

State of California — The Resources Agency	Primary #	
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION		HRI #
PRIMARY RECORD	Trinomial	NRHP Status Code
Other Listings		
Review Code	Reviewer	Date

Page 1 of 16 *Resource Name or #: Caliente Mural APN#: 533-52-104 and -105

P1. Other Identifier: Historic Caliente mural

***P2. Location:** Not for Publication Unrestricted ***a. County:** San Diego
and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)
***b. USGS 7.5' Quad:** Point Loma **Date:** T ;R ; **¼ of ¼ of Sec ; M.D. B.M.**
c. Address: 1122 4th Ave. City: San Diego Zip: 92101
d. UTM: Zone: 11 ; mE/ mN (G.P.S.)
e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

West wall of historic California Theatre building at 1122 4th Ave. in downtown San Diego. APN # 533-52-104 and -105.

***P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries).

This iconic and very large scale hand painted Caliente wall mural faces the ocean to the west on the historic 1927 California Theatre building in downtown San Diego. The mural fills up almost the complete wall below the building's upper cornice. The large mural is three dimensional with the painting climbing up over and around four vertical pilasters which connect to the upper roof cornice. The advertising mural design features a yellow or ochre painted background with black outlined edge, bracketed corners and the words CALIENTE! in slanted block letters with the large letter C oversized and painted in a deep red. A three dimensional shadow effect contains the so-called winner's wreath of roses with a racing horse and jockey seen running through the opening of the C. An even larger hand painted galloping horse is seen to the right, racing at the viewer, and is painted using classic black and grey tones. Black letters along the upper edge are easily read with the description, "RACING EVERY SATURDAY AND SUNDAY". Below the Caliente! lettering, hand painted cursive letters display "in Old Mexico". Below, in contrasting blue lettering, is "HOME OF THE FABULOUS 5 - 10". The 5 - 10 numbers are both oversized and painted in matching red in stylized script. At the bottom in black block lettering reads "BETTING DAILY ON MAJOR US TRACKS". The Caliente mural actually represents a series of murals revised over time with the first mural version added circa 1957 (please see attached historic photos). The mural was updated and partially repainted circa 1960. The long standing resource represents and reflects a special element of San Diego's historical, cultural, social, economic and aesthetic development and is therefore eligible under Criterion A. Additionally, the Caliente mural is significant under Criterion C as one of the few remaining examples of a large scale hand detail painted wall mural. This landmark wall mural design clearly displays and represents the artwork, hand painted craftsmanship, lettering methods and design of the mid century late 1950's era. (Please see continuation sheet)

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes) Wall mural

***P4. Resources Present:** Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other

P5b. Description of Photo: (View, date, accession #) Front (west) view, 2010, by Dan Soderberg.



P6. Date of Construction/Age and Sources:

Historic Prehistoric Both
California Theater Constructed in 1927
Original Caliente Mural Circa 1958
Updated second mural design circa 1960

***P7. Owner and Address:**

1122 4th Ave., LLC
301 North Carson Drive, Suite 205
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

***P9. Date Recorded:** June 2016

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe) Historic Resource Review / Rebuttal of the 2015 AECOM / Marie Lia report

***P11. Report Citation:** (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.") None

Preliminary Historic Review of the historic Agua Caliente racetrack mural on west facing wall of historically designated California Theatre, San Diego, California, for the City of San Diego's Historical Resources Board, by Ronald V. May, RPA, and Kiley Wallace, Legacy 106, Inc., June 2016. Legacy 106, Inc. is indebted to Alexandra Wallace and Dan Soderberg for assistance with the preparation of this report.

***Attachments:** NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List):

DPR 523A (1/95) *Required information

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*Resource Name or #: Caliente Mural

*Recorded by: Ronald V. May, RPA and Kiley Wallace *Date: June 2016 Continuation Update

***B10. Significance (continued):**

B1. Historic Name: Caliente Mural B2. Common Name: Caliente Mural
B3. Original Use: Wall mural
B4. Present Use: Wall mural

***B5. Architectural Style:**

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

The subject resource is a large wall mural painted on the west elevation wall of the large historically designated California Theatre which was constructed in 1927. Original Caliente Mural was painted Circa 1958 as seen in historic photos provided. Another updated second hand painted mural design was completed by the original artist George Sawders of Dix Outdoor Advertising circa 1960. The artist was fastidious about creating a quality and long lasting mural, completing a painstaking process of layering primer and then paint, which is why the mural artwork survives so colorfully to this day. The artist used smaller canvas/board version and after approval utilized a grid system to accurately recreate the work with a team of artists on a grand scale. Finally, George Sawders painstakingly hand painted the detailed roses, horses and other details to complete the finished design.

***B7. Moved?** No Yes Unknown Date:

Original Location:

***B8. Related Features:**

B9a. Architect: N/A **b. Builder:** N/A **Mural Painter:** - George Sawders of Dix Outdoor Advertising

***B10. Significance: Theme:**

Area: Downtown (San Diego)

Period of Significance: 1958-1965

Property Type: Commercial

Applicable Criteria: A & C

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

Criterion A. The late 1950's/early 1960's large scale Caliente mural represents and reflects a special element of San Diego's historical, cultural, social, economic and aesthetic development and is **therefore eligible under Criterion A.** This was one of many advertising murals around San Diego aimed at Americans in Southern California in the late 1950's and early 1960's which promoted the Caliente resort and racetrack and fostered tourism to Mexico. This was part of a large advertising campaign undertaken by prominent and locally significant San Diegan John Alessio. This iconic hand painted mural is the largest, most prominent and only known extant example of this Caliente mural artwork. The mural artwork representing this transnational relationship between San Diego and Tijuana is also directly related to the earlier 1927 Spanish Eclectic style California Theatre building which draws the inspiration for this large San Diego building from the Spanish influences seen south of the border in Mexico.

Criterion C. The Caliente mural is also significant under Criterion C as one of the few remaining examples of a large scale hand detail painted wall mural. This landmark wall mural design clearly displays and represents the artwork, hand painted craftsmanship, lettering methods and design of the mid century late 1950's era. The mural was designed and painted by muralist and artist George Sawders, owner of Dix Outdoor Advertising, and is an example of a large scale advertising mural with hand painted detailing. The mural displays the key features of the design and method of mural painting. **The mural is significant under Criterion C.** Please see detailed analysis attached.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes): None

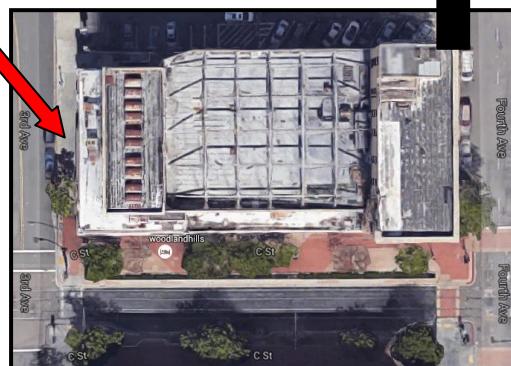
***B12. References:** See attached works cited

B13. Remarks: none

***B14. Evaluator:** Ronald V. May, RPA and Kiley Wallace

***Date of Evaluation:** June 2016

(This space reserved for official comments.)



*Recorded by: Ronald V. May, RPA and Kiley Wallace *Date: June 2016 Continuation Update

B10 Significance - Criterion A:

Regional bi-national trade and tourism between Tijuana and San Diego context.

The Caliente mural continues to represent the historic bi-national history of San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico. The Agua Caliente mural stands today as a symbol of San Diego's shared cultural history. The colossal work not only reflects the artist's mid century design but it also represents a large piece of pop art that has served as a San Diego landmark, guiding and orienting locals and visitors for over six decades. The mural qualifies under Criterion A as a significant design which also reflects our understanding of regional and bi-national trade and tourism between Tijuana and San Diego during its most significant period starting in the 1930's Prohibition era and extending until the mid 1960's when cross border international tourism declined. The large historic mural reflects the internationally historic significance of the Agua Caliente Resort and Casino in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico and its connection to cross border tourism and trade. The casino and racetrack industry joined San Diego and Tijuana during the years of 1930 to 1965.

The impact of the October 1929 Wall Street crash nearly destroyed the San Diego economy by 1930 and the effects lasted until the United States Congress poured millions of dollars into defense spending. During the years of 1929 to 1934, the Agua Caliente provided a major source of revenue for San Diego, Southern California and Baja California. An estimated \$30,000,000 from the Agua Caliente financial empire fueled the local economies of both nations during the bottom of the Great Depression.

While America suffered greatly from the economic disaster of Prohibition during the Great Depression, entrepreneurial investment by Wirt G. Bowman and the other co-founder of the internationally famous Agua Caliente Resort in Tijuana bootstrapped both America and Mexico during the most challenging years between 1929 and 1933. Millions of dollars earned at the racetrack and casino were transported to the Bowman Mansion for overnight storage before being deposited in San Diego banks and destined for reinvestment in real estate and other local industries throughout Southern California.

The so-called "Border Barons" of Agua Caliente facilitated a huge increase development of cross border trade during the years 1930-1965 with international trade, tourism and investments improving both economies.

None of the Border Barons enjoyed inherited wealth or social privilege. Instead, Bowman, Crofton, and Long had found a niche in a society testing its traditional ties and ways of thinking in a pivotal epoch of historical change. They wormed their way in, and then up. As teenagers, each had left home to try his fortune west and took catch-as-catch can jobs en route--- Crofton as a flamboyant circus barker and Long as a traveling flimflam medicine man, while Bowman bummed around as a lumberjack and railroad section hand before heading for northern Mexico. As they moved around by their wits, they had learned to suck the sustenance from both sides of the law and eagerly dared to do it. Once well into the Roaring Twenties, their paths crossed along the border. Aggressive, unscrupulous enterprisers, and full blown participants in gaming entertainment (then labeled as *vice* and now called *leisure*) along the border, they formed an uneasy but lucrative partnership at Agua Caliente (Vanderwood 2010:37).

The Agua Caliente casino, resort and racetrack was partially closed in 1937 due to political changes in Mexico's government. The racetrack continued to operate and in 1939 a California ban on horse racing again increased the flow of San Diego and Southern California tourists who visited the Caliente. The famous racetrack was closed during World War II, but in 1947 the leadership of new general manager and San Diego businessman John Alessio brought a resurgence of tourism in the post war era. Alessio's invention of the five and ten wagering system in the 1950's was hugely popular and was copied worldwide by other racetracks.

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B10 Significance - Criterion A:

The key years for the development of Agua Caliente from a hot water mud hole to an exciting European style resort were from 1930-1965. Built in stages, horse and dog racing tracks provided funds for the more elaborate gambling casino, night clubs, theaters, hotel, airport and bungalows that would support the wealthy elite tourists traveling through San Diego and up from Mexico City, Cuba, and South America, across the Atlantic from Europe, and from Southeast Asia across the Pacific.

The Caliente mural continues to represent the historic bi-national history of San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico. The Caliente mural stands today as a symbol of San Diego's shared cultural history. The colossal work not only reflects the artist's mid century design but it also represents a large piece of pop art or folk art that has served as a San Diego landmark, guiding and orienting locals and visitors for over six decades. The iconic San Diego mural can be easily compared to the famous Pepsi Cola sign in New York and the Citco sign in Boston, Massachusetts. The Caliente mural has transcended its original advertising use and has become an important symbol of San Diego's shared bi-national history as a gateway between the U.S. and Mexico.

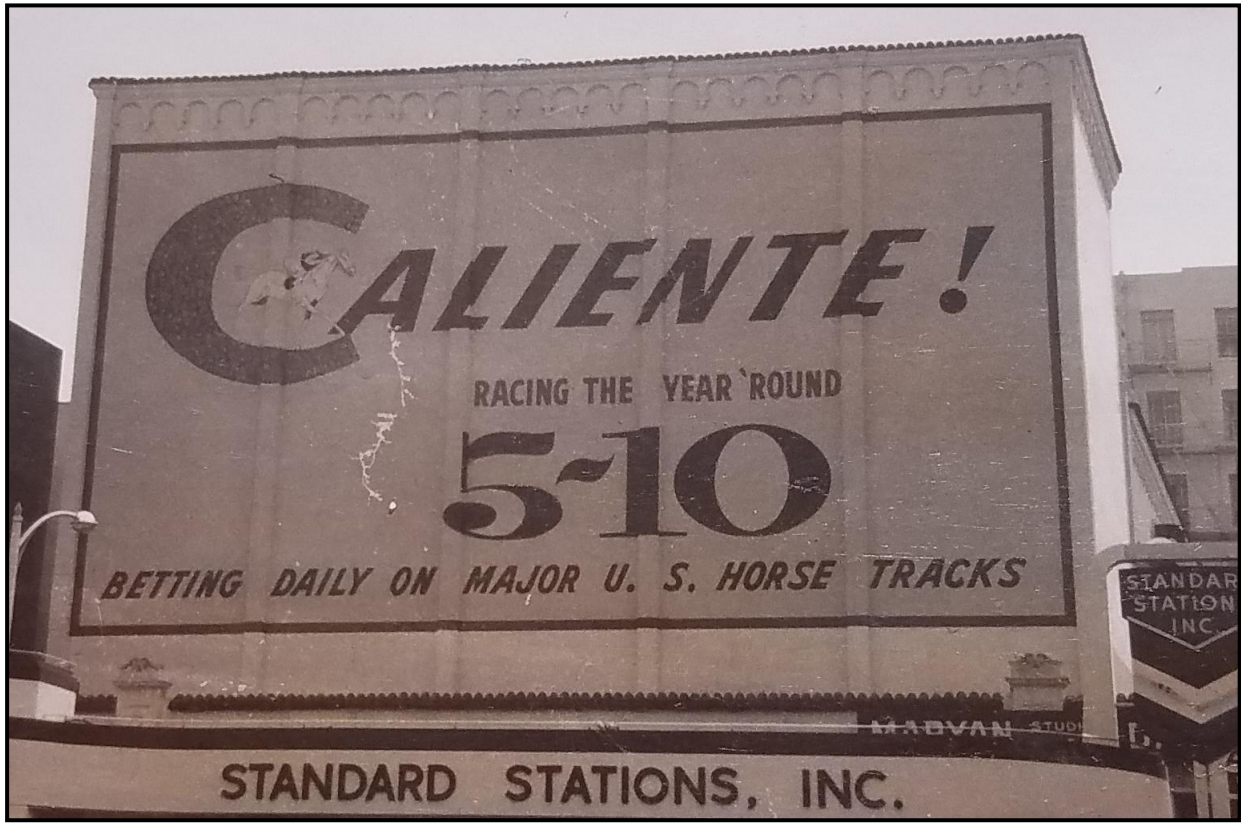
Attachment D

Photographs

-
- D.1 — Historical / Transitional Photographs
 - D.2 — Current Photographs

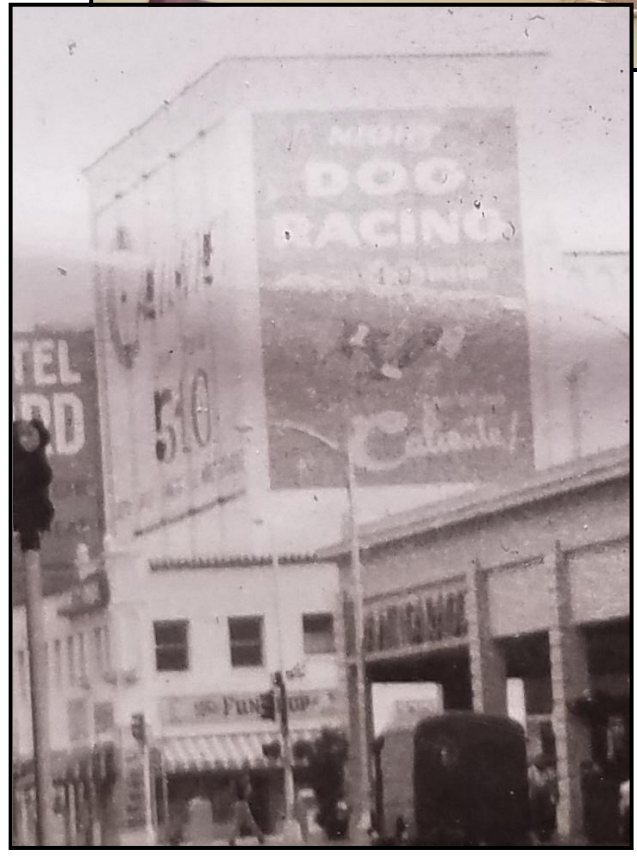
D.1 Historical Photographs

Photo of Caliente mural original design circa 1957. All historic photos courtesy of Malou Sawders, daughter of George Sawders. George owned Dix Outdoor Advertising, and he designed and painted the Agua Caliente murals on the California Theatre in the 1950's.



D.1 Historical Photographs

The Agua Caliente murals on the California Theatre circa 1957.
Contemporary photo (bottom right) by Dan Soderberg.



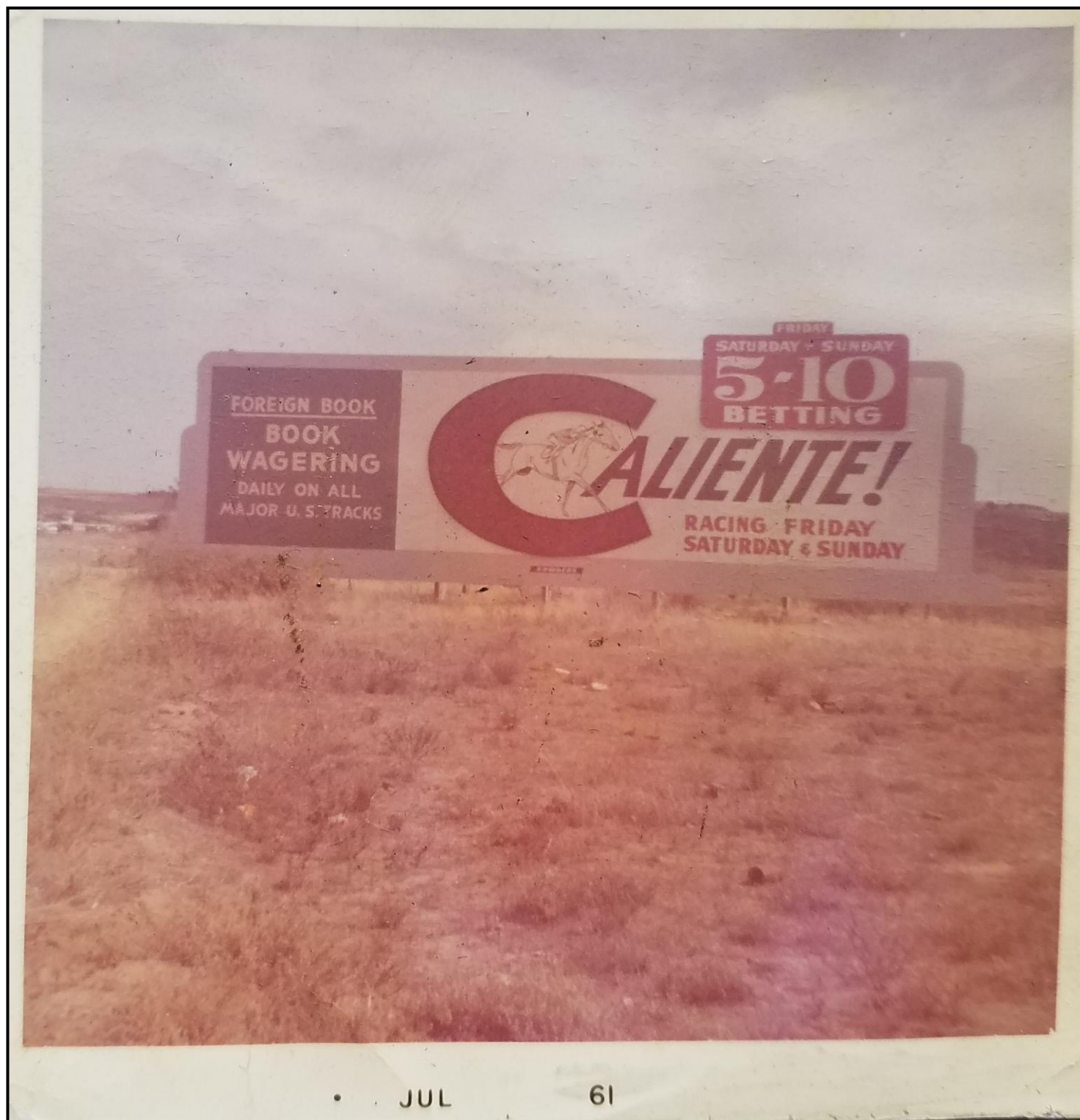
D.1 Historical Photographs

Agua Caliente billboard (non-extant) near the Tijuana / San Ysidro port of entry in 1961.
The billboard was designed and painted by George Sawders, owner of Dix Outdoor Advertising.



D.1 Historical Photographs

Agua Caliente billboard (non-extant) in 1961. The exact location is unknown. The billboard was designed and painted by George Sawders, owner of Dix Outdoor Advertising.



D.1 Historical Photographs

Agua Caliente billboard (non-extant) in the early 1960s. The exact location is unknown. The billboard mural was designed and painted by George Sawders, owner of Dix Outdoor Advertising.



D.1 Historical Photographs

Agua Caliente billboard (non-extant) in 1962. The exact location is unknown. The billboard mural was designed and painted by George Sawders, owner of Dix Outdoor Advertising.



D.1 Historical Photographs

Neon sign (non-extant) at 4th Avenue and Broadway in 1965.

Photo courtesy of the Vintage San Diego Facebook page and Bill Reid.



D.2 Current Photographs

Photos this page by Dan Soderberg



D.2 Current Photographs

Photo this page courtesy of derrickchinn.blogspot.com



Works Cited

E.1 — Provide a list of works cited
(bibliography)

E.1 Bibliography

Books

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Government Documents

City of San Diego Historical Resources Board

2009 Historical Resource Research Report Guidelines and Requirements, Land Development Manual, Historical Resources Guidelines, Appendix E, Part 1.1, Adopted by the Historical Resources Board November 30, 2006, Updated January 24, 2008 and February 9, 2009.

Internet

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Newspaper

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