

DATE: December 13, 2018
TO: Town of Los Altos Hills
FROM: Brad and Sally Hauser
RE: Request for Landmark designation for 14700 Manuella Rd

We are requesting that the Hills Brothers Coffee greenhouse and property located at 14700 Manuella Rd be designated as a landmark based on its historical, architectural, cultural and aesthetic significance per Los Altos Hills Municipal Code 11-1.01.

The Hills Brothers Coffee Estate in Los Altos Hills was built around 1914 by Ruben Wilmarth (R.W.) Hills, one of the founding brothers of Arabian Coffee and Spice Mills in San Francisco (established in 1882 and later renamed to Hills Brothers Coffee in 1906.) For additional history of Hills Bros Coffee company please see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills_Bros._Coffee and <http://www.hillsbros.com/history/>.

The original estate was made up of the current properties at 14790 Manuella Rd. (main house – demolished in 2003); 14780 Manuella Rd. (pool house – extensively redesigned and remodeled in 1997 and 2005); 14700 Manuella Rd. (greenhouse, cottage and workshop) and 14667 Saltamontes Way (Barn – demolished around 1965). Additional history on the pool house and property can be found at https://issuu.com/brentlooney/docs/looney_manuella_history_8.5x5.5_spi.

The architectural design is Spanish Colonial Revival, typical in California during the early 1910's and 20's. The structures on the properties were reinforced with steel framing, likely influenced from the 1906 earthquake. The steel framing was constructed by Soule's Steel Company which was also used to construct many other Bay Area high rises and notable structures, including the UC Berkley Stadium and the footings of the Golden Gate Bridge (<https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/SOULE-Edward-Lee-Jr-2591884.php>). Other noteworthy parts of the original construction include an above ground water well (pictured below); "knee-bent" Spanish roof tiles (fingerprints can still be seen); a large pergola that is now mostly enclosed as part of the exposed ceiling in living room, intricate Spanish-style doors, windows and hardware and steel gears that lift the glass panels on the top and sides of the greenhouse.

We purchased the home in 2017 and as we learned of its history we made significant efforts to repair and restore the existing wood, tile, doors, steel gears and function to match the original design by R.W. Hills for the greenhouse, cottage and grounds. Even though the kitchen/dining was originally a workshop until 1940's, we have also maintained all the steel framing, windows and restored the original Douglas fir ceiling and steel-framed skylights. Much of the historical significance of the property surrounds the greenhouse, which was originally intended to grow coffee botanicals for experimentation and future development for the company. Although R.W. and the property caretaker did not have much success with coffee crops, they were able to successfully

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grow avocado plants and purported to have supplied a Stanford/Cal Big Game luncheon during the 1930's. Over the years since, the greenhouse has remained in use by artists, potters, jewelers and woodworkers.

We believe the history and architectural charm of the property at 14700 Manuella Rd. should be maintained in perpetuity and make it an excellent candidate to be designated as a historical landmark under Los Altos Hills Municipal Code 11-1.01. We appreciate your consideration and please feel free to reach out with any further questions or information.

Sincerely,

Brad and Sally Hauser

Please see the attached photos below for some more of the history for this wonderful property.

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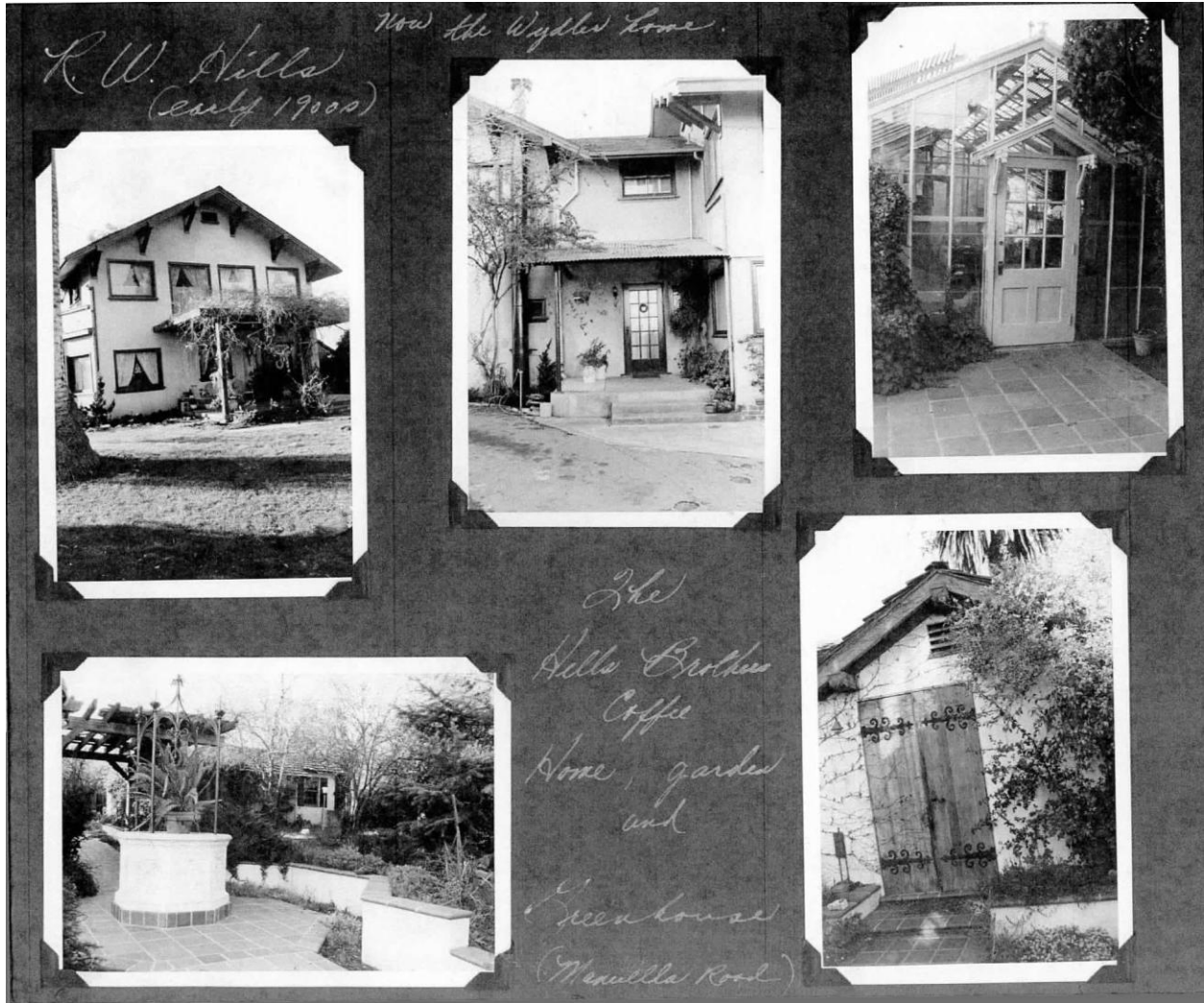
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Coffee magnates once tried to grow beans in Altos Hills

By John Hammarley
 Staff Writer

The founders of the firm that now brings you Juan Valdes extolling the virtues of Columbian-grown coffee dabbled in coffee growing themselves in the middle of the Los Altos Hills years ago.

Austin and Reuben Hills, better known as the Hills brothers, tried to "grow their own" in their respective estates in Los Altos Hills and Piedmont.

Reuben Hills, who lived in a large 33-acre compound in Los Altos Hills from about 1914 through 1948, decided while building his estate to include several greenhouses near the main house.

Located on rolling acreage near Manuella Avenue, the estate did not provide the most hospitable environs for coffee growing. Yet, neighbors were always curious about reports of coffee beans sprouting in the greenhouses.

At the same time his brother, Austin, was busy at his home in Piedmont cultivating the precious beans that would bring their families millions of dollars in later years.

T. Carroll Wilson, a former Hills Bros. company executive and now a historian for the firm, remembered Austin would coax the

to inspire other employees.

Wilson said Reuben Hills also grew avocados in his Los Altos Hills hothouses.

"He grew all sorts of strains and combinations," Wilson said.

Once Wilson was presented with an array of avocados when he traveled to the Los Altos Hills estate for a luncheon before the Big Game between Cal and Stanford.

A neighbor who lives on the estate said she discovered several horns thought to be used to call field hands in from the outer regions of the property. **

The Reuben Hills estate was subdivided several years ago. Several people now live there.

Little written history has been kept about the Hills estate and Reuben Hills' interest in growing coffee beans in Los Altos Hills.

After the Hills brothers died, the family continued the coffee business for two generations.

But three years ago, the third generation decided to sell out to a large Brazilian cooperative that deals in coffee and sugar.

Also gone are the reports of coffee growing in Reuben Hills' greenhouses.

A Scandinavian woman now lives on that

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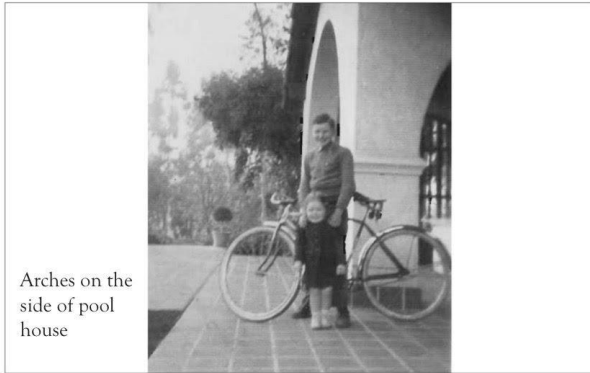
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R.W. Hills, 1931.

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PEEK INTO THE PAST



COURTESY OF LISA ROBINSON/LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM

Hills Barn, above, was located near the intersection of Salamontes Way and Estacada Drive in Los Altos Hills. Reuben Wilmarth Hills purchased the land, which had been the Clayton Fruit Ranch, in the early 1910s. In 1915, it was reported that he was “making extensive improvements about the place.” Reuben and his brother, Austin Herbert Hills, founded Hills Brothers Coffee of San Francisco.

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1914 Austin and Reuben Hills try to grow their own coffee beans at their respective estates in Los Altos Hills and Piedmont.

1925 Coffee roasting operations move to landmark brick building along the Embarcadero, San Francisco.

*1914–
1948* Reuben Hills built and resided in his Los Altos Hills 33 acre compound. This “Pool House” is steel reinforced – probably influenced by the 1906 earthquake.

Reuben Hills and the head caretaker of the estate, James M. Urquhart, experiment with coffee growing, but have much more success with Avocado crops, once providing the fruit for a luncheon before the Big Game between Cal and Stanford in the 1930s.

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