

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.

1. Name of Property

DRAFT

Historic name: Firma Lodge No. 27
 Other names/site number: Colored Veterans Hall of Vallejo, USO Georgia Street Center
 Name of related multiple property listing: African Americans in California, 1850-1974
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 1209 Georgia Street
 City or town: Vallejo State: California County: Solano
 Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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
 Applicable National Register Criteria:
 ___A ___B ___C ___D

_____ 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	

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

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

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

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Classical Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: CONCRETE, Walls: WOOD-
WEATHERBOARD and ASBESTOS, Roof:
Asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Firma Lodge No. 27, in central Vallejo, is a two-story social hall with an attic, constructed from 1916 to 1917 in a simple interpretation of the Classical Revival style. Built by members of the 9th and 10th Cavalry regiments (also known as Buffalo Soldiers) of the Colored War Veterans of the Spanish-American War, the building was first used as a veterans' social hall and a fraternal hall for Vallejo's local African American community. The building has also been used as a community event space, a church sanctuary, a USO Center for Colored Soldiers, and an office space. Significant features include massing, form, front-gable roof, wood siding, pedimented portico entryway with six square columns, and centered rectangular bay window. The building retains integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Narrative Description

Firma Lodge No. 27 is situated on a flat 4,500 square-foot mid-block parcel measuring 120 feet by 37.5 feet located near the southeast corner of Georgia Street and Amador Street. Neighboring

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

parcels include a commercial property with surface parking to the west and single-family residences, multi-family residences, and a commercial property with surface parking to the east. The building's primary (north) façade is set back from the Georgia Street sidewalk creating a shallow front yard. The east and west elevations are set back approximately three feet from the parcel's boundary fencing, a wood privacy fence. The west side yard is primarily occupied by an exterior wood staircase to the second floor of the building. The rear (south) elevation faces an unnamed alley and overlooks a modest backyard, with approximately half comprised of paved concrete patio and half of informal landscaping. The boundary fencing continues around the backyard.

The wood-frame building has rectilinear massing and a simple, rectangular plan. The building measures 30 feet wide and 72 feet long and rests on a concrete foundation. It has a front-gabled roof covered with composition shingles with slightly overhanging boxed eaves. A projecting wood cornice visually separates the second floor and attic level at the exterior, and continues along the length of the east, north, and west elevations. The building is clad with a variety of painted wood siding types, including drop wood siding at the first floor, narrow clapboard siding at the second floor and gable end; and asbestos siding at the second story of the rear elevation. Typical windows consist of one-over-one single-hung aluminum replacement windows of varying sizes. Windows have wood trim and sills. One window on the primary façade and two windows on the east elevation retain their original wood sashes.

EXTERIOR

Primary (North) Façade

The primary (north) façade addresses Georgia Street. It is three bays wide and displays a symmetrical arrangement of openings. A recessed entrance is located at the center of the first floor and includes a wood door with an upper square glazed panel flanked by sidelites. An elevated wood portico volume with a gable roof with boxed overhanging eaves spans the width of the central bay and accesses the primary entrance. The portico volume features a triangular pedimented portico to which is mounted a blue-and-white painted wood shield containing the words "Firma Lodge No. 27, F&AM, Member" at the top; a masonic symbol of a square and compass at the center; and the words "M.W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge F&AM, State of California Inc." below. The portico is supported by four simple square columns at the front and two square pilasters at the rear. Near each rear pilaster rests a wood mail/ballot box. The portico is accessed by three cement steps that lead up from a concrete pathway with white handrails.

The primary facade has eight windows: seven rectangular single-hung aluminum sashes with one-over-one glazing and one small wood-framed square window centered in the gable. The first floor includes a pair of single-hung windows on either side of the front entry. A centered rectangular bay window extends from the second floor to the peak of the roof gable and contains one small square wood framed window, which is flanked on either side by two other windows.

East Elevation

The east elevation contains five bays, with an irregular arrangement of windows. There are three original one-over-one wood-frame single-hung windows with ogee lugs at the first floor. Three

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

additional windows of similar size have been boarded over at an unknown date, though the painted wood trim remains visible around each. Second-floor openings are an evenly spaced arrangement of four one-over-one aluminum-frame single-hung windows with wood trim.

Rear (South) Elevation

The rear (south) elevation overlooks a small yard with a concrete patio, enclosed by a wood privacy fence, and an alleyway beyond. There are two entrances at the ground floor; one is contained within a shed-roofed addition at the west (left) corner, and the other is a six-panel wood door at the center of the façade within the primary volume of the building. The west door was boarded over at an unknown date and is inaccessible. There are three one-over-one aluminum-frame single-hung windows of varying sizes across the second floor. This includes one window on the west (left) side and a pair of smaller windows on the east (right) side. There is also a small one-over-one aluminum-frame single-hung window at the attic level, centered under the gable peak.

West Elevation

The west elevation overlooks a commercial parcel and Amador Street beyond. It is generally inaccessible due to vegetation and an exterior wood stair within a narrow side yard, which is enclosed by a wood privacy fence. Like the east elevation, the west elevation contains five bays and features an irregular window arrangement. Four one-over-one aluminum-frame single-hung windows are visible across the elevation, two at the ground floor and two at the second floor. The exterior wood stair accesses a second-story entrance, which is a solid wood door, and features a simple wood railing. There is a chain-link gate at the base of the stair, mounted to the northwest corner of the building.

INTERIOR

First Floor

The interior is divided into rectangular rooms of varied sizes. On the first floor, the primary entrance accesses an entry hall with doors to a meeting room on the east, a hallway to stairs on the southwest, and an office with a restroom and changing area on the west side. Flooring consists primarily of wood floors with non-historic carpet in the meeting room and tile in the restroom. A large dining room occupies the majority of the rear (south) portion of the first floor with access to the backyard. A kitchen is nested along the west side of this space along with a closet under the stairs. Ceilings are a mix of dropped acoustical tile panels and smooth plaster with storage spaces exhibiting unfinished ceilings that show exposed wood beams. Walls are a mix of painted plaster with wainscoting, non-historic wood paneling, and non-historic vinyl. Fixtures and furnishings do not appear to be historic. The wood stairs along the west side of the first floor connect to the second-floor meeting hall. The walls of the stair are painted board-and-batten with round wood handrails.

Second Floor

The second floor primarily contains the lodge room, historically used for official meetings and services. There is a landing area at the south end of the floor, which provides access to the main stairs, in addition to a storage area, with wood stairs to the unfinished attic level, and a restroom.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Second-floor ceilings are finished with rough-coat plaster and wood floors span all rooms on this level. Walls are finished in smooth plaster with board-and-batten wainscoting.

The lodge room is a rectangular space with architectural details and furniture oriented to the cardinal directions. The main entrance to the room is located near its southwest corner, flanked by two pillars topped with globes—one terrestrial and the other celestial—replicas of those that stood at the entrance to King Solomon's temple. The floor is raised along the perimeter of the room with built-in wood benches set between windows. The backs of these benches are level with the wainscoting that clads the lower portion of the lodge room's plaster walls. The walls also feature picture rails, from which many framed portrait photographs hang. The raised floor is enlarged at the center of the north end, creating a platform that holds the Worshipful Master's Chair. A metal "G" sign hangs at the center of the north wall above this platform, representing God; the Freemason blazing star also hangs on this wall. Freestanding desks for the Treasurer and Secretary flank the raised platform containing the Master's Chair. Along the opposite (south) wall is a small freestanding platform that holds a Warden's Chair. Another Warden's Chair is at the center of the east wall. A freestanding wood altar is located near the center of the room, with the remaining space largely open.

The east, north, and west walls each contain three balanced openings. While the east and north wall openings are typical windows, the west wall's center opening is a solid wood door, which accesses the exterior stair.

ALTERATIONS

Exterior and interior have been altered since the building's completion in 1917. A June 14, 1916 article in the *Vallejo Evening News* describes the property as a "two story frame building 30 feet by 66 feet in size. It will have a concrete foundation and will be plastered throughout. The front will be of stucco work."¹ Building permits for this property were not available to identify the dates of alterations before 1986, though based on historic aerial photographs the exterior west stair was added by 1950. The building measures approximately thirty feet by seventy-two feet due to a rear addition constructed at an unknown date. Also at an unknown date, all but three of the building's twenty-eight windows were altered from the original wood sashes to aluminum replacements. Three windows on the east elevation are boarded over and not visible.

At the interior, it is unknown if alterations to the first-floor floor plan have occurred, though it is likely with the addition of the kitchen at the southwest corner. The second floor and attic floor plans appear to be unaltered. Many interior finish materials have been replaced, such as carpet that has been laid over the original wood floors in the ground-floor meeting room and some original plaster walls have been clad with wood paneling. The majority of interior doors and fixtures have also been replaced, while the interior door of the left entryway at the rear elevation has been boarded up.

¹ *Vallejo Evening News*, "Lodge Hall Work Starts Tomorrow," June 14, 1916, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

INTEGRITY

Firma Lodge No. 27 retains integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building was one of the first constructed in this area of Vallejo and has never been moved, maintaining integrity of location. The building maintains its simple twentieth-century Classical Revival design, featuring a symmetrical two-story primary façade with a central steeple-like projection truncated at the roofline and a pedimented front porch with square columns. The building's character-defining features have been preserved, including its massing, gabled roof form with overhanging eaves, boxed cornice, wood siding, and recessed primary entrance. Simple, unique aspects of the building's design and window arrangement convey the design and workmanship of the builders, a group of local veteran volunteers from the Colored Veterans of the Spanish-American War, the 9th and 10th Cavalry of Buffalo Soldiers.

The building was constructed south of the city's railroad tracks during the decade when Vallejo's population began to grow. Firma Lodge No. 27 was one of the first properties to be built on its block. While the surrounding area has since been paved and developed from a primarily vacant area on Vallejo's urban periphery, these changes were mostly made during the period of significance while Firma Lodge No. 27 was in use for its original purpose as an assembly hall. Integrity of association and feeling have been retained, as the building continues to be used as a multi-purpose meeting hall for African American veterans and community members.

Only integrity of materials has been impaired. All but three of the building's twenty-eight original wood-sash windows have been replaced with aluminum-frame types. This alteration does not greatly affect the overall design or feeling of the building as the opening configuration as well as the original wood trim and sills at each window opening have been retained. Wood clapboard and wood shingle cladding was installed over the original stucco cladding, circa 1956 or earlier.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- 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

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black

SOCIAL HISTORY

RELIGION

Period of Significance

1917-1974

Significant Dates

1917

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Firma Lodge No. 27 is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black, Social History, and Religion. The parcel was originally purchased by the Veterans and Auxiliary Hall Association, formed by the Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry. The building was constructed by volunteer labor from members and completed in 1917 and was occupied by Firma Lodge No. 27 of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Free & Accepted Masons. As Vallejo's African American population grew, initially following the Spanish-American War as soldiers were discharged in San Francisco and attracted to the job opportunities afforded by the Mare Island Naval Shipyard and the rebuilding effort of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and again following the conclusion of World War II, the building served as a central hub for Black fraternal, civic, social, and religious organizations, offering vital community and housing support. The period of significance begins in 1917 with completion of construction and extends to 1974. This period reflects the span during which the building's significance is most directly associated with Vallejo's African American social, civic, and fraternal life within the broader context of twentieth century migration, wartime and postwar community formation, racial exclusion, and civil rights-era organizing. By the mid-1970s, the historical conditions that had shaped these patterns—including the conclusion of the Great Migration (approximately 1910-1970) and the evolution of Vallejo's African American community into a more established, multi-generational population—had begun to change. The end date to the period of significance therefore defines the close of the historic context evaluated in this nomination and is not intended to suggest an end to the building's community role, which continues to the present. As a meeting place for several African American religious organizations, Firma Lodge No. 27 meets Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties because its primary significance is derived from its association with Vallejo's early African American community, particularly soldiers who had previously fought in the Spanish-American War, and the building's role as a social gathering place. The religious functions hosted in the building were not the sole or primary intention for its purpose. As a property type associated with social clubs and organizations, specifically "Fraternal Lodges, Clubhouses, and Meeting Spaces" as a locally significant purpose-built lodge constructed by African American volunteer labor for the local African American community in Vallejo, Firma Lodge No. 27 meets the registration requirements of the *African Americans in California, 1850-1974* Multiple Property Submission in the context of "Making a Life."

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

Background

Brief History of Vallejo, California

The area that became Vallejo was first inhabited by the Coastal Miwoks, the Suisunes, and other Patwin people, whose villages along San Pablo Bay thrived on the region's abundant plant and

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

wildlife resources. The first documented European encounter came in 1775, when Spanish explorers crossed San Pablo Bay and named the Carquinez Strait “Puerto de la Asunción de Nuestra Señora.” Despite recognizing the fertility of the land, Spanish and later Mexican settlers did not establish a permanent presence until 1844, when General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo received the 80,000-acre Rancho Soscol land grant from the Mexican government.²

Following the American annexation of California in 1846, General Vallejo sought to ensure his influence in the new political order. In 1850, he offered to donate 156 acres of Rancho Soscol to the State of California in exchange for relocating the capital from San Jose to his planned community, initially named Eureka and later renamed Vallejo in his honor. Although the State Legislature officially moved to Vallejo in 1851, the city’s rough conditions, such as unfinished buildings, muddy roads, and inadequate accommodations, led lawmakers to relocate the capital to Benicia in 1853.³ Despite this setback, the city’s deep-water harbor and proximity to the Carquinez Strait soon positioned Vallejo as a strategic center for maritime commerce and industry.

Vallejo’s economic fortunes grew alongside the establishment of Mare Island Naval Shipyard in 1854.⁴ While the naval base was technically a separate installation, its presence spurred local employment and urban development. Vallejo became home to shipyard workers and their families, and businesses catering to the Navy and maritime trade flourished. By the late 1860s, Vallejo was incorporated as a city and formally platted in a gridiron street pattern.

The arrival of the California Pacific Railroad in 1867 further accelerated Vallejo’s growth. As the southern terminus of the line to Sacramento, the city became a major shipping point for the Central Valley’s wheat crop, with warehouses, flour mills, and docks lining the waterfront.⁵ Industrial and civic construction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected Vallejo’s prosperity.

World War I and especially World War II marked periods of explosive growth. The Navy’s expansion drew thousands of workers to Mare Island, and federal programs constructed large-scale housing tracts, including Bay Terrace, Carquinez Heights, and Chabot Terrace, to accommodate the influx.⁶ Vallejo’s population swelled from fewer than 30,000 residents in 1940 to more than 80,000 by 1942. Migrants included Dust Bowl refugees from Oklahoma and

² Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum, “Vallejo - Our History,” <https://vallejomuseum.net/vallejo-history/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

³ Robert R. McCormick, *California’s Capital Saga: Vallejo, Benicia, and Sacramento* (California Historical Society Quarterly 34, no. 2, 1955).

⁴ According to local legend, General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo named the island “Mare Island” (originally Isla de la Yegua, or “Island of the Mare”) after one of his prized mares swam ashore there following a capsizing incident while herding livestock across the Carquinez Strait. (City of Vallejo Marina, “History of Vallejo,” <https://vallejomarina.com/vallejo-marina/history-of-vallejo/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵ James E. Britton, *The Development of Vallejo and Mare Island* (Vallejo Historical Society, 1985).

⁶ Jeffrey Stine, “Wartime Housing and Shipyard Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area,” *Journal of Urban History* 12, no. 2 (1986): 117-143.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Arkansas as well as African Americans from Louisiana and Texas, shaping Vallejo into one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the Bay Area.

Although Mare Island remained central to the local economy for over a century, Vallejo's developmental history reflects broader patterns of California urbanization: speculative land development, reliance on transportation and shipping infrastructure, rapid wartime population growth, and cycles of prosperity followed by economic contraction. Mare Island Naval Shipyard closed in 1996. Vallejo's trajectory illustrates the opportunities and challenges faced by mid-sized California cities shaped by military-industrial growth.

Vallejo and the Great Migration

African Americans from the rural Deep South migrated in large numbers to Northern, Midwestern, and Western cities during the early decades of the twentieth century, seeking to escape the oppressive constraints of Jim Crow segregation and to pursue new opportunities in industry and urban life. In California, the African American population steadily increased between the first phase of the Great Migration and the onset of World War II (roughly 1910 to 1939), with the most dramatic growth occurring between 1916 and 1918 as wartime industries created heightened demand for labor. Vallejo reflected these same patterns of residential settlement, commercial development, and displacement. By the turn of the twentieth century, the city's population was beginning to diversify; in Solano County, the Black population quadrupled from fifty-four individuals in 1900 to 210 in 1910.⁷ Among those who settled in Vallejo were members of the Buffalo Soldiers, or the African American regiments of the 9th and 10th Cavalry, who were stationed at Mare Island Naval Shipyard following the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), as the Army sought to reinforce garrisons in the Bay Area.⁸

An April 8, 1920, article in the *Vallejo Evening Chronicle* reported that Vallejo's population had grown from 11,340 to 16,853 residents, a forty-eight percent overall increase that included a fifty percent rise in the city's African American population.⁹ These migration patterns in the first decades of the twentieth century demonstrated that Vallejo, with its military base and associated employment opportunities, was viewed as a viable destination for African American families seeking greater economic and social stability. While the city experienced a population dip to 14,476 (297 or two percent were identified as "Negro") in 1930, it saw explosive growth to

⁷ Sharon McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century: African Americans in Solano, Napa, and Sonoma Counties from 1845 to 1925* (2009), Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Press, 59.

⁸The Buffalo Soldiers were African American Army regiments. The creation of these units came through the Reorganization Act of 1866. This act, created by President Andrew Johnson during the post-Civil War reconstruction era, removed African American soldiers from integrated Army regiments in the Southern States. Their removal led to the formation of the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry of African American Soldiers. The 9th and 10th Cavalry made up twenty percent of the Army's post-Civil War horsemen. While some Buffalo Soldiers were born Free, the majority were formerly enslaved people looking for a new way of life. The Buffalo Soldiers fought in the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War (Cuba and the Philippines), World War I, World War II, and the Korean War before racial integration of the military beginning in 1948. See the National Park Service's "Presidio of San Francisco: The Buffalo Soldier."

⁹ McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, 59.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

20,072 (549 or 2.7 percent were identified as “Negro”) in 1940 and 26,038 (1,513 or six percent were identified as “Negro”) in 1950, mirroring the national economic trends during the years of the Great Depression (1929 to 1939) and World War II (1939 to 1945).¹⁰

Establishment and Early Years of Vallejo’s Colored Veterans’ Hall

Colored Veterans’ Hall

As Vallejo’s population grew and diversified during the early twentieth century, racial discrimination intensified. The divide between White and African American residents extended even into veterans’ organizations, like local lodges and halls and later the United Service Organizations (USO). A collective of African American veterans, primarily members of the 9th and 10th Buffalo Soldier Cavalry and other African American war veterans from units like “Captain Charles Young Camp No. 6” formed to support one another. These veterans often faced exclusion and discrimination when attempting to access resources, like housing or dining at restaurants, or to participate in community events in Vallejo.¹¹

When Buffalo Soldiers and other African American veterans arrived in Vallejo, they frequently gathered on local street corners to socialize and build community.¹² As their numbers increased, this collective negotiated limited access to the city’s Veterans Hall, which had been established for White veterans.¹³ Although the group was able to organize dances, banquets, and other social events for the African American community in the shared space, their use of the hall was short-lived.¹⁴ Racially motivated hostility, frequent interruptions, and broader discrimination curtailed their efforts.¹⁵

In 1916, this veterans’ collective, the Veterans and Auxiliary Hall Association, purchased a portion of “Lot 11, Block 272, Vallejo,” later addressed as 1209 Georgia Street.¹⁶ Members of the Association included William Fryson, B. Johnston, John L. Malone, E.U. Moore, Alexander Morrow, George W. Posey, and W.C. Wyne, residents of Vallejo, Spanish War veterans, and trustees of the Captain Charles Young Camp No. 6. Construction of this “Colored Veterans’ Hall” and “Negro Masons of California” lodge was completed in early 1917.¹⁷

¹⁰ United States Federal Census, “California: Composition of the population for cities of 10,000 or more,” 1930 and 1940. Bay Area Census, “Vallejo: Decennial Census Data, 1950,” <https://census.bayareametro.gov/historical-data/1950/vallejo> (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹¹ *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, “Colored People Would Finance Lodging House,” April 26, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹² *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, “Colored Vets Will Convene,” June 26, 1911, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹³ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Auxiliary Was Organized,” March 25, 1915, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁴ *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, “News in Brief,” June 6, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁵ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Policeman Named for Vets’ Hall,” July 6, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁶ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Documents Recorded: Deeds,” August 2, 1916, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁷ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Finish Veterans’ Hall Next Month,” December 12, 1916, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Recognizing the potential of their new facility to serve as a headquarters for additional civic and fraternal organizations, the veterans understood that property ownership conferred the right to request municipal services. On June 7, 1917, just months after the building's completion, the group formally petitioned the City of Vallejo for police protection to safeguard their gatherings from racially motivated harassment and disruption.¹⁸ Within thirty days, the city assigned a police officer to the lodge. This milestone established 1209 Georgia Street as a secure and enduring hub for African American social, cultural, and civic life in Vallejo, fostering the growth of community institutions and contributing to broader movements for equality and social change across the Bay Area.

Most Worshipful Prince Hall Free & Accepted Masons of Firma Lodge No. 27

The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Free & Accepted Masons of Firma Lodge No. 27 has been headquartered at 1209 Georgia Street since June 5, 1918. Several Buffalo Soldiers who helped build the Colored Veterans Hall were founding members of Firma Lodge No. 27.¹⁹ The Prince Hall Free & Accepted Masons (Prince Hall F&AM) is the oldest African American organization in the United States.²⁰ The organization is named after its founder, Prince Hall (ca. 1748-1807), an African American abolitionist and civil rights activist from Boston, Massachusetts.²¹

Formation of Firma Lodge No. 27 began in August 1917, with members inducted in October 1917.²² This was the second attempt to organize a Masonic lodge for African American men in the City of Vallejo, and the men were determined to create a lasting organization. Because of this, they named the lodge "Firma," referencing the phrase "firmer ground or foundation."²³ The Lodge was established by Grand Master T.A. Harris of the Negro Masons of California, L.J. Williams, A. (Alex) Taylor, James E. Berry, and W.C. Wyne.²⁴ During the week of November 19, 1918, Firma Lodge No. 27 began meeting at 1209 Georgia Street at the "hall of the Negro

¹⁸ *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, "Policeman Named for Vets Hall," July 6, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁹ McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, 44.

²⁰ Prince Hall, *A Charge, Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797*, <https://guides.loc.gov/prince-hall-freemasonry> (accessed September 12, 2025).

²¹ In 1775, Hall and fourteen other Free Black men in Boston, who had been initiated into the Free Masons, banded together to request an official charter from the Grand Lodge of England to establish an African American lodge in the United States. When approved, the African Lodge No. 459 was established and later became African Lodge No. 1 in the United States. For nearly 300 years, the Prince Hall F&AM have worked to improve the life conditions of Blacks and African Americans in the United States. The order has served as a pathway to citizenship and advanced education for many individuals within the African diaspora. Prince Hall F&AM was founded on Christian principles and prides itself on making "good men better." The fraternity does not get involved in religion or politics and focuses on building up men of character dedicated to charity. See <https://guides.loc.gov/prince-hall-freemasonry>.

²² "64th Annual Communication of the Most Worshipful Sovereign Grand Lodge Free & Accepted Masons for California," June 3-5, 1918, 23.

²³ Sarah Rohrs, "Firma Lodge Takes Pride in its History," *Vallejo Times-Herald*, October 25, 2009.

²⁴ *Vallejo Evening News*, "Negro Masons Have Lodge in Vallejo," November 19, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Spanish War Veterans.”²⁵ Its founding members were described as “25 of the best-known colored men of the community” and met two times a week during the first year.²⁶

Other African American Associations at the Colored Veterans Hall

In addition to Firma Lodge No. 27, 1209 Georgia Street became the community meeting space of the following twentieth-century African American fraternal, civic, social, and religious organizations.

El Dorado Lodge No. 9429 of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows

One of the first fraternal orders created for African Americans in Vallejo was the El Dorado Lodge of Oddfellows, Colored, which was founded in 1913. A 1917 article in the *Vallejo Evening News* stated, “the Colored Oddfellows is the strongest fraternal order in the world among the colored people, having close to half a million.”²⁷ City of Vallejo records show that several officers of the Veterans and Auxiliary Hall Association were also members or leaders of El Dorado Lodge. Prior to the construction of the building at 1209 Georgia Street, El Dorado Lodge met and held events at the Vallejo Labor Temple.²⁸ In July 1916, while 1209 Georgia Street was under construction, the *Vallejo Evening News* announced that the building was to be the future home of the Colored Veterans and El Dorado Lodge of Oddfellows, colored.²⁹ It is not known how long the Oddfellows used the building.

Household of Ruth No. 5085 of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows

The Household of Ruth No. 5085, the women’s auxiliary to El Dorado Lodge of Oddfellows, was organized in Vallejo in 1915 and occasionally used the building at 1209 Georgia Street for special events during the early 1920s.³⁰ As the women’s branch of the Colored Oddfellows, the Household of Ruth provided African American women with opportunities for civic leadership and community service that paralleled the efforts of their male counterparts. While the group did not hold regular meetings at the Firma Lodge No. 27 building, records show that members hosted concerts, fundraisers, and social gatherings at the hall, though the exact years of their use is unknown.

²⁵ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Negro Masons Have Lodge in Vallejo,” November 19, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

²⁶ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Negro Masons Have Lodge in Vallejo,” November 19, 1917, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

²⁷ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Colored Lodge Had Time,” February 13, 1914 www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

²⁸ *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, “Colored Order Gives Banquet,” February 13, 1914, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

²⁹ *Vallejo Evening News*, “Fraternal Hall is Rapidly Taking Shape,” July 17, 1916, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

³⁰ *Vallejo Tribune*, “Household Ruth Club Hold Entertainment,” March 29, 1915. *Vallejo Evening News*, “Local Jottings,” June 19, 1920, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

The Booker T. Washington Community Service Club

On August 2, 1919, the War Camp Community Service (WCCS) established the Booker T. Washington Community Service Club for African American veterans at 1209 Georgia Street.³¹ The WCCS was created by the U.S. government in April 1917 at the request of the Commissions for Training Camp Activities of the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy. The WCCS was managed by the Playground and Recreation Association of America to meet the “social hunger of enlisted men” by providing “better sources of entertainment” during free time.³² According to U.S. military leadership, men involved in the armed forces in the late nineteenth century were overwhelmed from home sickness and regularly made “immoral” decisions such as indulging in vices and contracting venereal disease.³³ To combat these unsavory impacts of war on young men, the WCCS established community centers for soldiers—primarily White—and coordinated access to films, theatres, libraries, museums, swimming pools, gymnasiums, athletic fields, social clubs, musical concerts, games, food, showers, lodging, and dancing, and opportunities to meet moral women.³⁴

In the fall of 1917, the WCCS acknowledged that the social needs of the Black soldier were “identical” to those of the White soldier and should be addressed.³⁵ The WCCS cited lack of funding and varying levels of prejudice within communities as the main delay for establishing services for African American soldiers; however, once funding was allocated, the WCCS established clubs for African American soldiers across the United States. The WCCS Clubs for Colored Soldiers provided a safe space for “holiday festivities” for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Emancipation Day (Juneteenth).³⁶ In addition, the WCCS centers helped solve the housing crisis of African American soldiers who had trouble finding housing during training camp sessions due to racial discrimination.³⁷ It is not known how long the WCCS used the building at 1209 Georgia Street.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is “one of the nation’s oldest grassroots civil rights organizations... dedicated to serving the community.”³⁸ The NAACP

³¹ *Vallejo Evening Chronicle*, “Community Camp Colored Home Opened,” August 2, 1919, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

³² Lee, Joseph. “War Camp Community Service,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 79 (1918): 189-194, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1013978> (accessed September 12, 2025).

³³ Lee, “War Camp Community Service,” 190-192.

³⁴ Lee, “War Camp Community Service,” 192-193.

³⁵ Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Democracy and the Colored Soldier: War camp community service for the colored soldier, sailor and marine*, ca. September 1919. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

³⁶ Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Democracy and the Colored Soldier: War camp community service for the colored soldier, sailor and marine*.

³⁷ Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Democracy and the Colored Soldier: War camp community service for the colored soldier, sailor and marine*. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, “Vallejo, Cal.,” 1919.

³⁸ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), “Our History,” <https://naacp.org/about/our-history#:~:text=Accordingly%2C%20the%20NAACP's%20mission%20is,the%20acclaimed%20publication%20of%20theNAACP> (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Branch No. 1081 in Vallejo, California was established in 1918.³⁹ One of the first events hosted by the NAACP at the Colored Veterans' Hall on Georgia Street was a lecture by Professor William Pickens, Dean of the historically Black Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 20, 1918.⁴⁰

Kyles Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church

Kyles Temple African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was founded in Vallejo in 1910.⁴¹ From 1921 to 1922, the congregation met and held church events at 1209 Georgia Street after their church building was burned down by an arsonist who had been harassing the congregation for six months.⁴²

Other fraternal or civil organizations, such as the Order of the Eastern Star's Semper Fidelus Sisterhood Chapter (established in 1923) and Oriental Chapter (established in 1953), Amicus Lodge No. 28 (the Filipino auxiliary of Prince Hall F&AM, established in 1944), Harmony Court Lodge (established in 1944), and George W. Posey Lodge No. 77 (established in 1953), appear in some early to mid-twentieth-century accounts as using the Firma Lodge No. 27 building, though their exact years of usage are not documented. Some of these groups are primarily associated with the Labor Temple at 316 Virginia Street, about a mile away, suggesting that minority civic and fraternal groups clustered in this area of downtown Vallejo to provide for social, cultural, and mutual-aid purposes. This geographical proximity among diverse organizations underscores how Firma Lodge No. 27 functioned as part of a broader network of community institutions serving Vallejo's African American, Filipino, and other minority populations.

³⁹ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "Vallejo Branch NAACP To Observe 30th Anniversary," July 24, 1948, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁰ *Vallejo Evening News*, "Prof. W. Pickens Made Fine Address," July 22, 1918, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025). The NAACP was founded in 1909 by a multiethnic group of male and female activists, journalists, philanthropists, sociologists, orators, social workers, religious leaders, nurses, and lawyers. These prominent individuals came together to form an organization that would "advocate the civil and political rights of African Americans." The organization's founders believed that American democracy should be synonymous with civil, religious, and political freedom. As they observed the happenings within the U.S. in the early twentieth century, they saw a society torn apart by racial tension. See NAACP's "Our History" source.

⁴¹ McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, xxv.

⁴² *Vallejo Evening News*, "Brand Firing of Church Insolence," December 3, 1919; The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was formed in 1796 by Free African Americans in New York City, determined to pursue a culturally relevant form of Methodism. AME Zionism emerged during the nineteenth century. AME Zion Churches, also known as "Freedom Churches," helped enslaved African Americans in Southern states escape to the North. In the early twentieth century, a new branch of AME Zionism, Kyles Temple African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church (Kyles Temple), was founded by Bishop Linwood Westinghouse Kyles in Duram, North Carolina. Since that time Kyles Temple churches have been established in various historically Black communities. See "African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church" source.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

World War II Era at the Colored Veterans' Hall

USO Georgia Street/ USO Colored Center and Post 619 of the American Legion

At the onset of World War II, Mare Island Naval Shipyard experienced unprecedented expansion, employing more than 40,000 workers at its wartime peak to repair ships, build submarines, and support aircraft operations.⁴³ The influx of African American workers and service members to Vallejo created a growing need for safe and welcoming community spaces, as segregation and racial discrimination persisted despite official U.S. military policies prohibiting such practices.⁴⁴

To address this inequity, the United Service Organizations for National Defense, Inc. (USO) established "Colored USO Centers" across the country to serve African American soldiers.⁴⁵ In Vallejo, the Booker T. Washington Service Club appears to have been the catalyst associated with the building's use as a colored USO center, beginning in 1943.⁴⁶ Founded in 1941 as a nonprofit coalition, the USO provided morale, welfare, and recreation services to members of the U.S. Armed Forces, offering spaces for rest, socialization, and community connection.

Operating from 1943 to 1947 and again during the 1960s, the USO at 1209 Georgia Street functioned as the designated USO center for African American soldiers and veterans in Vallejo.⁴⁷ Beyond typical USO social programming, the center also provided housing for Black veterans returning from the war, who faced widespread housing discrimination in the city.⁴⁸ During this period, Post 619 of the American Legion was also located at 1209 Georgia Street, where it played a vital role in ensuring that African American veterans received their military benefits and access to housing assistance.⁴⁹

Post-World War II and Ownership Transfer to Firma Lodge No. 27

The population of the Vallejo more than doubled between 1950 and 1960, and the African American community alone rose from 1,513 people to 10,053 individuals during that time

⁴³ Denise Bradley, "Mare Island Cultural Landscape Report-Final," March 2015, 0-10, <https://californiapreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ALL.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁴ PBS, "USO – For the Troops: A Home for African American Troops," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Unwnc9EruPQ> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁵ USO, "Hattiesburg USO was a Sanctuary During World War II," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTTmCr_Z3V8 (accessed September 12, 2025). The USO was a coalition of social welfare organizations that united to support the morale of American soldiers during World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt created this private sector agency on February 4, 1941 to build upon the work of the War Camp Community Service (WCCS) of World War I. See Library of Congress' "Home Away From Home."

⁴⁶ United Service Organizations (USO), "Our History," <https://www.uso.org/about> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁷ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "USO Georgia Street Draws High Praise for Program Here," December 31, 1944, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁸ McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, 47.

⁴⁹ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "Post 619 to Aid Pay Applicants," August 25, 1946, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

period.⁵⁰ Firma Lodge No. 27 greatly benefited from the second phase of the Great Migration of African Americans to the West during the World War II era. New members joined Prince Hall Masons, and through Firma Lodge No. 27, several Prince Hall Mason affiliated lodges were launched. Increased membership in the 1940s provided the financial backing needed for Firma Lodge No. 27 to purchase 1209 Georgia Street from the Veterans and Auxiliary Hall Association in 1946.⁵¹

Under the ownership of Firma Lodge No. 27, 1209 Georgia Street continued to serve as an important cultural center for the African American community in Vallejo and also took on a new role of providing housing and housing finance navigation services. The USO continued to lease space at 1209 Georgia Street through the late 1960s.⁵² Three local African American churches were formed during the 1950s and 1960s that held congregational meetings in this lodge for a minimum of five years: The Deliverance Center, Friendship Baptist Church, and Macedonia Pentecostal.⁵³

Urban Renewal and the Fight Against Housing Inequality in Vallejo

From the summer of 1946 to 1965, the Vallejo Branch of the NAACP met at 1209 Georgia Street, which was referred to as the USO building and the Masonic Hall during this period.⁵⁴ During this time, the President of the NAACP was James Owens, Sr., who also served in a leadership position for Firma Lodge No. 27.

This strengthened alliance between Firma Lodge No. 27 and the NAACP was advantageous for the African American community in Vallejo. When World War II ended and soldiers returned home, many had new GI loans to purchase homes. Housing continued to be hard to obtain because of racially restrictive covenants. This circumstance worsened once the Federal Housing Act of 1949 was passed. The Act initiated what is known as the urban redevelopment or urban renewal era in the United States by allocating funding that covered two-thirds of the costs for city governments to revive their locales by demolishing run down, “blighted areas” with new housing and city attractions that would improve safety and tourism.⁵⁵

In 1956, ten years after acquiring 1209 Georgia Street, Firma Lodge No. 27 paid off the remaining mortgage and celebrated the milestone with a community-wide Mortgage Burning

⁵⁰ State of California Department of Finance, “Historical Census Populations of Counties and Incorporated Cities in California, 1850-2020,” https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Reports/Demographic_Reports/documents/2020-1850_STCO_IncCities.xlsx (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵¹ McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, 48.

⁵² Rohrs, “Firma Lodge Takes Pride in its History.”

⁵³ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, “Friendship Baptist Church,” January 7, 1950; *Vallejo Times-Herald*, “Additional Churches: Deliverance Center,” March 26, 1960; *Vallejo Times-Herald*, “Additional Churches: Macedonia Pentecostal- 1209 Georgia Street,” February 29, 1964, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵⁴ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, “Colored People to Meet Sunday,” June 22, 1946; *Vallejo Times-Herald*, “NAACP to Hear Postal Official,” February 22, 1963, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵⁵ Brendan Riley, “Brendan Riley’s Solano Chronicles: Vallejo’s urban renewal effort had mixed results,” *Vallejo Times-Herald*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.timesheraldonline.com/2018/04/13/brendan-rileys-solano-chronicles-vallejos-urban-renewal-effort-had-mixed-results/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

Ceremony.⁵⁶ That same year, the City of Vallejo established a Redevelopment Agency, which by 1960 initiated demolition of the city's historic urban core.⁵⁷ These redevelopment efforts disproportionately impacted communities of color, displacing families from long-established homes and, in many cases, rendering them ineligible for newly constructed public housing. The program compounded the effects of redlining, a discriminatory practice that denied loans and services based on race and neighborhood, resulting in widespread disinvestment and decline in targeted areas. Urban renewal projects, often mapped directly onto redlined districts, relied on eminent domain to raze existing buildings and replace them with new government facilities, commercial centers, and civic improvements, frequently at the expense of residents and local businesses. By 1970, more than 500 buildings across 100 acres of land had been demolished, including many of Vallejo's oldest homes and much of its affordable housing stock. In their place rose new government buildings, public service facilities, and a redeveloped waterfront, projects that came at significant social and cultural cost to the city's African American community.

From the 1950s to 1970s, Firma Lodge No. 27 and the NAACP took an active stance against racially motivated discrimination in the housing and financial industries and provided solutions to their ethnic community. In 1953, the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Masons organization approved the establishment of a Credit Union initiative.⁵⁸ The Credit Unions would have offices at Masonic Lodges in certain cities. In 1954, Firma Lodge No. 27 became one of the new locations for the credit union.⁵⁹ In these early years, Grace Logan Patterson worked as the credit union's secretary.⁶⁰ In 1960, the Grand Master reported that the credit unions had secured \$60,000 and were financially healthy.⁶¹

In 1955, Firma Lodge No. 27 provided office space in its building at 1209 Georgia Street to Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, one of the largest Black-owned insurance companies in the United States, founded in 1925 to provide life insurance and financial services to African Americans who were often excluded from mainstream institutions. This Vallejo branch was managed by Hillard P. Young, an African American businessman widely respected in the community and remembered as "the Man with the Golden Pen" for his skill in salesmanship and writing.⁶² Thus, during the era of urban redevelopment when housing discrimination was at its peak and African Americans were struggling to obtain loans, insurance,

⁵⁶ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "Lodge To Burn Mortgage Here In Ceremonies," June 9, 1956, www.newspapers.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵⁷ *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "Lodge To Burn Mortgage Here In Ceremonies," June 9, 1956.

⁵⁸ Riley, "Brendan Riley's Solano Chronicles: Vallejo's urban renewal effort had mixed results," *Vallejo Times-Herald*, April 12, 2018.

⁵⁹ "Credit Unions," *Prince Hall Masonic Digest*, First Quarter, 1953-1954, 7.

⁶⁰ Patterson was also Vallejo's first Black teacher (1949), a career she maintained for 25 years, and a lifelong civic leader. *Vallejo Times-Herald*, "Museum honors Vallejo's first black teacher, Grace Logan Patterson," August 30, 2018, <https://www.timesheraldonline.com/2010/02/28/museum-honors-vallejos-first-black-teacher-grace-logan-patterson/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶¹ "Credit Unions," *Prince Hall Masonic Digest*, First Quarter, 1953-1954, 7.

⁶² Sharon McGriff-Payne, *Images of America: African Americans in Vallejo* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing: 2012), 15.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

and other financial services, Firma Lodge No. 27 stood as a beacon of hope for African Americans in Vallejo, showing that property ownership was possible with support from the community.

By the early 1970s, Vallejo's African American community had largely transitioned from a population defined by in-migration to one characterized by permanence, generational continuity, and established institutions, marking the close of the Great Migration era (1910-1970). The majority of Black residents had arrived from Southern states during earlier decades to work in defense-related industries, particularly at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, and by 1970 had formed a stable and deeply rooted community with growing economic and social infrastructure.⁶³ This period reflected broader statewide patterns identified in the *African Americans in California Multiple Property Document*, in which migration gave way to "settling-in" period of consolidation, community-building, and increased civic engagement.⁶⁴

In Vallejo, this shift was evident in the strengthening of local organizations such as the NAACP chapter and Bay Area Employees for Equal Opportunity, which focused on education, employment, housing, and police relations following the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, as well as in the emergence of a second generation of African Americans born and raised in the city.⁶⁵ The Firma Lodge No. 27 building continued to serve important roles into the early 1970s—including hosting the Sweet Lillie Primitive Baptist Church congregation through early 1973 when it acquired its own church building at 140 Daniels Avenue, as well as meetings of the George W. Posey Lodge No. 77 of the Free & Accepted Masons. As the 1970s progressed, the broader social and physical restructuring of Vallejo, driven by urban renewal, changing economic conditions, and the gradual dispersal of long-established neighborhoods, signaled a transition away from the historic patterns of community formation that had defined the building's earlier significance.⁶⁶ By 1974, these cumulative changes marked the end of the building's primary period of historical importance within the context of African American migration, settlement, and community development in Vallejo.

Firma Lodge No. 27: 1975 to 1996

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the City of Vallejo experienced economic challenges. The Mare Island Naval Shipyard workforce had steadily declined each decade after World War II as the Navy changed its priority from shipbuilding to nuclear-powered weapons

⁶³ Bay Area Census, "Historical Data: Vallejo, 1970," <https://census.bayareametro.gov/historical-data/1970/vallejo> (accessed April 7, 2026).

⁶⁴ Architectural Resources Group and Historic Resources Group, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African Americans in California, 1850-1974 DRAFT," https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1067/files/CA_Multiple%20Counties_African%20Americans%20in%20CA%20MP_DF_DRAFT.pdf (accessed April 7, 2026).

⁶⁵ Stephen Menendian and Samir Gambhir, "Racial Segregation in the San Francisco Bay Area, Part 2," Othering & Belonging Institute, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/racial-segregation-san-francisco-bay-area-part-2> (accessed April 7, 2026).

⁶⁶ Vallejo Times-Herald, "Posey Masonic Lodge Seats Officers," February 23, 1973. Vallejo Times-Herald, "Open House Service Sunday," March 9, 1973.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

and submarines.⁶⁷ In 1972, Mare Island stopped constructing new nuclear submarines, though it continued to refuel and repair the nuclear-powered fleet until the base's closure in 1996. The end of the Cold War in 1989 led to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, which aimed to reduce the size of the U.S. military and consolidate facilities. In 1993, President Bill Clinton recommended the closure of Mare Island, and Congress approved the recommendation. When the shipyard closed in 1996, thousands became unemployed.

Fraternal lodges throughout Vallejo felt the effect as their members moved away for new job opportunities through the 1970s and 1980s. Firma Lodge No. 27 maintained its reputation as an anchor for the African American community in Vallejo, including access to the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Free & Accepted Masons Credit Union until 1989, when the Masons disbanded all credit unions and liquidated the assets.⁶⁸

The year 1996 marked the reconciliation and mutual recognition between the Grand Lodge of California and the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California. Before this landmark agreement, Prince Hall lodges, like Vallejo's Firma Lodge No. 27, operated as separate institutions due to a longstanding tradition of racial segregation in American Freemasonry. The 1996 accord, ending over a century of racial division within California's Masonic community, enabled members of both organizations to formally collaborate, eliminating the need for parallel, and at times unequal, operations.⁶⁹ This change ended the era defined by segregated lodges and initiated a new, unified period of Masonic life in the state, shifting the historical lens through which buildings like Firma Lodge No. 27 at 1209 Georgia Street in Vallejo are viewed.

Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties

Although Firma Lodge No. 27 was occasionally used as a meeting place for religious congregations, its function was never limited to worship and/or religious services. The building primarily served as a civic meeting space and assembly hall for Masonic activities and broader community gatherings. Freemasonry, while incorporating a spiritual dimension through belief in a higher power (sometimes referred to as the "Great Architect of the Universe"), is non-sectarian and does not endorse any specific faith. It emphasizes universal moral and ethical principles, such as integrity, charity, brotherhood, and service, that are broadly consistent across many religions. Therefore, the building meets Criteria Consideration A as its significance is rooted in its central role in supporting African American social, civic, and fraternal life in Vallejo.

⁶⁷ Naval History and Heritage Command, "Mare Island Naval Shipyard," <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/organization-and-administration/historic-bases/mare-island.html> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁸ San Juan, "For California's Prince Hall Masons, A State of Belonging," <https://californiafreemason.org/2024/06/19/prince-hall-history/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁹ Stewart, "A New Beginning," <https://californiafreemason.org/2021/09/02/a-new-beginning/#:~:text=The%20Grand%20Lodge%20of%20California%20and%20the,the%20World%20Conference%20on%20Freemasonry%20in%202015> (accessed September 12, 2025).

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

CONCLUSION

Firma Lodge No. 27 is eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black, Social History, and Religion for its continuous role as a hub of African American community life from 1917, when construction was completed, to 1974, the year by which the cumulative impacts of urban renewal, population displacement, and shifting community institutions in Vallejo contributed to a decline in the building's prominence. Constructed by volunteer labor from African American veterans, many of them Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry, the lodge provided space for fraternal orders, veterans' groups, civic organizations, and churches at a time when African Americans faced widespread exclusion from Vallejo's institutions. It hosted the city's first NAACP chapter, supported housing and financial equity through a Masonic credit union and insurance office, and served as Vallejo's designated African American USO center during World War II. The property is nominated under the cover of *African Americans in California, 1850-1974* under the theme "Making a Life," meeting the registration requirements as an example of the property type "Fraternal Lodges, Clubhouses, and Meeting Spaces." Constructed by and for the African American community, Firma Lodge No. 27 stands as a rare surviving example of a purpose-built African American fraternal hall in Northern California. Its uninterrupted association with pivotal events in African American history—military service, the Great Migration, civil rights activism, and the struggle for economic and housing equity—establishes its eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Architectural Resources Group and Historic Resources Group, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: African Americans in California, 1850-1974 DRAFT,"

https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1067/files/CA_Multiple%20Counties_African%20Americans%20in%20CA%20MPDF_DRAFT.pdf.

Bay Area Census. "Vallejo: Decennial Census Data, 1950."

<https://census.bayareametro.gov/historical-data/1950/vallejo>.

Bay Area Census, "Historical Data: Vallejo, 1970,"

<https://census.bayareametro.gov/historical-data/1970/vallejo>.

Bradley, Denise. "Mare Island Cultural Landscape Report-Final," March 2015.

<https://californiapreservation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ALL.pdf>.

Britton, James E. *The Development of Vallejo and Mare Island*. Vallejo Historical Society, 1985.

City of Vallejo Marina. "History of Vallejo." <https://vallejomarina.com/vallejo-marina/history-of-vallejo/>.

Hall, Prince. *A Charge, Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797*.

<https://guides.loc.gov/prince-hall-freemasonry>.

Lee, Joseph. "War Camp Community Service," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1918). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1013978>.

Library of Congress. "Home Away From Home." <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/february-04/>.

McCormick, Robert R. *California's Capital Saga: Vallejo, Benicia, and Sacramento*. California Historical Society Quarterly 34, No. 2, 1955.

McGriff-Payne, Sharon. *Images of America: African Americans in Vallejo*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing: 2012.

McGriff-Payne, Sharon. *John Grider's Century: African Americans in Solano, Napa, and Sonoma Counties from 1845 to 1925*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc.: 2009.

Firma Lodge No. 27

Name of Property

Solano, California

County and State

- Menendian, Stephen and Samir Gambhir. "Racial Segregation in the San Francisco Bay Area, Part 2," Othering & Belonging Institute, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/racial-segregation-san-francisco-bay-area-part-2>.
- National Park Service. "Presidio of San Francisco: The Buffalo Soldiers," updated February 9, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers.htm>.
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). "Our History." <https://naacp.org/about/our-history#:~:text=Accordingly%2C%20the%20NAACP's%20mission%20is,the%20acclaimed%20publication%20of%20theNAACP>.
- Naval History and Heritage Command. "Mare Island Naval Shipyard." <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/organization-and-administration/historic-bases/mare-island.html>.
- Osborne, Donald E. Email correspondence with California Preservation Foundation staff, September 2025.
- PBS. "USO – For the Troops: A Home for African American Troops." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Unwnc9EruPQ>.
- Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Democracy and the Colored Soldier: War camp community service for the colored soldier, sailor and marine*, ca. September 1919. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
- Prince Hall Masonic Digest*. "Credit Unions." First Quarter, 1953-1954.
- Riley, Brendan. "Brendan Riley's Solano Chronicles: Vallejo's urban renewal effort had mixed results," *Vallejo Times-Herald*, April 12, 2018. <https://www.timesheraldonline.com/2018/04/13/brendan-rileys-solano-chronicles-vallejos-urban-renewal-effort-had-mixed-results/>.
- Rohrs, Sarah. "Firma Lodge Takes Pride in its History," *Vallejo Times-Herald*, October 25, 2009. www.newspapers.com.
- San Juan, David. "For California's Prince Hall Masons, A State of Belonging." <https://californiafreemason.org/2024/06/19/prince-hall-history/>.
- State of California Department of Finance. "Historical Census Populations of Counties and Incorporated Cities in California, 1850-2020." https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/Reports/Demographic_Reports/documents/2020-1850_STCO_IncCities.xlsx.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Stewart, Ian A. "A New Beginning." <https://californiafreemason.org/2021/09/02/a-new-beginning/>.

Stine, Jeffrey. "Wartime Housing and Shipyard Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area," *Journal of Urban History* 12, No. 2 (1986).

United Service Organization (USO). "Hattiesburg USO was a Sanctuary During World War II." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTTmCr_Z3V8.

United Service Organizations (USO). "Our History." <https://www.uso.org/about>.

United States Federal Census. "California: Composition of the population for cities of 10,000 or more," multiple years.

Vallejo Evening Chronicle, "Colored Vets Will Convene," June 26, 1911.
www.newspapers.com.

"Colored Order Gives Banquet," February 13, 1914.

"News in Brief," June 6, 1917.

"Community Camp Colored Home Opened," August 2, 1919.

Vallejo Evening News. "Colored Lodge Had Time," February 13, 1914.
www.newspapers.com.

"Auxiliary Was Organized," March 25, 1915.

"Lodge Hall Work Starts Tomorrow," June 14, 1916.

"Fraternal Hall is Rapidly Taking Shape," July 17, 1916.

"Documents Recorded: Deeds," August 2, 1916.

"Finish Veterans' Hall Next Month," December 12, 1916.

"Colored People Would Finance Lodging House," April 26, 1917.

"Policeman Named for Vets Hall," July 6, 1917.

"Negro Masons Have Lodge in Vallejo," November 19, 1917.

"Prof. W. Pickens Made Fine Address," July 22, 1918.

"Brand Firing of Church Insolence," December 3, 1919.

Vallejo Times-Herald. "USO Georgia Street Draws High Praise for Program Here," December 31, 1944. www.newspapers.com.

"Colored People to Meet Sunday," June 22, 1946.

"Post 619 to Aid Pay Applicants," August 25, 1946.

"Vallejo Branch NAACP To Observe 30th Anniversary," July 24, 1948.

"Friendship Baptist Church," January 7, 1950.

"Lodge To Burn Mortgage Here In Ceremonies," June 9, 1956.

"Additional Churches: Deliverance Center," March 26, 1960.

"NAACP to Hear Postal Official," February 22, 1963.

"Additional Churches: Macedonia Pentecostal - 1209 Georgia Street," February 29, 1964.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

- “Meetings,” January 9, 1970.
- “Posey Masonic Lodge Seats Officers,” February 23, 1973.
- “Open House Service Sunday,” March 9, 1973.
- “Museum honors Vallejo’s first black teacher, Grace Logan Patterson,” August 30, 2018.

Vallejo Tribune. “Household Ruth Club Hold Entertainment,” March 29, 1915. Vallejo Evening News, “Local Jottings,” June 19, 1920. www.newspapers.com.

Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum. “Vallejo - Our History.”
<https://vallejomuseum.net/vallejo-history/>.

Williams, Wiley J. "African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church," NCpedia-State Library of NC, 2006. <https://www.ncpedia.org/religion/african-methodist-episcopal-zion-church>.

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: City of Vallejo, Architectural Heritage Commission

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 38.100677 Longitude: -122.242748

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

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

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary with the County of Solano Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk, parcel number APN 0059011030.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the legal boundary of the parcel on which the building has been located since construction began in 1916.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Me'Lisa James, California Preservation Foundation Underrepresented California Program Intern; Maggie Nicholson, Cultural Resources Planner; Clare Flynn, Cultural Resources Planner; Christina Dikas Brobst, Principal

organization: Page & Turnbull

street & number: 170 Maiden Lane

city or town: San Francisco state: CA zip code: 94108

e-mail: dikas@page-turnbull.com

telephone: (415) 593-3246

date: October 2025; Revised December 2025, April 2026

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Firma Lodge No. 27
City or Vicinity: Vallejo
County: Solano
State: California
Photographer: Stephen Schafer
Date Photographed: July 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 20 Primary (north) façade, looking south from Georgia Street
- 2 of 20 Upward view of the primary (north) façade showing projecting details, looking southeast from front yard
- 3 of 20 Detail of recessed main entrance on primary facade, looking southeast from portico volume
- 4 of 20 Shield detail in pediment of projecting portico volume on primary façade, looking southeast from front yard
- 5 of 20 Oblique view of east (left) and primary (right) elevations, looking southwest from Georgia Street
- 6 of 20 Oblique view of rear (left) and east (right) elevations, looking northwest from unnamed alleyway at southern periphery of property
- 7 of 20 Rear (south) elevation, looking north from backyard
- 8 of 20 Oblique view of west (left) and rear (right) elevations, looking northeast from unnamed alleyway at southern periphery of property
- 9 of 20 Oblique view of primary (left) and west (right) elevations, looking southeast from Georgia Street
- 10 of 20 First floor, looking southeast across meeting room with dining room in background
- 11 of 20 First floor, looking northwest across dining room with kitchen at left, hall with stairs at back left, and meeting room at back right
- 12 of 20 First floor, looking southeast across dining room

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

- 13 of 20 First floor, looking northwest across hall at back left with office in background
- 14 of 20 First floor, looking south up wood stair from southwest corner of west hall
- 15 of 20 Second floor, looking south across storage area with restroom at back left, attic stairs behind door in right foreground
- 16 of 20 Second floor, looking west across meeting hall
- 17 of 20 Second floor, looking south to main entrance of lodge room
- 18 of 20 Second floor, looking north to Worshipful Master's Chair on a raised platform from center of lodge room

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Location Map

Latitude: 38.100677 Longitude: -122.242748

Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Vicinity Map

Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Exterior Photo Key

Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27 Building
Photographic Key Map

Basemap: Google Earth, 2025.
Edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025.



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Interior Photo Key: First Floor

Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27 Building
Photographic Key Map - First-floor Interior

Basemap: Google Earth, 2025.
Edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025.

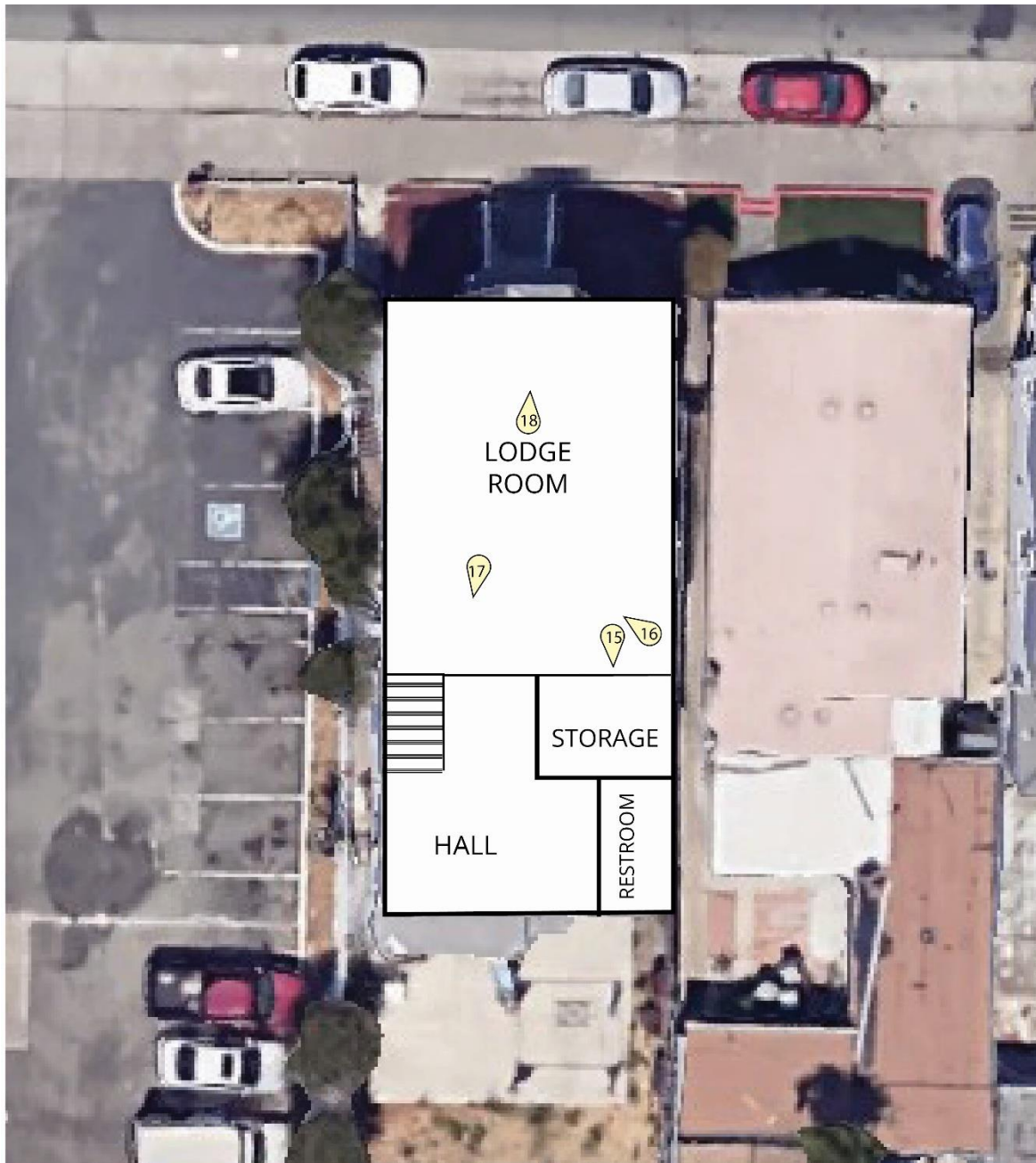


Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Second-floor Interior Photo Key

Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27 Building
Photographic Key Map - Second-floor Interior

Basemap: Google Earth, 2025.
Edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025.



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Figure 3 Members of Firma Lodge No. 27 F. & A.M. Vallejo, California, circa 1955; Source: Oakland Public Library, Towns (Royal E.) Paper, MS026_B15_1703



Figure 4 Prince Hall Masons Firma Lodge No. 27, circa 2000; Source: McGriff-Payne, *John Grider's Century*, 45



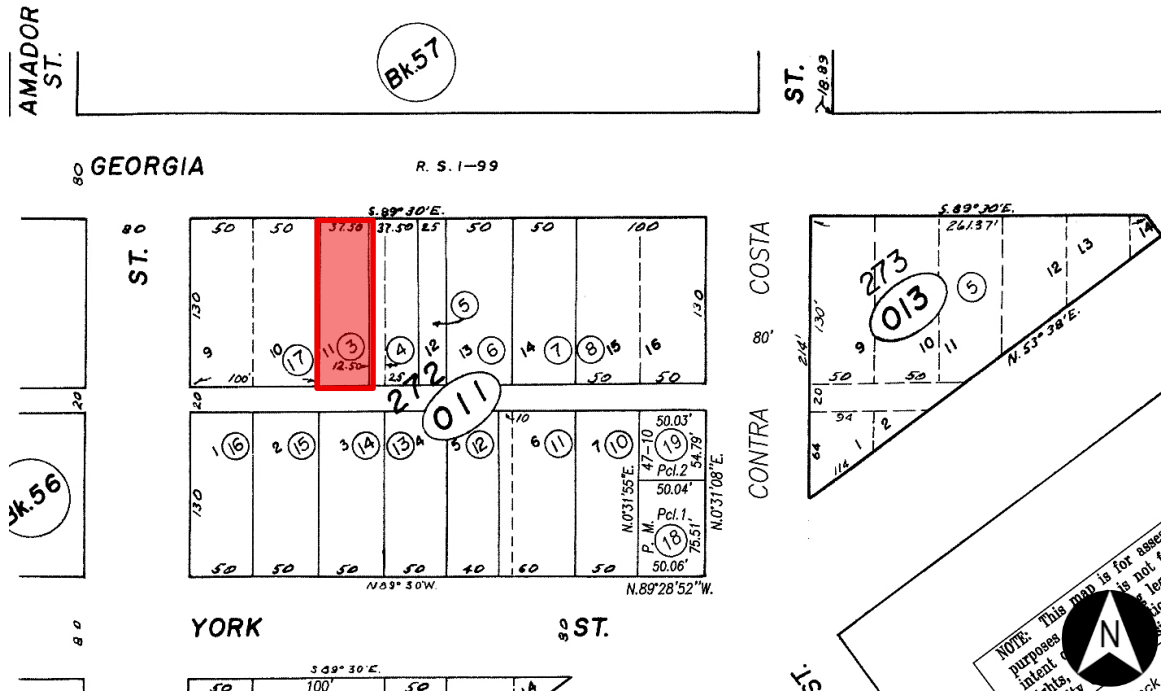
Firma Lodge No. 27
 Name of Property

Solano, California
 County and State

Figure 5 Bird's Eye View, Source: Google Earth, 2025; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Figure 6 Property Boundary Map, Source: Assessor Division, Solano County Property Map; edited by Page & Turnbull, 2025



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 1 Primary (north) façade, looking south from Georgia Street



Photo 2 Upward view of the primary (north) façade showing projecting details, looking southeast from front yard



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 3 Detail of recessed main entrance on primary facade, looking southeast from portico volume



Photo 4 Shield detail in pediment of projecting portico volume on primary facade, looking southeast from front yard



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 5 Oblique view of east (left) and primary (right) elevations, looking southwest from Georgia Street



Photograph 6 Oblique view of rear (left) and east (right) elevations, looking northwest from unnamed alleyway at southern periphery of property



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 7 Rear (south) elevation, looking north from backyard



Photo 8 Oblique view of west (left) and rear (right) elevations, looking northeast from unnamed alleyway at southern periphery of property



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 9 Oblique view of primary (left) and west (right) elevations, looking southeast from Georgia Street



Photo 10 First floor, looking southeast across meeting room with dining room in background



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 11 First floor, looking northwest across dining room with kitchen at left, hall with stairs at back left, and meeting room at back right



Photo 12 First floor, looking southeast across dining room



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 13 First floor, looking northwest across hall at back left with office in background



Photo 14 First floor, looking south up wood stair from southwest corner of west hall



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 15 Second floor, looking south across storage area with restroom at back left, attic stairs behind door in right foreground



Photo 16 Second floor, looking west across meeting hall



Firma Lodge No. 27
Name of Property

Solano, California
County and State

Photo 17 Second floor, looking south to main entrance of lodge room



Photo 18 Second floor, looking north to Worshipful Master's Chair on a raised platform from center of lodge room

