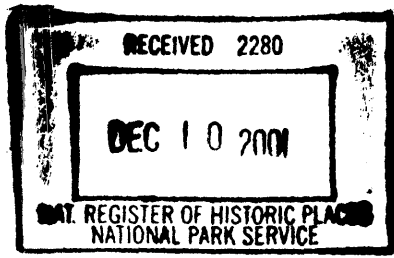


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



148B

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Donner-Houghton House

other names/site number Allen Apartments

2. Location

street & number 156 East St. John  not for publication

city or town San Jose  vicinity

state California code CA county Santa Clara code 085 zip code 95112

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

K. M. Ellison 11/29/01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson A. Beall 1-24-02  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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

Domestic – single dwelling

Education - school

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

Domestic – multiple dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

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

Italianate

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

roof asphalt

walls weatherboard

\_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_

Exploration/Settlement \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1881-1886 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1881 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Donner-Houghton, Eliza P. \_\_\_\_\_

Houghton, Sherman Otis \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Burkett, John T. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Donner-Houghton House  
Name of Property

Santa Clara County, CA  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	598443	4133040	3	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—	—

See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Amber Engle

organization Dill Design Group date July 19, 2001

street & number 110 North Santa Cruz Avenue telephone (408) 354-4015

city or town Los Gatos state CA zip code 95030

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### 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.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

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

### Property Owner

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

name Keith Watt

street & number 72 North 5<sup>th</sup> Street telephone (408) 998-0223

city or town San Jose state CA zip code 95112

**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. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Donner-Houghton House, more commonly known as the Allen Apartments, is a large two-story building located on a small lot along the north border of San Jose's downtown commercial core area. Relocated to its present site at 156 East St. John Street in 1909, it has been in continuous use as a multi-family residential building since the late nineteenth century, until vacated in the late 1990s due to a small interior fire. It was originally constructed or assembled as a single-family residence at a site two blocks to the northwest at the corner of East Julian and North Third Streets in 1881. Completed in the summer of 1881 as the home of Sherman Otis and Eliza (Donner) Houghton, it was their family residence during the last five years of their residency in San Jose, and remained under their ownership until relinquished in mortgage litigation during 1898. In the late 1880s, the building was resited on the lot to face North Third Street, and was then addressed as 325 N 3<sup>rd</sup>, until it was moved again in 1909. Although an itinerant structure that has been relocated in historic times at least twice (at least once, and probably twice, by the Houghtons themselves), the building retains its 1881 configuration, reflective of the Houghton period of ownership, and has a high degree of integrity to its 1881 design and appearance. Although the original associations of this building had been lost to history for much of the twentieth century, the recent re-establishment of its significant association with the Houghton family has resulted in a high level of public interest. The ill-fated Donner Expedition to California of 1846-1847 remains a pivotal story in the history of America's westward expansion. Eliza Donner, a child of George and Tamsen Donner, as an orphaned survivor, researcher and chronicler of this event, remains a significant personage within the story of the modern development of the State of California. The tragedy has been institutionalized in California's fourth grade curricula, and historians still debate the details surrounding this event. During mid-2001, the City of San Jose designated the building a City Landmark, largely in respect for this historic association and its continued existence as a physical reminder of San Jose's intimate connection with the people who pioneered the opening of California to American settlement.

The building itself is representative of Italianate residential architecture that was perfected in the region during the 1860's, and dominated the design of larger estate houses into the early 1880s. The Donner-Houghton House has the characteristics of the early, more formal, part of this period. The front portion of this building is a simply massed structure taller and wider than its depth, and configured symmetrically to establish a classically inspired presentation to the street. Like others in the genre, a slight two-story projection forward at the entry cumulates in a pediment that emphasizes the height (and grandness) of the structure. The building is symmetrical in plan, the large rear wing is slightly offset from the front, and oriented around a long central corridor, flanked by bedrooms that running the depth of the building. In the rear, a small stairway is offset and accessed by the rear door located near the corner of the building. The Houghtons modified this portion of the building in the late 1880s for a service area to accommodate an adaptive reuse to an institute for women. No other significant changes to the exterior of the early building appear to exist. A two-story bay window on the (current) west side of the building, although more ornate in design than the rest of the building, appears in early 1880s photos that document the building. The other windows lack this embellishment, but are also one-over-one double-hung sash, in single and couplet groupings, topped by pedimented hoods. The Classical details are also found in the boxed cornice that is supported by built-up corbels. This Italianate detailing is reinforced by wood quoins at all the 90-degree outside corners of the building envelope. The front façade features a one-story

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7, 8 Page 2

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portico and porch that extends the full width of the building. The wood porch is characterized by square columns under ornate brackets that segment the cross beam, and turned balusters. Historic photos show a matching balustrade surrounding a widow's walk above the porch roof, but this railing as well as historic metal finials at the roof peaks are no longer extant. The front door is recessed within a short alcove with segmental arched ceiling, a keystone protruding at the top. The transom above the door reflects this arch in the building volume.

The interior has less integrity than the exterior, with only the woodwork of the main entry balustrade and some trim appearing to be original. While wood floors, baseboards and door and window casings (and the window sash itself) remain, most original wall surfaces have been replaced, and plumbing has been retrofitted into the building to serve the multi-tenant uses. When moved to its present location in 1909, the building was cut vertically in half, the rear wing separated and moved as a separate structure. A new full basement was constructed with a concrete foundation, and the front steps were replaced. The present site lacks improvement or outbuildings related to the current or past uses.

John T. Burkett is the architect of record for the Donner-Houghton home as configured in the summer of 1881, as noted in the July 1881 issue of the *California Architect and Building Review*. It could not be determined whether the 1881 Houghton residence was built from scratch or if it was partially created out of an earlier structure.

The Houghton family left San José and moved to Los Angeles in late 1886. They appear to have maintained their residence in San José, as they continued to be listed in the city directories at 95 West Julian Street until 1889. After 1890, the Houghton residence was converted to other uses. It was the home of the San José Institutę, a prominent school for girls that had its roots in the Freeman Gates' San José Institute (San Jose's first private school). It was during this tenancy that the Houghtons modified the rear to accommodate the residential use associated with the Institute. The subsequent owners adapted it to boarding use, and for a while it was known as "The Majestic, a family hotel." The 1909 relocation by house mover Abner E. Newby (as well as the earlier late 1880s relocation on its site), would have been significant undertakings for the period. Although building relocation a century ago was common, most known house moves are of smaller vernacular buildings that were displaced during San Jose's rapid physical expansion periods. The relocation of this structure would have been a significant undertaking given the technologies available.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Allen Apartments building was identified in an early architectural survey in the 1970s by the County of Santa Clara as a building of local interest due to the style and scale of the structure, and the apparent circa 1870s-1880s date of construction. During preparation of the Environmental Impact Report for San Jose's new Civic Center Plaza in 1998, the building was found potentially eligible for the California Register based on its architecture and style. It was in 2000, through efforts of its owner, that an intensive level of investigation was undertaken that linked the origins of the structure at Third and Julian Streets to Sherman Otis and Eliza (Donner) Houghton. Found eligible as a City Landmark due to its association

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

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with the Houghtons and its architectural style, the San Jose City Council designated it a City Landmark in summer of 2001.

Sherman Otis and Eliza Houghton had been married for 20 years and residing in San Jose since 1861, when they constructed this structure to replace their 1860 residence. A prominent family in San Jose, they left San Jose shortly after a grand reception at their "elegant residence" that was the talk of social circles for some time and recorded in the *San José Daily Mercury* October 17, 1886. The event was also recorded in Mary Bowden Carroll's book *Ten Years in Paradise*, written in 1903. The gathering celebrated the Houghton's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary and was a farewell party, as they were planning to move to Southern California in a few months. The party was described as "one of the most brilliant receptions ever given in San José." The more than 200 guests were "received by Col. and Mrs. Houghton in the spacious hall of their home".

*"The parlors were brilliantly illuminated and the whole house elaborately decorated with the choicest flowers and vines. The stair railing was trimmed with ivy intermingled with bright red berries. The rich lambrequins and lace draperies were adorned with delicate tendrils of smilax, the mantles banked with scarlet geraniums and chrysanthemums and the grates filled in with the choicest flowers and vines .... In the sitting room, the etage [etagere] was loaded with floral offerings ... The large dining room, which had been built especially for the occasion, was reached by passing out at the rear of the main hallway."*

The article describing the Houghton reception occupies twenty inches of fine print, including a description of the decorations, gifts, and a list of everyone present. The list of the attendees includes what appear to have been every luminary in San José and several from San Francisco, Stockton, Berkeley, Monterey and other towns.

The Houghton family left San José and moved to Los Angeles in late 1886. They appear to have maintained their residence in San José as they continued to be listed in the city directories at 95 West Julian Street until 1889. The following section summarizes the lives of Sherman Otis Houghton and his wife, Eliza Poor (Donner) Houghton. Several biographical sketches on each exist, and Eliza wrote her own book in 1911 on the Donner Party and her experiences as a Donner Party survivor.

### **Sherman Otis Houghton**

One of Colonel Sherman Otis Houghton's biographers wrote that he "bulked large in the affairs of California, and no history of the state should be written without reference to his services" (McGroarty 1923). During Houghton's lifetime, he was a military officer, a merchant, a lawyer, a politician, and was involved in transportation and real estate development. His activities encompassed most of the state. In addition, he was married to one of the most well known women in this period of California history, Eliza Poor Donner, a survivor of the Donner Expedition tragedy. She was a historian of that event, as well as other aspects of life in the first decades of California's statehood.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

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Sherman Otis was born in 1828 in New York City and was a descendant of early New England pioneers. At the age of eighteen in 1846, he enlisted as a soldier for the War with Mexico, following the footsteps of his father and other forebears who served in the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War. He served with Company A of Stevenson's Regiment of New York Volunteers for which he served two years until discharged in Monterey in October 1848. He subsequently caught gold fever and with six of his fellow officers proceeded to the gold fields (Fain 1968; Munro-Fraser 1881; Foote 1888). It is thanks to S. O. Houghton that there exists a detailed first hand description of San José in fall 1848 when he passed through on his way to the gold fields. He described the area as completely void of the male population as they had all departed for the mines. The crops had not been harvested, except by the stock, and no provision had been made for the ensuing season.

Houghton took his profits from the gold fields and opened a store in Sonora, which furnished supplies to miners. This enterprise suffered during the winter of 1849 when he lost his merchandise and the means of transporting it due to the heavy rains of that season. Having lost everything, he located in San José in late 1849 where he worked as a clerk of the Senate Judiciary Committee for the first session of the California Legislature, which had convened in San José. Houghton had acquired Spanish as a second language during his tenure in the military, which turned out to be a tool that served him well as business was conducted in both English and Spanish at that time. He also engaged in a business partnership with Nesmith A. Peasley, an old military acquaintance. The men entered into the stock business together, and Houghton used his linguistic abilities to negotiate cattle purchases from local Hispanic rancheros. This endeavor earned them a fortune, which unfortunately, was subsequently lost due to the gambling habits of Nesmith Peasley and the devaluation of the state scrip (Fain 1968). In addition to the stock business, Houghton went into the sawmill business (Sawyer 1922).

By 1852, Houghton had found a job as the census taker for the 1852 census, and began studying law in his spare time. Other subsequent jobs included Deputy Santa Clara County Recorder and deputy of the State Supreme Court in 1854. He ran for Sheriff in 1853. Engaging in many business enterprises, by the early 1850s, he had managed to accumulate considerable wealth. Between 1854 and 1856, he owned a ranch in the Milpitas area (the later Trimble Ranch). Still interested in politics, he was elected to the Common Council of San José in 1854, serving as mayor in 1855 and 1856 (Fain 1968).

In 1855, when the Santa Clara Dragoons were organized, Houghton served as First Lieutenant under Captain S. J. Hensley. He founded the Eagle Guard, one of the first independent military companies in California. Serving under Major-General H. W. Halleck in the National Guard of California, Houghton was Ordnance Officer with the rank of Captain in the California Militia. While on Halleck's staff, Houghton participated in framing the first militia law of the state, revising it again in 1856 (Fain 1968; Shuck 1901).

Houghton continued to study law during the 1850s, entering the law offices of William T. Wallace and Caius T. Ryland, the sons-in-law and previous partners of former Governor Peter Burnett. Houghton was admitted to the bar of the District Court of San José in 1857, the bar of the State Supreme Court in 1859 and the Supreme Court of the United States in 1871. He specialized in litigation arriving out of Spanish



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

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and Mexican land grants. Several of the cases he carried to the Supreme Court of the United States and thus perfected the title to vast areas (McGroarty 1923). In the early 1870s, Houghton's own law practice was joined by John Reynolds, a partnership that lasted until 1886 (Fain 1968; Munro-Fraser 1881; Foote 1888).

In 1859, Sherman Otis Houghton married Mary Donner, one of the surviving members of the Donner Party tragedy and daughter of Jacob and Elizabeth Donner. Mary had been adopted into the James F. Reed family in San José. Unfortunately, Mary died two weeks after giving birth to their first child on June 21, 1860. During their marriage, Houghton successfully represented Mary's brother, George Donner, in a precedent setting San Francisco land grant case before the State Supreme Court (Fain 1968; Munro-Fraser 1881; Foote 1888). Houghton had traveled frequently to Sacramento on business where he met Mary's cousin and fellow survivor, Eliza Poor Donner, daughter of George and Tamsen Donner. After Mary's passing, Houghton courted Eliza, and the couple was married on October 10, 1861 (Houghton 1911). As well as raising Houghton's daughter Mary, the couple had seven children together: Eliza P., Sherman O., Clara H., Charles D., Francis, Stanley W., and Herbert S. who died in 1878 at 20 months of age (McGlashan 1879).

With the advent of the Civil War in 1861, Houghton had achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army. In 1863, he was commissioned as Captain of the company of Light Artillery, consisting of three companies (Fain 1968; Munro-Fraser 1881; Foote 1888).

Houghton invested in real estate and transportation in the 1860s. In 1865, he laid out the town of Mountain View, then known as Mountain View Station, adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railroad (Munro-Fraser 1881; Fain 1868). For many years, he was vice president of the Western Pacific Railroad, which was built in the 1860s between Sacramento and San José to connect the Central Pacific with San Francisco (McGroarty 1923). He was also a director of the Santa Clara Valley Railroad in 1870. Other business endeavors included acting as a trustee for the San José Woolen Mill, which was incorporated in 1869 (Fain 1868).

In the 1870s, he returned to politics when he was elected to the United States Congress in 1871. He represented the First District, which comprised a portion of the City of San Francisco and extended south to the border with Mexico. He served two terms but lost his re-election bid in 1875. Much of his focus while in Congress was on railroad issues and settlement of pueblo era land titles in San José. He secured the first appropriation for the improvement of the interior harbor of San Pedro Bay, which led to his title as "Father of San Pedro Harbor." He fought and succeeded in keeping Los Angeles on the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad line (McGroarty 1923).

In the mid 1870s, the Houghtons returned to their home in San José. Sherman Houghton returned to his law practice. In 1881, he was appointed to a commission to investigate the United States Mint in San Francisco (Fain 1868). During the 1880s, Houghton continued to practice law in partnership with John Reynolds. He was considered to be among the keenest attorneys in his day (Arbuckle 1985). He was a charter member of the Society of California Pioneers and was one of five veterans of the Mexican war

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

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selected to represent that organization in the re-incorporation of the Veterans' Home Association, of which he was elected director in 1882, serving until 1884 (McGroarty 1923).

After moving to Los Angeles, Sherman Houghton joined the law firm of Judge Alexander Campbell and Judge Charles D. Silent. Houghton handled many cases involving extensive riparian rights, a branch of law in which he was a recognized authority (McGroarty 1923; Fain 1968). He continued to involve himself in land speculation and railroad issues, serving as director of the Los Angeles, Utah and Atlantic Railroad Company. He and his business partners laid out the town of Redondo Beach, Houghton suggesting the name (Fain 1968). In 1896, Houghton bought a 78-acre ranch at Hynes where he retired in 1903. He served as assistant district attorney of Los Angeles between 1899 and 1901 (Shuck 1901). Sherman Houghton died at Hynes, California on August 31, 1914 (Fain 1968).

In 1924, Stanley W. and Eliza P. Houghton donated their parents' home and three acres to the City of Long Beach. This became the site of Houghton Park. On February 4, 1944, a Liberty Ship was named after Sherman O. Houghton. The ships were, generally, named for eminent Americans from all walks of life, who had made notable contribution to the history or to the culture of the United States of America. Two thousand seven hundred and ten ships were commissioned, the Sherman Otis Houghton ship was number 2,562 (Fain 1968; [www.armed-guard.com](http://www.armed-guard.com)).

### **Eliza Poor (Donner) Houghton**

Interest in the life of Eliza Poor Donner Houghton continues to this day. In 1997, her 1911 book *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate* was republished. The Long Beach chapter of the Children of the American Revolution is named after Eliza Houghton. Researchers continually search for information relative to the Donner Party and its survivors.

Eliza was born on March 8, 1843 in Springfield, Illinois. Eliza Donner was a child of three when her parents, George and Tamsen (Eustis) Donner, embarked on their now famous and tragic trek to California. During the winter of 1846/1847, the struggling party split near Donner Lake, Tamsen trusting the safety of her children to friends while she remained camped in the snow, to tend to her injured husband George. George and Tamsen perished during the ordeal, but the five daughters survived. Eliza and her sister and half sisters were left orphans. Eliza and her sister Georgia were taken in by an elderly Swiss couple, Christian and Mary Brunner, who lived on a dairy ranch near Sonoma. Eliza made many acquaintances growing up including Captain John Sutter and officers at the Sonoma barracks, including Lieutenants Tecumseh Sherman and George Stoneman, later Governor of California. She received her education in Benicia and Sacramento. While in Sacramento, she witnessed the first pony express rider to go through that city (McGroarty 1923; Johnson 1997).

After her marriage to Sherman Otis Houghton, the widowed husband of her cousin, Mary Donner, in 1861, the couple settled in San José where she became a part of San José society. Eliza occupied her time raising her children, as well as with church and social activities. Her accounts of life during that period give insight into early social and cultural life of San José not found elsewhere (Carroll 1903). In 1869, Eliza and Sherman Houghton traveled to Donner Lake where they caught the first train through to

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 7

Sacramento of the transcontinental railroad (McGroarty 1923). She lived in Washington D.C. when her husband served in the Congress. Congressional service acquired the couple even more social status when they returned to San José (Johnson 1997).

In the late 1870s, Charles F. McGlashan of Truckee, a lawyer and newspaper editor, who was engaged in writing a history of the Donner Party, contacted Eliza Houghton. She began to search for the truth surrounding the events of 1846, and a friendship ensued between Charles McGlashan and Eliza Houghton. It was during this period that McGlashan sought to confirm the stories of cannibalism and other atrocities associated with this event. He visited Eliza and was surprised to find that she rejected the story that Lewis Keseberg had murdered and consumed her mother Tamsen Donner. McGlashan subsequently found Keseberg in Sacramento, interviewed him twice, and became convinced of his innocence. Eliza then met with Keseberg a month later, and as a result of her personal confrontation with him, became convinced of his innocence in regard to the death of her mother (McGlashan 1879, Johnson 1997, Steward 1936). By 1884, she also was able to meet and interview Jean Baptiste Trudeau (Trivido), who had met Sherman Houghton while applying for membership in the Society of California Pioneers. Trudeau, considered by some historians to be the most loathsome of the survivors, also contradicted accounts of cannibalism relative to the Donner Party. Eliza determined to write her own story. In 1911, her book *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate* was published. Following the publication of the book, she became a recognized authority on the Donner Party, giving talks and lectures on the subject. Eliza continued to be active in the Red Cross, the Native Daughters of the Golden West and the Daughters of the American Revolution. She was involved in the construction of the pioneer monument at Donner Lake, which was unveiled in 1918. Four years later, on February 19, 1922, Eliza Houghton passed away at age 78 (Johnson 1997; McGroarty 1923).

Historian George Steward, writing in the 1930s was amazed by the growing interest in this historical event. This interest continues to expand in the present on the Internet, which contains numerous sites and mail-lists where the details related to the Donner Party continue to be researched and discussed. McGlashan and Eliza Houghton (who once called McGlashan's book "our book"), are primary sources of information for this continued study of human nature and morality during times of extreme stress and crisis, that the memory of this tragic event continues to evoke.

The Donner-Houghton House in San Jose, although relocated from its original site(s) and now disconnected from the "place" of residency of Sherman Otis and Eliza Houghton, remains a physical representation of their important presence in early San Jose. It is a building of architectural distinction, representative of early Italianate architecture. But the primary significance of the structure is its link to Eliza Houghton, and her place in the story of the Donner Party tragedy and the settlement of California and the West. Ordinarily, structures that have been moved from their original locations are not considered eligible for the National Register, although a building removed from its original location but which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person(s) may be found eligible. Eliza Poor (Donner) Houghton, and her husband Sherman Otis, meet the definition of "person(s) significant to our past". This association, as well as its distinctive architecture, would appear to qualify the building for the National Register under both Criteria B and C.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

---

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### Attached Photo Log:

1. Photographic Portrait of Eliza Houghton, date not known. Original print of this image at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. All rights reserved by the Regents of the University.
2. 1880s detail excerpt of the residence when located at the corner of East Julian and North Third Streets. Home Houghton family members, including S. O. and Eliza, are standing on the porch. Original in possession of the Glory Anne Laffey Architectural Archives, courtesy of Ann Smith of Arroyo Grande, granddaughter of S. O. and Eliza Houghton. All rights reserved by the owner. View from the southeast.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 10

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### Verbal Boundary Description

The Allen Apartment building is located at 156 East St. John Street, on the southeast corner of North Fourth and East St. John Streets, in downtown San José, California. The Assessor's Parcel Number for the property is 467-20-018. According the Assessor's Parcel Map the property is 137.8 feet deep and 137.6 feet wide.



Photo 1  
Eliza Houghton. date not known (Bancroft Library)



Photo 2  
1880s  
Houghton Residence on East Julian and North Thirds Streets



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 5

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### Photograph List

Donner-Houghton House  
Santa Clara County, California

For all photographs:

Photographer: Amber Engle

July 17, 2001

Original Negatives at Dill Design Group, Los Gatos, California

- 1 View from northwest
- 2 View from west
- 3 View from southwest
- 4 Detail from southwest
- 5 View from south