

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER

FEBRUARY 27, 2024

OWEN BROWN GRAVESITE HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

In October 1859, abolitionist Owen Brown participated in a raid led by his father John Brown, on the national armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The goal was to initiate a slave revolt that would end slavery in America. The event so inflamed a nation already divided over the issue of slavery that the Civil War became inevitable after it. John Brown and six others were tried, found guilty of treason, and executed. Owen Brown escaped and went into hiding for more than 20 years and eventually relocated to California, residing in the Pasadena/Altadena area where he had family. He died in 1889 and was buried on his homestead in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. His gravesite, which is marked by a commemorative stone, has been a place of pilgrimage by admirers of his and his family’s sacrifices to the cause of ending slavery.

On April 16, 2019, the Board of Supervisors approved Tentative Tract Map No. 069504 and a Conditional Use Permit for the La Vina subdivision located in the unincorporated community of Altadena. The Conditions of Approval require the developer to acquire the property that the gravesite is located on and through a committee that includes representatives from the Altadena Town Council and Altadena Heritage, place the property in a conservancy to protect it from development and further protect the site through historic designation. The conditions also require the developer to fund projects associated with the gravesite including restoring the commemorative stone and creating a public education program for the gravesite.

The gravesite is eligible and deserving of its historic designation because it is associated with the life of a person who is significant in the history of the nation, state, and community of Altadena. Specifically, it marks the grave and commemorates the life of celebrated abolitionist, Owen Brown.

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MOTION

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Given its historical significance, it is important to preserve the gravesite so that this and future generations are aware of one of America's early civil rights figures. Nomination of the gravesite is the first step toward preserving the site in perpetuity. Furthermore, it illustrates that the County, through its Historic Preservation Program, is committed to preserving important historic resources associated with the civil rights movement and reflect Los Angeles County's rich cultural diversity.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Find that the project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and
2. Adopt a resolution nominating the Owen Brown Gravesite, located at the northern terminus of El Prieto Road on Assessor's Parcel 5863-003-004 in the unincorporated community of Altadena and in the Angeles National Forest, as a Los Angeles County Historic Landmark.

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**RESOLUTION
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
OWEN BROWN GRAVESITE LANDMARK NOMINATION
PROJECT NO. PRJ2022-002656-(5)
CASE NO. RPPL2022008240**

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors (hereinafter, the "Board") of the County of Los Angeles (hereinafter, the "County") conducted a duly noticed public meeting to consider the nomination of a property, known as the Owen Brown Gravesite ("gravesite"), located on Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 5863-003-004 in the unincorporated community of Altadena in the Fifth Supervisorial District, a County landmark ("landmark") pursuant to Chapter 22.124 of the Los Angeles County Code ("County Code") on February 27, 2024.

WHEREAS, the Board duly considered all facts and records presented on the nomination, including all public comment and testimony; and

WHEREAS, the Board makes the following findings on the nomination:

1. The gravesite is located at the northern terminus of El Prieto Road on APN 5863-003-004 in the unincorporated community of Altadena in the Fifth Supervisorial District, and in the Angeles National Forest.
2. The subject property is approximately 5.58 acres in size and located on a hilltop. The gravesite is accessible by a footpath that begins near the terminus of El Prieto Road. The gravesite is marked by a rustic commemorative stone, and by additional stones placed to mark the presumed outline of the body. Two interpretive panels, three benches, and a directional sign are located on the site.
3. The boundaries of the proposed landmark follow the boundaries of APN 5863-003-004.
4. In October 1859, Owen Brown participated in a raid, led by his abolitionist father, John Brown, on the national armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to initiate a slave revolt. Many historians have written that this attack so inflamed the already divided country over the issue of slavery that it was the point after which the Civil War became inevitable. Owen Brown's father, John Brown, and six of his men were executed in December of 1859, being found guilty of treason. Owen Brown escaped capture and went into hiding for more than 20 years. In approximately 1884, Owen Brown relocated to Pasadena, California where his sister lived. Soon after, he began homesteading with his brother in the foothills of Altadena. They were visited at their homestead by Civil War veterans who venerated Owen and the Brown family for their many sacrifices to the abolitionist cause. In 1889, Owen Brown died. His funeral service at the Tabernacle in Pasadena was attended by approximately 2,000 mourners, notably Caucasian and African American. In 1898, a commemorative stone, replacing the original wood marker, was placed on his gravesite by his friend Horatio Nelson Rust. The commemoration ceremony was attended by prominent community leaders. Sometime before 1907, a ring of stones was added indicating the presumed placement of the body. From Owen Brown's death to 1942, the gravesite was a place of pilgrimage by admirers of his and his family's abolitionism. In 1948, police investigated reports of desecration of the gravesite. In 1972, the United States Forest Service restored the vandalized stone. In 2002, the disappearance of the stone led to its retrieval and storage. In 2021, the stone was restored to its original location.

and configuration on the basis of historic photos. In 2023, the interpretative panels and benches were installed, and the existing directional sign was updated.

5. Pursuant to County Code Section 22.124.080, the Board may by resolution nominate a landmark. Such resolution shall be in writing and include findings of fact in support of the nomination, including reasons why the landmark is eligible for, and deserving of, designation under the criteria set forth in Section 22.124.070 (Criteria for Designation of Landmarks and Historic Districts). The nomination shall be effective as of the date the resolution is adopted.
6. The property is eligible, and therefore deserving of designation because the following designation criteria has been met pursuant to County Code Section 22.124.070.A because the gravesite is:
 - a. 50 years of age or older;
 - b. Associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the nation, state, and of the community in which it is located. Specifically, it marks the grave and commemorates the life of celebrated abolitionist Owen Brown.
7. Historic integrity is commonly defined as the ability of a site to convey its historical significance and is the composite of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The setting has retained its integrity as the upper foothills are relatively undeveloped, the site remains undeveloped, and the gravestone has been restored to its original location and configuration. The additions of the interpretive signs and the benches do not detract from this integrity, and they enhance the feeling of association since they inform visitors of the historic importance of the site.
8. Pursuant to County Code Section 22.124.080.C, unless the appropriate application has been found complete or a Certificate of Appropriateness or Economic Hardship has been approved, no person shall perform or cause to be performed any work on a property subject to a landmark nomination that has become effective, and no application for a permit or other approval that would authorize such work shall be approved by any County department or commission.
9. Pursuant to County Code Section 22.124.080, the nomination shall be effective as of the date this resolution is adopted February 27, 2024, and the decision of the Board is final.

(Signature page follows)

The foregoing resolution was on the 27th day of February, 2024, adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles and ex-officio the governing body of all other special assessment and taxing districts, agencies, and authorities for which said Board so acts.



JEFF LEVINSON


Interim Executive Officer-Clerk of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles

By: 
Deputy

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

DAWYN R. HARRISON

County Counsel

By: 
Thomas R. Parker
Senior Deputy County Counsel