora throughout the United States.

³⁸ "Chop Suey Neon Sign Refurbished and Lighted Up," Chinatown Renewal Newsletter Winter 2010.

<<http://salinasdcb.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CTRPNLWinter102.pdf>>

³⁹ Formed in 2005, SDCB is a 501c3 comprised of multiple stakeholders gathered to ensure that there's a forum to dialogue about the development plans in the Chinatown area. The Chinatown Renewal Project is SDCB's first initiative.

⁴⁰ Dolores Hayden, The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1995) 9.

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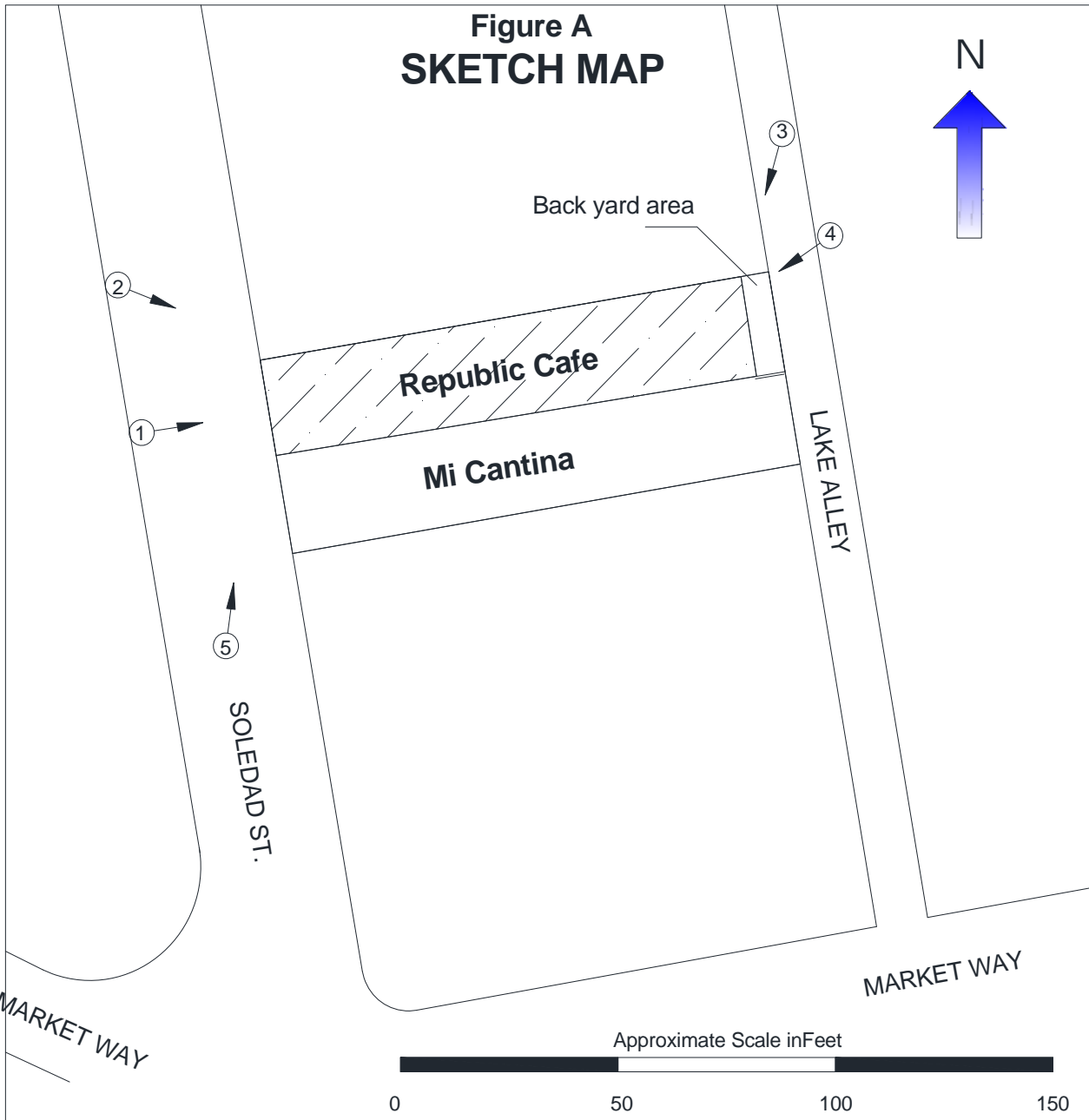
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
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Republic Cafe	.
Name of Property	.
Monterey, CA	.
County and State	.
	.
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)	.



 Nominated property

 Photo number, Vantage point and direction

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

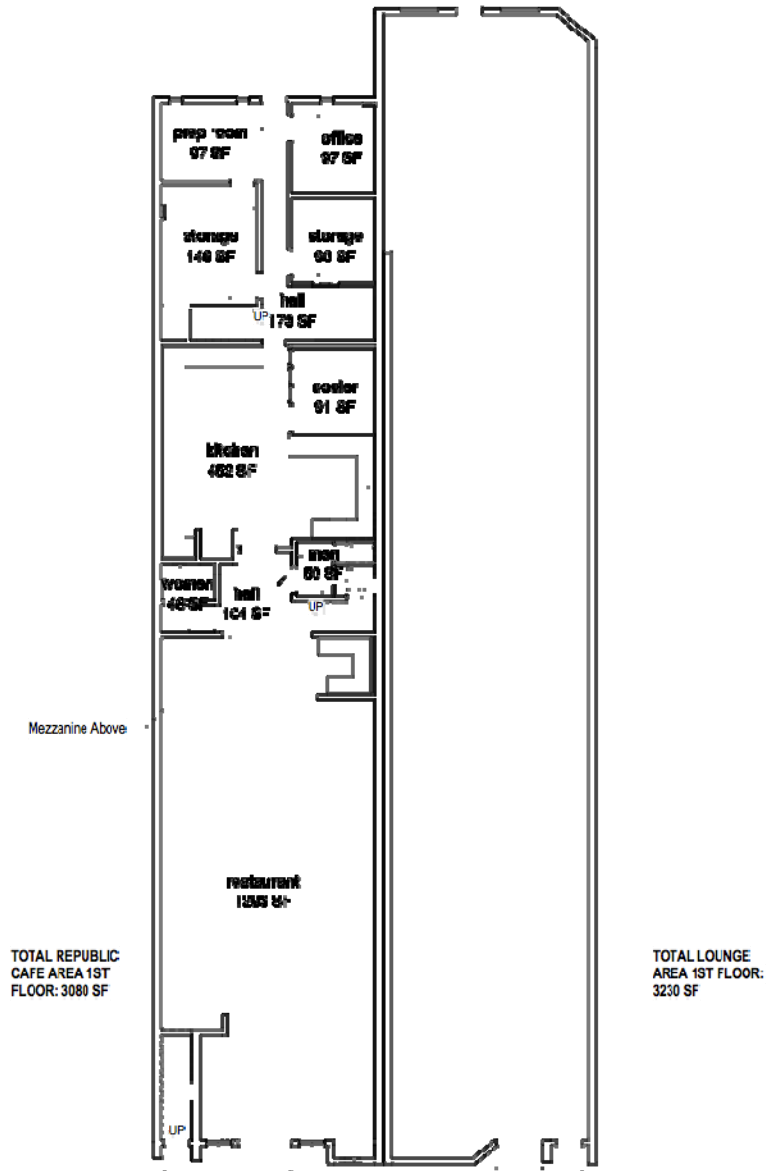
Name of Property **Republic Cafe**

County and State **Monterey, CA**

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Section numb



1st FFL
THE ARCHITECTURE COMPANY

Scale: 1" = 10'-0"

the architecture company
285 N. Silverbell Road
Tucson, Arizona 85745
520.525.4000
520.525.8997 fax

DESCRIPTION

Figure B: FLOOR PLAN 1 Kitchen and Restaurant

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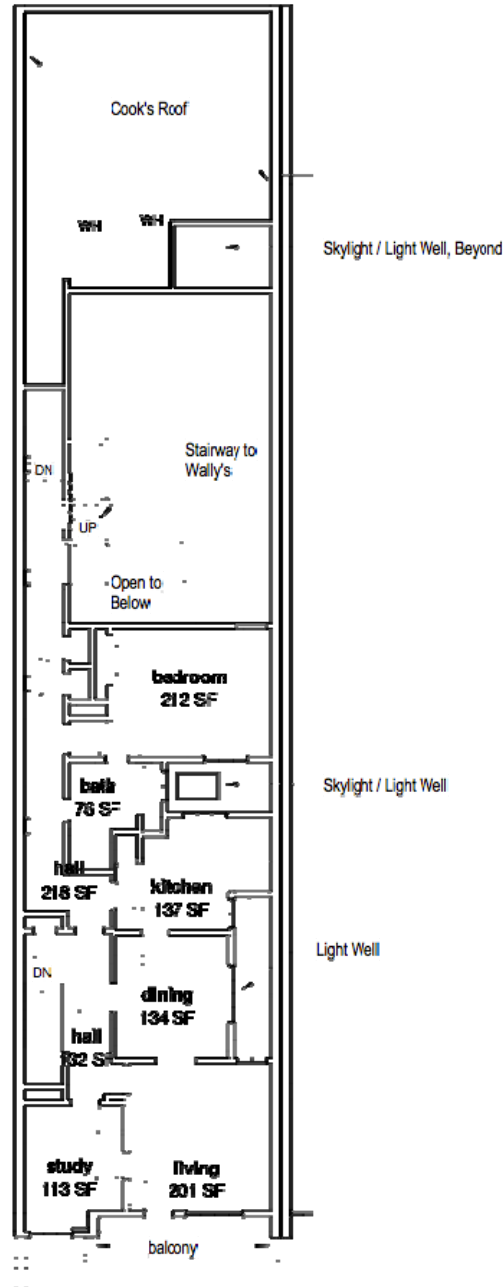
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DESCRIPTION

Figure C: FLOOR
PLAN 2 Wally's
Parents' Floor

TOTAL REPUBLIC CAFE AREA
WALLY'S PARENTS FLOOR: 1420 SF



THE ARCHITECTURE COMPANY

Scale: 1" = 10'-0"



the architecture company
 31 The Silverbell Ranch
 2625 N. Silverbell Road
 Tucson, Arizona 85745
 520 622-4509
 520 622-6597 fax

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United States Department of the Interior
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Name of Property **Republic Cafe**

County and State **Monterey, CA**

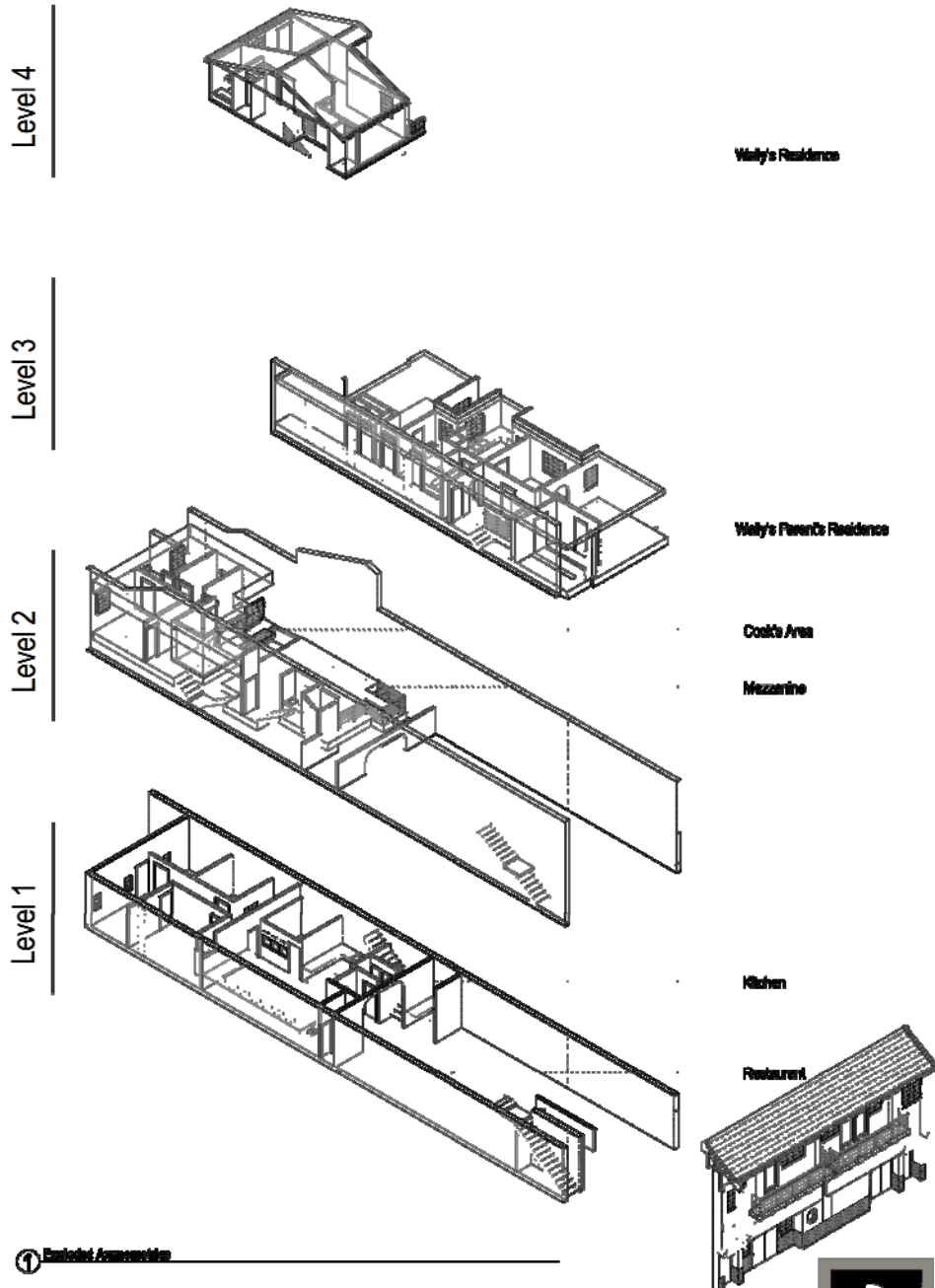
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DESCRIPT
Figure D: FL



North Arrow

Salinas Asian Cultural Center



the architecture company

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2200 N. Shoreland Blvd
Tucson, AZ 85745
520-625-6556
520-625-6557 fax

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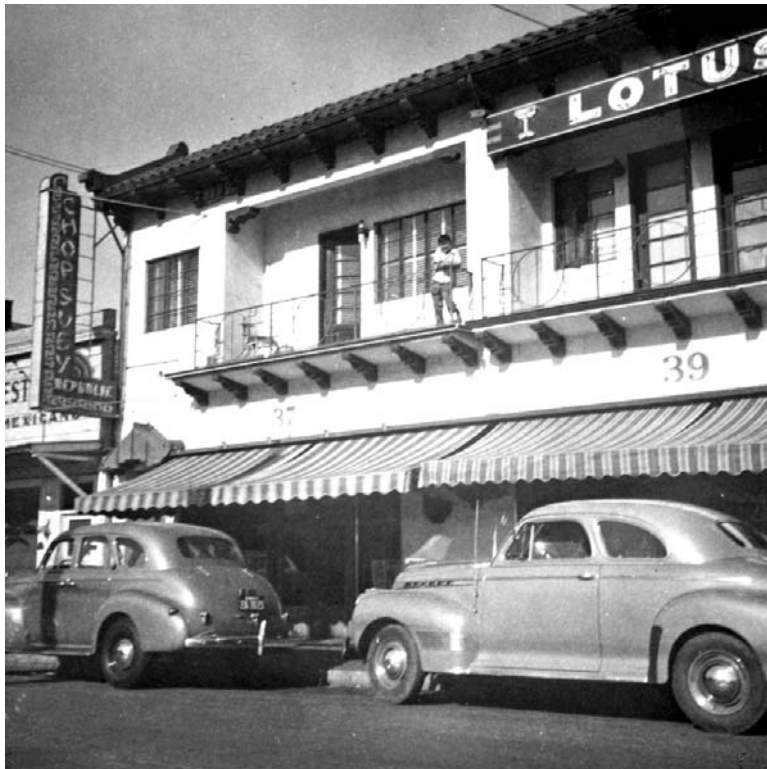
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DESCRIPTION

Figure E: Historic Photos Front Façade of 37 & 39 Soledad St., showing Republic Cafe in 1943.



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DESCRIPTION

Figure F: Historic Photo 2 of 3 Banquet feast at the Republic Cafe in 1950.



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DESCRIPTION

Figure G: Historic Photo 3 of 4

Lion dance performance on April 15 & 16, 1961 in front of the Republic Cafe to celebrate the grand opening of Bing Gong Tong's new building located at today's 16 Soledad St.



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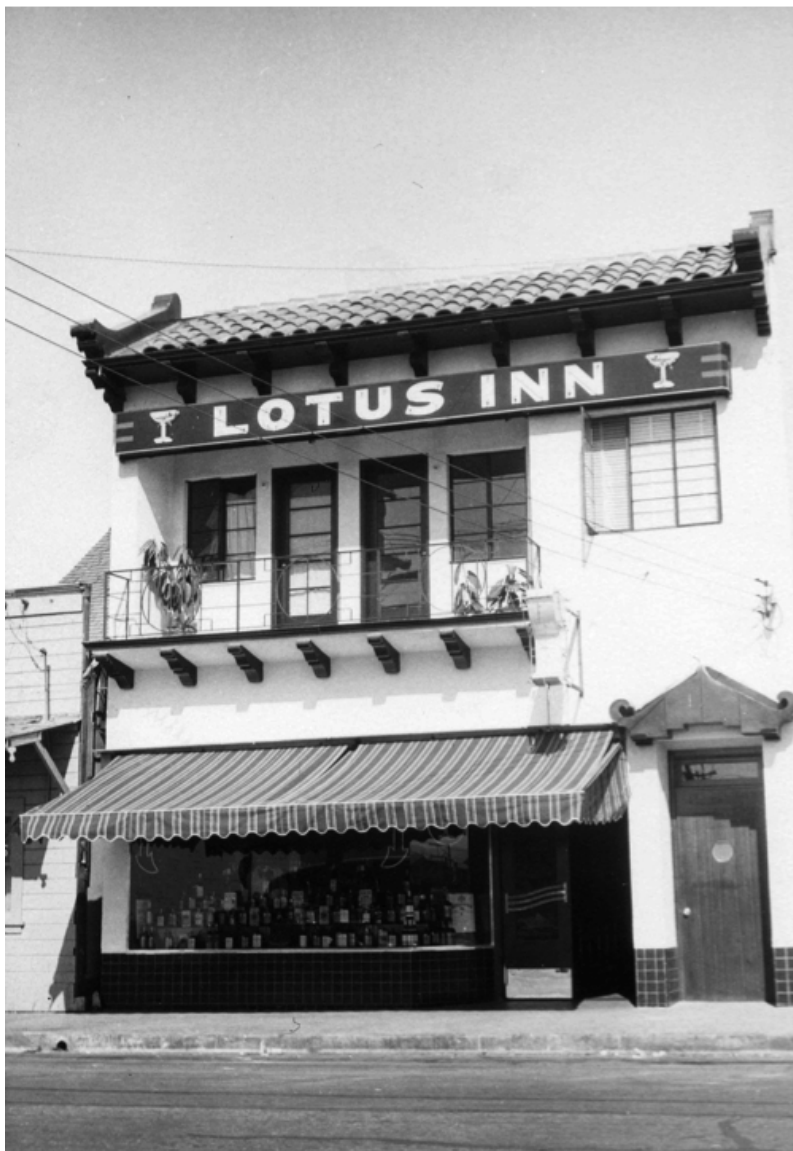
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DESCRIPTION

Figure H: Historic Photo 4 of 4

Prior to the construction of Republic Cafe, Lotus Inn was a standalone building. Photo estimated to be taken in 1940.



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DESCRIPTION

Figure I: Fee Simple Owners of the Republic Cafe, per the assessor's records:

Wallace Ahtye Jr.
Sam Ahtye
Conrad Ahtye
Patricia Ahtye
Peggy Ahtye
Wallace J. Ahtye
Warren Ahtye
Mar Loon

Listed address:

45 St. Francis Way
Salinas, CA 93906

Note: Wallace Ahtye Jr. and Warren Ahtye own about 65% of the property and they strongly support the nomination.