



## NHL Executive Summary



**Name of Property:** John Muir Home NHL (update and name change to Strentzel-Muir Ranch)

**City, State:** Martinez, California

**Period of Significance:** 1880-1914

**NHL Criteria:** 1, 2

**NHL Themes:**

- II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements, 1. clubs and organizations
- III. Expressing Cultural Values, 3. Literature
- VI. Expanding Science and Technology, 3. scientific thought and theory
- VII. Transforming the Environment, 3. protecting and preserving the environment

**Previous Recognition:** NHL (1962); National Historic Site (1964)

**National Historic Context:** Theme XIX: Conservation of Natural Resources

**NHL Significance:**

- Located in the Alhambra Valley on the outskirts of Martinez, California, the John Muir Home is where Scottish-born naturalist John Muir (1838-1914) lived and worked during the years of his greatest



influence on the American conservation movement. The period of significance encompasses the full period of Muir's residence on the property, beginning in 1880 with his marriage to Louisa (Louie) Strentzel, daughter and heir of the wealthy Strentzel family, and ending with his death in 1914.

- The John Muir Home is significant under Criterion 1 for its association with important events in the history of conservation including the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890, the founding of the Sierra Club in 1892, the creation and expansion of early national forest reserves, and the battle over the proposed damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite. Muir's marriage to Louie Strentzel and role in the management of the family's extensive Martinez ranch provided him with the financial security, social connections, and support necessary to commit himself to the movement. From his "scribble den" on the second floor of the Victorian-Italianate Strentzel-Muir House, Muir mounted letter writing campaigns and produced many of his most significant works including *The Mountains of California* (1894), *Our National Parks* (1901), *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), *The Yosemite* (1912), and *The Story of my Boyhood and Youth* (1913).
- The property is additionally significant under Criterion 2 for its association with life of John Muir as a nationally significant person in American conservation. It offers unique opportunities to explore the various influences on Muir's life and to understand him as a multifaceted individual with responsibilities as a husband, father, agriculturalist, author, and advocate for the natural world.

#### Integrity:

- Contributing resources of the John Muir Home are in their historic locations and retain much of their original design schemes and features including materials, proportion, scale, orientation, architectural details, and circulation patterns.
- Victorian workmanship is evident in the Italianate architectural features of the Strentzel-Muir House including the roof brackets, balcony balustrades, attenuated rectilinear porch columns, window hoods, quoins, and roof cupola. Interior features such as ceiling medallions, moldings and wainscoting, and fireplaces also exemplify historic workmanship.
- Historic patterns of design and workmanship are retained in the Martinez Adobe. This includes repairs and renovations attributed to Wanda Muir and Tom Hanna during the period of significance. Historic exterior materials are retained, including the original adobe walls dating to 1849.
- Integrity of setting, feeling, and association at the House Site is retained in its topography, characterized by the 30'-high knoll on which the Muir House sits and Franklin Creek to the west. Historic character is further retained in mature specimen trees surrounding the Muir House. Additionally, while the existing orchards and vineyards are non-historic, they replicate varieties present during the period of significance and are compatible with the historic scene.
- The oak woodland and grassland landscape of Mount Wanda exists much as it did during the period of significance. The upper slopes continue to provide expansive views of the Alhambra Valley. Despite being surrounded by a residential neighborhood, the setting of the Strentzel-Muir Gravesite along Alhambra Creek remains peaceful and contemplative. The remnant pear orchard and mature eucalyptus associated with Muir's funeral service further contribute to integrity of setting.

**Owner of Property:** National Park Service



**Acreage of Property:** 336.42 acres (House Site: 8.9; Mount Wanda Site: 326.25; Gravesite: 1.27)

**Origins of Nomination:** This revised nomination was completed on behalf of John Muir National Historic Site to update the period of significance, resource descriptions, and discussion of national significance in accordance with current scholarship, site documentation, and NHL guidelines. The NHL boundary is also expanded to include Mount Wanda and the Strentzel-Muir Gravesite as contributing sites. Added to John Muir National Historic Site in 1993 and 2000 respectively, Mount Wanda and the Strentzel-Muir Gravesite are located south of the original House Unit (identified as the House Site for the purpose of this nomination) on the south side of California State Route 4. The property name is also revised from “John Muir House (and Martinez Adobe)” to “John Muir Home” to better represent the expanded boundary encompassing not only the Strentzel-Muir House and Martinez Adobe but other surrounding lands that historically comprised Muir’s ranch home.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** Expansion of the NHL boundary and updates to the significance statement will provide the public with a more complete, up-to-date understanding of Muir’s life and legacy in conservation; and will aid the NPS in preservation planning.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None are known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 21, 2023):** None.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

- Consider adding Muir’s wife’s name to the designation as she adds to the significance and reasoning for changing the name from house to home. The nomination was subsequently revised to propose that the NHL be renamed the Strentzel-Muir Ranch.

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the NHL boundary change, updated documentation, and name change for the John Muir Home in Martinez, Contra Costa County, California, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:** The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the boundary change, updated documentation, and name change (to Strentzel-Muir Ranch) for the John Muir Home NHL in Martinez, Contra Costa County, California.