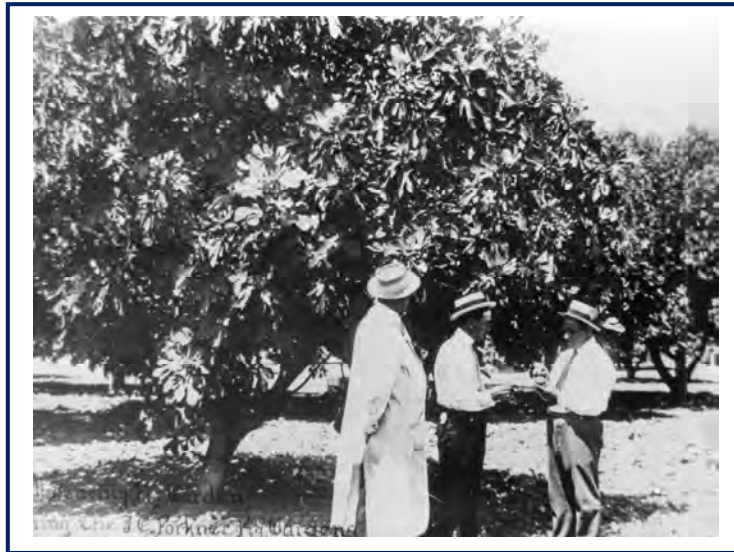


Garden of Eden: An Historic Context for Fresno's Fig Gardens



*J.C. Forkner and Henry Markarian c1910
(Photo: Pop Laval Foundation)*

Prepared by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A. (City of Fresno)

February 27, 2013

With funding from a Caltrans Community Based Transportation Planning Grant

Table of Contents

Project Summary..... 1-2

Research Methods 2

Historical Overview 3-29

 Early History and Development of Fresno

 Development of J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens

 Irrigation: Herndon and Enterprise Canals

 J.C. and Lewella Pooler Swift Forkner

 Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens

 Depression and World War II

 Architecture and Landscapes of Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens

 Interiors

 The Adobe Tradition

 Shaw Avenue Garden Offices

 Fig Garden Village

Recommendations for Future Planning..... 30-31

Project Staff Qualifications 32

References 33-38

Appendix: Old Fig Garden Subdivision Boundaries (Tracts)

 Fig Garden Timeline



Project Summary

Fig Garden is a County “island” surrounded by the City of Fresno. The residential neighborhood has a rural bucolic quality to it with an eclectic mix of architect-designed and modest homes, a lack of traditional “city” amenities such as streetlights and sidewalks, and is set within a mature urban forest. The neighborhood’s main axis, Van Ness Boulevard, is transformed each December into a winter wonderland, “Christmas Tree Lane.” The Herndon Canal and a reach of the Enterprise Canal wind through the area and add to the neighborhood’s aesthetic values and “sense of place.”

This residential neighborhood is in marked contrast to the City with its adjacent arterial class streets, slated for intensification through a proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and potential mid-rise infill development. The “Old Fig” community is bisected by Ashlan Avenue which runs east to west and connects two freeway systems, State Route 41 and State Route 99. The design and treatment of Ashlan Avenue have long been a contested issue due to the high volume of traffic through the neighborhood. Fig Garden Homeowners’ Association members, staff from the office of County Supervisor Susan Anderson, and County and City staff met in 2009 to discuss how best to address the conflict between the transportation and commercial needs of the City’s urban corridors while preserving and celebrating the character of this historic County island. In a first-ever collaborative effort, representatives of the four groups prepared a grant application to Caltrans for a Community-Based Transportation planning grant to address these apparent tensions. The Study was funded in the 2010-11 grant cycle.

The “Old Fig Garden Community Transportation Study,” prepared by consultants Community Design and Architecture (February 2013), provided a series of recommendations for a multimodal transportation framework and set of street improvements. The Study addressed traffic calming, safe routes to school, pedestrian and bicycle accommodation and context-appropriate urban design transitions from the residential neighborhood to the adjacent transportation corridors. The Caltrans grant also funded a tree inventory of the Old Fig Garden area, which was prepared by Davey Resource Group (See Community Design and Architecture 2013).

An additional grant task was the following Historic Context, prepared by the City of Fresno’s Historic Preservation Project Manager. Historic Contexts are defined by the National Park Service as (in brief) an analysis of the historical development of a community which highlights the major trends and patterns critical to the understanding of the built environment. A Historic

Context is NOT a comprehensive history of an area but rather a framework for continuing a process for identifying historic, architectural and cultural resources, and is critical to good land use planning.

One problem in discussing “Fig Garden” or “Old Fig” is its geography and thus identity. Are we discussing the 12,000 original Bullard Lands which were transformed into a “Garden of Eden” by entrepreneur J.C. Forkner? Are we talking about the “Forkner-Giffen Fig Garden” (also known as the “Garden Tract”) which was a 1919 residential subdivision of 1-acre parcels along the southern boundary of the J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens? Or perhaps we mean the political boundaries of the County Island which today encompasses these 1919 tracts and newer subdivisions as well?

The following Context starts with the general and moves to the particular. Thus we will first take a brief look at the major themes in the history and development of the City of Fresno. Next we turn to the J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens with an emphasis on the early years, 1910-1920. Finally, the Historic Context follows the development of the residential tracts developed by Forkner with business partner Wylie M. Giffen which constitute “Old Fig.” The architectural style guide (produced also as a separate brochure) identifies the major residential building styles within Old Fig, although Minimal Traditional, Ranch and Contemporary styles are also found in the adjacent County and City tracts.

Research Methods

Research was conducted in the City of Fresno’s Historic Preservation archives, in the California Room of the Fresno County Library and at Fresno State University. City of Fresno Interns Arianna Carrillo and Hannah Starke helped to locate obscure materials. It should be noted that many of the old newspaper articles housed in vertical files at the libraries lack a clear citation. In addition, there are conflicts among the various sources on dates, as for example, the founding of the Fig Garden Woman’s Club in Old Fig. Architectural historian John Edward Powell shared his excellent research notes on Old Fig architecture. Norma Cecil of Fresno Irrigation District answered questions about FID history and the City’s Edward Smith and Allen Smith supported map and photo production. Elizabeth Laval was amazingly generous in providing access to her great-grandfather’s collection of photos from his time working with J.C. Forkner. Prior notes and research prepared by this writer for the Fresno Historical Society home tours of Old Fig (2008, 2010) were invaluable. Scott Severance prepared the artwork for the cover and poster. Finally, both Louise Yenovkian and Prudence Zalewski of the Fig Garden Homeowners’ Association graciously reviewed the draft of both the Historic Context and the Architectural Guide.

Historical Overview

Early History and Development of Fresno

The Yokuts were the first residents of the Fresno area, with small tribes occupying the floodplains of the Big Dry Creek and Little Dry Creek (Gayton 1948:153; Latta 1997:163). Although there were no missions established in the Valley, there were small Mexican era settlements including Pueblo de las Junta, located at the confluence of the San Joaquin River and the Fresno Slough (Hoover 1990: 86). The Spanish and Mexican influence is indicated through place names such as “Fresno,” which means “ash tree” and which was first applied to the Fresno River (Hoover et al 1990:85). Following the Gold Rush of 1849, miners were drawn to the southern gold fields, and cattle ranchers and dryland farmers moved into the area. Three momentous changes occurred in the 1870s, which dramatically changed settlement patterns and history: the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, the introduction of agricultural colonies and the concomitant development of a labyrinth of canals to bring water to these colonies.

In 1870 the Central Pacific Railroad began its diagonal push down the San Joaquin Valley. New towns were surveyed along the corridor---several were planned by the railroad itself---and earlier villages situated away from the

tracks often vanished overnight. In 1872 the railroad reached what is now Fresno. The Contract and Finance Company, a subsidiary of the Central Pacific Railroad, bought 4,480 acres in a desolate area where Dry Creek drained into the plains. Surveyor Edward H. Mix laid out the new town in blocks 320 feet by 400 feet, with 20 foot alleys, lots 25 x 150 feet fronting on 80-foot wide streets parallel to and on both sides of the tracks (Clough 1984:121). The gridiron plan was filed in 1873 and was remarkably rigid, broken only by the space reserved for a future courthouse and the broad swaths through the center of town for the tracks, depot and yards (Reps 1979:187).

Fresno’s location was uninviting at best, with barren sand plains in all directions. The nearest substantial supply of water was the San Joaquin River, 10 miles to the north (Reps 1979:187) and the Kings River further south. Fresno grew slowly but in 1874 it was able to wrestle the county seat away from the former mining town of Millerton (Hoover 1990:88). The population of Fresno in 1875 was 600, with a third of the residents Chinese who lived west of the tracks. In 1878 a new resident, R.W. Riggs described the community as “not much of a town, a handful of houses in a desert of sand” (Reps 1979:187). Fresno’s population was 1,112 in 1880 and 3,464 in 1885. “Yet the town remained a collection of buildings on the prairie rather than a full-

fledged city. There was no police force, sewer system or truly efficient fire department, and cattle were still roaming the dusty streets that became winter lakes” (Clough 1984:141).

The 1880s, however, were prosperous years and the desert was turned into profitable farmland with the introduction of irrigation and agricultural colonies. The model for the system that ultimately served throughout the San Joaquin Valley was the Central California Colony, established in 1875 three miles south of Fresno. The Colony was the “brainchild” of Bernard Marks, a German immigrant who approached William S. Chapman, one of the wealthiest landowners in California, with his vision of 20-acre family owned farms sharing a secured source of water. Marks saw the potential for farming in the desert-like environment of the San Joaquin Valley if irrigation could be guaranteed (Panter 1994:2). He surveyed six sections of land owned by Chapman and investor William Martin and subdivided the land into 192 20-acre parcels. Three laterals from the Kings River and Fresno Canal were extended into the tracts and water rights were sold to the prospective farmers. Twenty-three miles of roads were laid out and bordered with trees (Panter 1994; Rehart and Patterson 1988:7). Many of the earliest settlers were former miners as well as Scandinavian immigrants: Danes, Swedes and Norwegians (Rehart and Patterson 1988:8). By 1903 there were 48 separate colonies or tracts in Fresno County representing approximately 71,080 acres (Panter 1994:9). These colonies helped to break up the vast estates and initiated what agricultural historian Donald Pisani termed “the

horticultural small-farm phase” of California agriculture (Datel 1999:97).

Fresno was incorporated in 1885. With incorporation, street grades and town lot numbers were established (Clough 1984:319). In November 1887, 1,100 deeds were filed at the county courthouse and the last of the original railroad lots in Fresno were sold. By 1890 the population of Fresno was over 10,000, and land outside of the original town site was subdivided into streets and lots (Reps 1979:191). The first streetcars were introduced in 1892, and this greater mobility allowed for the construction of a variety of streetcar suburbs (Bulbulian 2001:38; Clough 1984:319). Van Ness Boulevard, for example, was developed to link Fresno and the San Joaquin River. Van Ness led to the prestigious Fig Garden residential area. Homes along Van Ness were built between 1917 and 1940 (Fresno Bee 25 May 1985).



“Piety Flat,” Fresno Street at M Street, 1886
(Photo: Fresno Historical Society)

The “west” side of the Southern Pacific tracks quickly became “Chinatown,” where Chinese, as well as disreputable whites, were forced to settle. The 1898 Sanborn Map shows a remarkably dense in-fill of saloons, lodging houses, lottery and gambling parlors between G, Mariposa, F and Kern Streets. A Chinese theatre is noted on China Alley and a Joss House faced G Street (1898 Sanborn Map of Fresno).

In addition to Chinese and Scandinavian farmers, other early ethnic groups in the Fresno area included Germans from Russia, Japanese and Armenians. Volga Germans from Russia first came to Fresno in 1887, seeking work as farm laborers. By 1920 there were approximately 8,000 Volga Germans in Fresno and by 1937 at least 8 churches serving the German-speaking population (*Germantown Context*:12). Although there were only 12 Japanese in Fresno in 1890, by 1900 there were 3,000 (Bulbulian 2001:34). The first Armenians arrived in 1881 and eventually settled in an area between the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific tracks appropriately called “Armenian Town” (*ibid.* 37-38). African-Americans were also present early on and organized an African Methodist Church in 1882 (Clough 1984:137).

The raisin industry developed in the 1870s, after the scorching heat of 1875 dried grapes on the vine (Hoover 1990:91). Martin Theodore Kearney who left employment with the Central California Colony and eventually became one of the wealthiest landowners in the area served as the President of the first California Raisin Growers Association

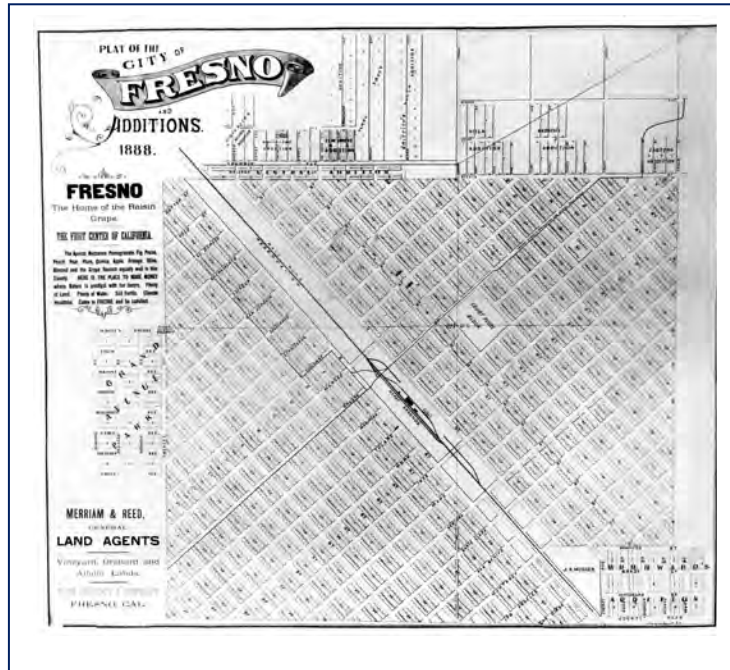
from 1898 to 1904. The Sun-Maid Raisin Cooperative was founded in 1911 and became one of the most successful in America. Fresno became the principal-packing center for the raisin grape industry with numerous packinghouses in the city.

In the early 20th century cotton became the county’s “number one money-making crop.” In 1910 the University of California’s Kearney Station [located at what is now Kearney Park] tested several varieties of cotton for their applicability to the area’s climate and soils. Fiber shortages during World War I encouraged the growth of a local cotton industry and in March 1918 the Fresno County Board of Supervisors selected the Pima variety for local production. The first cotton gin and drying mill in the County were built in 1918 by the California Products Company on the parcel now addressed at 3000 E. Butler Avenue in Fresno. The cotton came from a thirty-acre field about 15 miles south of Fresno (Clough 1986:169,175-6).

Other crops such as figs and stone fruits helped to diversify the local economy and Fresno became the market town for a large portion of the San Joaquin Valley (Reps 1979:192). It is now a city of 500,000 and the center of the richest agricultural county in the United States (Haslam 1993:194).

From 1880 to 1885 the population of Fresno more than tripled from 1,112 to 3,464 inhabitants. As a consequence land speculators began to buy and subdivide land outside of

Fresno's original town plan. Although the "parent grid" of the city was designed to be parallel to the Central Pacific corridor, these new tracts were surveyed to line up with the surrounding agricultural sections and laid out with streets oriented north-south and east-west. Thus today, when one crosses "Divisadero Street" it is necessary to make a 45% shift in entering the old part of the City. Odd-shaped triangular lots exist where the newer grid system meets the old. Divisadero Street itself was developed beginning in 1906.



Settlement north of the railroad town was facilitated by the development of streetcar lines; in particular the Forthcamp Avenue line along what is now Fulton Street. Large homes for Fresno's business elite were built along Forthcamp and Van Ness Avenues, the two main thoroughfares. The streets immediately west and east were lined, however, with homes built for families of more modest means and included both vernacular cottages and early bungalows built on speculation (Tower District Specific Plan 1991:3-10).

Development of J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens

As the City of Fresno gradually expanded north, developers hit a vast area of “outlaw land”, considered virtually worthless for anything but grazing and limited dry farming. The area was pocketed with hog wallows: in winter the land flooded and water stagnated in the lowest pockets; in summer it dried bone hard (Schlyer Rehart 1977:1). The landscape was scattered with Mima mounds, which varied in height from 1-5 feet, 10-15 feet across and which usually appeared in rows (Catherine Rehart 2002:166-167). Mima Mounds (named for the Mima Prairie in the state of Washington) contain sandy, loamy or silty soil above a more solid basement layer, which in Fresno is generally hardpan. The origins of these mounds are unclear but one theory is that they are created by pocket gophers (Wikipedia accessed 4 February 2013 and Catherine Rehart *ibid*). In 1891 Frank Bullard, Director of the Fresno Flume and Irrigation Company, purchased a significant portion of this area which he hoped to develop as part of a combined lumbering and irrigation project (Schlyer Rehart 1977:3). It was this vast stretch of “hog wallow” that attracted the attention in 1910 of a Kansas born entrepreneur, Jesse Clayton Forkner.

J.C. Forkner was born on a farm in Cherokee County Kansas in 1873. In 1889 he attended divinity school at Drake University and later graduated in 1893 with the first law class from the University of Kansas. His early farm

experience combined with his training in the ministry and law served him well. He had a “gift of gab,” as well as a prophetic vision for land development which translated into a successful career in real estate promotion (Schlyer Rehart 1977:1; Walker 1941:374). Forkner moved to Los Angeles around 1906 and spent some time in the Tulare Lake Region. He helped to establish a 7,000 acre colony near Caruthers and became an expert in growing trees and orchard cultivation. He particularly loved the Australian Eucalyptus and had them planted on the avenues leading to colony farms and towns (Schlyer Rehart 1977:1).

In 1910 Forkner came to the Fresno area. He obtained a one-year option from the Bullard Company to purchase 6,000 acres of the “outlaw land” north of the city. Rather than wasteland, Forkner saw promise. As he later commented: “I always have felt that there is no such thing as poor land; that God in His wisdom intended all the earth for some good purpose, no matter how poor the quality of the soil might appear to the casual observer” (*ibid*:5). He tested the soil and when he drilled through the hardpan he discovered that there was sandy soil beneath. He quickly understood that if he could blast a hole through the hardpan, the tree roots could reach good soil (Eaton 1965:37). He considered the possibility of vineyards, however, grapevines planted 10-12 feet apart would require a great deal of blasting and thus have a high cost at \$1 a shot (Schlyer Rehart 1977:4).

Forkner then turned to the fig tree with its Biblical associations. Photographer Pop Laval was hired to document the progress and he later recalled how Forkner quoted scripture while they were in the fields: “And the eyes of them both were opened and they perceived themselves naked. They sewed together fig leaves and made themselves aprons” (Pop Laval 1960). The notion of this hog wallow land as a “Garden of Eden” was planted.

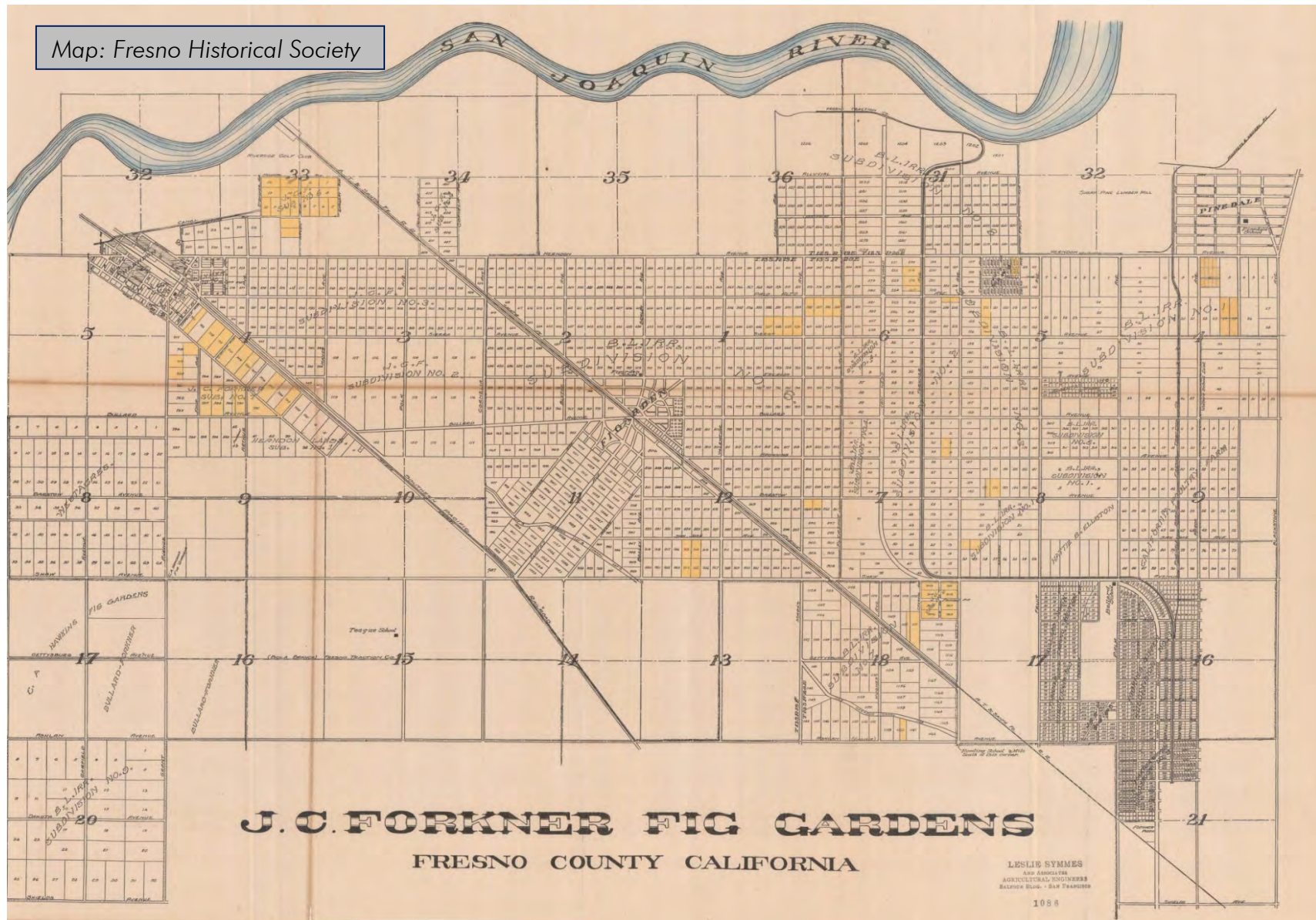
Fig orchards were already a cash crop in the Fresno area by the time Forkner took out his option on the Bullard lands. In 1885 Adriatic white figs had been planted and in 1889 were dried and shipped to the East (Schyler Rehart 1977:4). George C. Roeding introduced Smyrna figs to California and crossed them with the Capri fig to create a new variety, the Calimyrna (Cathy Rehart 1997:304). In 1894 Henry Markarian, son of Armenian immigrants, dried figs and shipped them to Saint Louis. He then purchased a ranch north of Fresno, planted it all in figs and by 1910 his “Fig Gardens” were flourishing. Markarian’s 160-acre ranch is now the site of Manchester Mall (Catherine Rehart 1996:193, Eaton 1965:37). When J.C. Forkner contacted Edward J. Wickson at U.C. Berkeley for advice on fig cultivation, Wickson redirected Forkner back to Fresno, to both Roeding and Markarian (Schyler Rehart 1977:4; Eaton *Ibid*). Forkner hired Markarian as a consultant in 1910 and the two men toured most of the fig growing areas in the United States (Eaton *Ibid*:38).



Makarian Fig Gardens, January 1918
(Photo: Pop Laval Foundation)

Forkner exercised his option to buy the 6,000 acres of Bullard lands and began to grade and level the Mima mounds using six-horse teams pulling Fresno scrapers (Eaton 1965:38). He purchased an additional 6,000 acres from various owners in the area so that his holdings were now 4.5 miles wide and 8 miles long, or an area bounded roughly today by Blackstone Avenue, Chateau Fresno, Alluvial and Ashlan Avenues (Schyler Rehart 1977:5). Forkner bought 48 of the first Fordson tractors and attached small scrapers and a disc tiller to them. These were so successful than he soon had 80 tractors “rumbling over the land, reshaping it so that water could reach every part of it from a network of canals” which were dug as the work progressed (*Ibid*). Henry Ford drove up from Los Angeles in a Tin Lizzy Model T coupe to

Map: Fresno Historical Society



view the work in progress, the first use of tractors in a large scale leveling operation (ibid).



Fresno Scraper 1913 (Pop Laval Foundation)

Then came the dynamite. Over a period of 3 years Forkner's workers used 660,000 pounds of dynamite to blast holes for 600,000 fig trees and 60,000 ornamental and shade trees. The ornamentals included eucalyptus, cedars and oleanders which were planted along the eight mile length of Van Ness Boulevard as it led out of town towards the San Joaquin River (Schyler Rehart 1977:5). Old time residents recalled that as children they were taken out to watch the blasting. "It was like an old-fashioned Fourth of July on a big scale" (Heritage Fresno 1975:68-69).

The land was marketed in 10-40 acre parcels to farming families throughout the United States and Europe. The handbills, newspaper advertisements and circulars published



Blasting for Fig Orchards on Bullard Land, 1916 (Pop Laval)

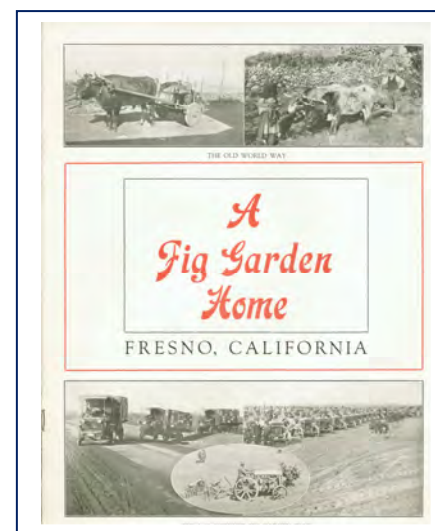
by the company painted a utopian ideal of almost socialistic proportions. The terms were generous. According to one article in the Fresno Morning Republican, Forkner apparently asked for no payment for five years: "And the result was that he sold within four months 1000 acres of land in units of about thirty acres, to good men, who moved upon the land, who planted the land to figs, who built comfortable homes at a cost of from \$800 to \$1200 (...) And the men and women who have moved upon this property are among the best settlers that Fresno county has ever had." (FMR nd.) These new fig farmers were "gathered from the four corners of the

earth." While waiting for the trees to bear fruit they planted crops between the rows, including potatoes to feed the Allies" (FMR 4 November 1917).

These early promotional pieces were quick to applaud the economic benefit of the Fig Garden project to the City of Fresno. The income from the development was estimated at \$1,200,000 annually; within ten years it was projected that this would double, "a golden stream that shall enrich the mercantile activities of the city and touch the economic life of Fresno at every point" (FMR n.d.). The Fresno County Chamber of Commerce, however, was far more skeptical and viewed Forkner as a carpetbagger, or worse. The Chamber passed a resolution condemning Forkner's project and published the resolution in local newspapers. Forkner responded with his own full page advertisement in the Fresno Morning Republican that promised "\$1,000 to any man, woman or child who could prove that a single acre of the Bullard Lands was free of hardpan" (Schyler Rehart 1977:1).

By 1922 there were close to 800 property owners, with holdings from one to 1,000 acres, including some large companies. The average property was 16 acres. Fig Garden Home, a 24-page brochure published by the company, continued the egalitarian, utopian vision of the earlier publicity pieces. There was a place for everyone in the Forkner Fig Gardens: "Modest homes and mansions alike, adorn the J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens. People of all walks of life live here, farmers, bakers, lawyers, doctors, laborers, school teachers and business men have all joined

hand in making these Fig Gardens a prosperous community and an ideal home place" ("A Fig Garden Home" 1922, n.p.). The publication discussed fig production and the social, educational and business amenities to be found living on the northern edge of Fresno. Photographs of homes included those of E.J. Bullard, President of the Bullard Company, the three-story Colonial style home of Senator M.B. Harris as well as the more modest properties of A.E. Zugg, Carpenter and B.K. Hesseltine, barber.



The Farming Division of the J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens was under the watchful eye of W.M. Bacon who monitored the 16 superintendents. The harvest season began in August and continued for 60 days or more. At the height of the season in 1921, 200 men were actively employed, operating

87 tractors. All supervisors and salesmen lived on the land, rather than being absentee landowners, which guaranteed immediate support to a new fig garden farming family. A Farm Bureau, comprised of the property owners, met frequently to discuss issues. The community of "Figarden," located in the middle of the 12,000 acres at what is now Bullard and Brawley Avenues, included a large fig preserving and packing plant owned by the California Peach and Fig Growers Association as well as the office for the J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens. The Santa Fe Railroad had a station in the town. The J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens also had a manufacturing plant at another site and shipped the first carload of pre-cooled fresh figs to New York City in the spring of 1921 ("A Fig Garden Home" 1922).



Forkner Gardens Fig Canning, 1921
(Photo: Pop Laval Foundation)



DeVaux Home Viewed Through Van Ness Trolley Stop, May 1920
(Photo: Pop Laval Foundation)

In retrospect, Fig Gardens was a model of progressive sustainable living. The Fresno Traction Company had established a streetcar line in 1912 that ran up Wishon Avenue and out to the San Joaquin River. One could take the trolley to work, shop downtown, and return to a "farm" in the country, or take the streetcar north to "Fresno Beach" for a day of picnicking, boating and "bathing".

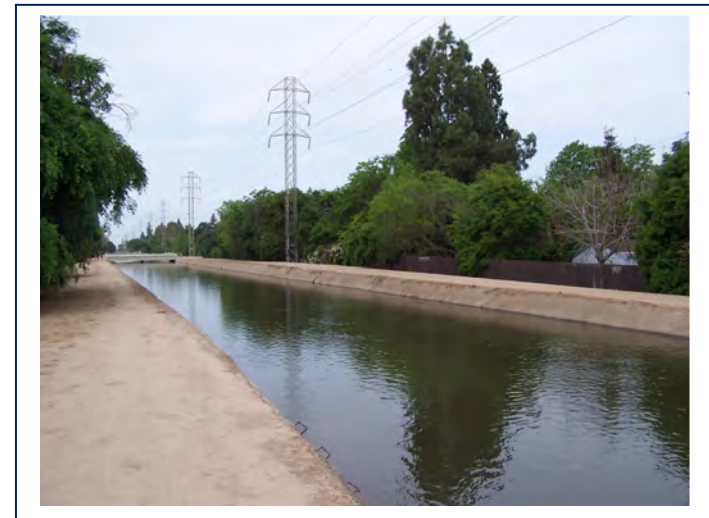
Irrigation: Herndon and Enterprise Canals

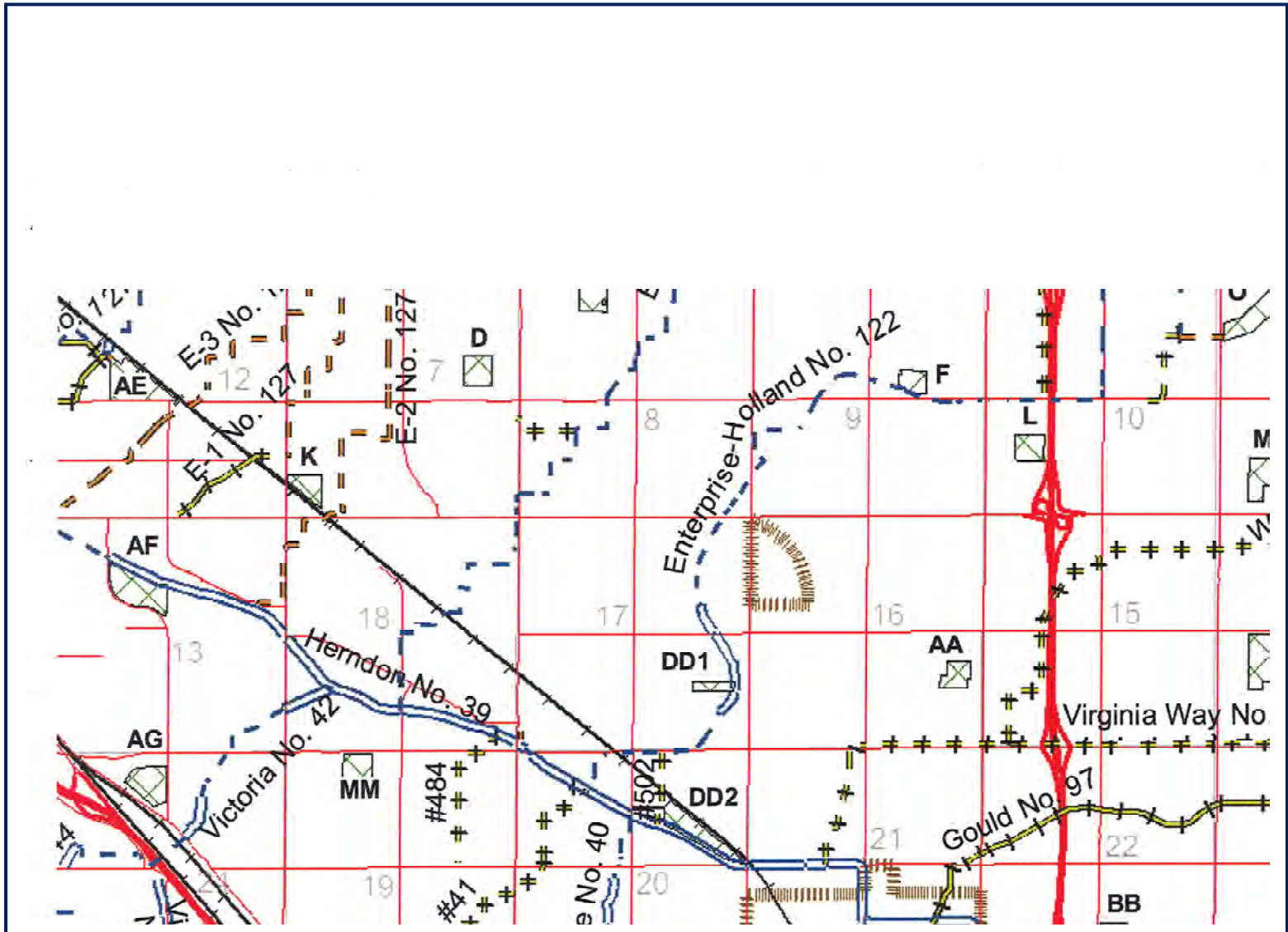
Over and above the preparation of the land for cultivation, an additional challenge was to obtain sufficient water for irrigation. The Fig Garden parcels all carried a “first class water right” furnished by the Fresno Irrigation District (FID), from water appropriated from the Kings River to the south (“A Fig Garden Home” 1922). By 1925 there were 25 miles of canals and 135 miles of laterals through Fig Garden with irrigation beginning in January each year (Schlyer Rehart 1977:5; “A Fig Garden Home” 1922). Domestic water was obtained from wells and pumped to the surface by windmill or electric motor. Many of the earliest residences are depicted in fact with an accompanying tankhouse (“A Fig Garden Home” 1922).

The Herndon Canal is the main canal which wends its way through the area. The Herndon turns off from the earlier Mill Canal, west of the Fresno Yosemite International Airport. It was constructed between 1887 and 1894 by the Fresno Canal and Irrigation Company (founded in 1871) under the direction of Dr. E. B. Perrin. Perrin’s land holdings included vast tracts around the settlement at Herndon and in 1887 he gained control of the company; the Herndon Canal was, in fact, initially called the “Perrin Canal.” British investors ran the FCIC for 20 years when Perrin defaulted on his loans in 1894. In 1917 the company was designated the Fresno Canal and Land Company and in mid-1920 the landowners voted to form the Fresno Irrigation District (JRP 1995).

The Fresno Irrigation District inherited over 800 miles of canals, laterals and ditches, including the Enterprise-Holland Canal. A short reach of this canal runs above ground west of Palm Avenue, but most of this system, which dates to 1876, has been placed underground. The Enterprise was the only canal on the Fresno plain with its dam and headgate above the Fresno Canal on the Kings River (Shallat 1978:108). Both the Herndon and the above-ground segment of the Enterprise contribute significantly to the historic landscape of Fig Gardens. Both canals also offer recreational possibilities for walking and jogging, possibilities only partially realized today due to liability concerns and public safety.

Herndon Canal, Old Fig





J.C. and Lewella Pooler Swift Forkner

J.C. Forkner married Lewella Pooler Swift in 1912. She was the daughter of pioneer timber operator Lewis P. Swift who with partner Charles Shaver established a timber mill in the late 1800s at what is now Shaver Lake (Fresno Bee 5 March 1991). The Forkners built a new home which they named “Northfield,” as it was located in the north field of the 12,000 acres (Schyler Rehart 1977:6). The two-story residence was designed by Swartz and Swartz in a rambling Prairie style with Arts and Crafts detailing. The home had sleeping porches on the second story and a large kitchen that could accommodate preparation of meals for the many guests and potential clients which the Forkners entertained over the years. William Claybaugh, superintendent of Roeding Park, landscaped the grounds and planted the family orchard (Heritage Fresno 1975:68-69). The streetcar line ran two blocks away and Forkner boasted that he was only 20 minutes by either streetcar or auto from the Rowell Building in downtown Fresno, with “all the advantages of city and the country.” The Forkners lived at Northfield until 1921, surrounded by fifteen acres of apricots, olives, figs and citrus trees (Schyler Rehart ibid.). In 1921 they moved with their four children to a new home at Swift and Van Ness Boulevard in the Forkner-Giffen Tract (“Lewella Pooler Swift Forkner”, n.d). The Forkners later moved back to Northfield where J.C. Forkner died in August 1969.

Mrs. Forkner passed away one day short of her 101st birthday in 1991 (Fresno Bee March 1991). Northfield was razed in 1991 to make way for two “estate-sized” homes (McGill1991:1).



J.C. Forkner Home, Northfield, n.d. (Pop Laval Foundation)

Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens

In 1919 J.C. Forkner and local entrepreneur Wylie M. Giffen joined forces and developed the "Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens Incorporated," with the expressed purpose of subdividing a portion of the remaining 12,000 Bullard acres into residential parcels. The "Garden Home Tract" was located on Van Ness Boulevard just north of the Fresno State Normal School and the site for the new \$750,000 Fresno High School (FMR 12 September 1919). Forkner Giffen Fig Gardens Subdivision No 1 (the west half of Section 16) was bounded by Maroa Avenue on the east, Palm Avenue on the west, what is now Shaw Avenue on the north and Virginia Way (now Ashlan) on the south. The two graceful curves of Wishon and Van Ness Boulevard were depicted on the 1919 map along with a right-of-way down the middle of Wishon Avenue for the Fresno Traction Company streetcar line (Forkner Giffen Fig Gardens Subdivision No. 1 1919). Subdivision No. 2 was shaped like a "P," with Virginia (now Ashlan) on the North, Palm on the west, the Herndon Canal on the south, Van Ness Boulevard to Griffith Way and then east to Maroa Avenue (Forkner Giffen Subdivision No. 2 1919). The parcels were mostly 1-acre or 10 city lots in size in order to provide for a "home-sustaining fig garden, to include [a] suburban environment, and at the same time the privileges and advantages of the city." Each acre was planted by the company with fifty Kadota fig trees (Fresno Real Estate Market 1919:10). The Forkner-Giffen

Garden Home Tract

A Garden Home Acre
EQUALS 10 CITY LOTS

An Opportunity Made Possible for You
—through the foresight of the Giffen-Forkner Organization—

—The Garden Home Tract is a beautiful residential tract, located in the heart of the city of Fresno, California, and is one of the most desirable places to live in the city. The tract is bounded by Van Ness Boulevard to the north, Maroa Avenue to the east, and Virginia Way to the south. The tract is divided into 10 city lots, each of which is one-tenth of an acre. The tract is one of the most beautiful and desirable places to live in the city of Fresno, California.

This is What Wylie M. Giffen and J. C. Forkner Guarantee to Give You—

- To own a beautiful home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.
- To own a home, with a large lot, and a beautiful view of the city of Fresno, California.

Garden Home Acres—10 City Lots
\$1250 — \$1350 — \$1500
Without Interest or Taxes 3 Years
On Terms Most Attractive

THE FORKNER-GIFFEN FIG GARDENS INC.
Wylie M. Giffen 312 CORY BLDG. FRESNO, CALIF. J. C. Forkner

PHONE 268 **BERT GOLDSMITH** SALES MANAGER

—Send for Descriptive Pamphlet of Garden Tract

Organization offered free delivery service for groceries, ice and milk “and other every-day life essentials and comforts.” Depending upon location the parcels sold for \$1250, \$1350, or \$1500 without interest or taxes for three years. A new “Domestic and Irrigation Plant” was planned to provide free water to each home (Garden Home Tract advertisement, n.d.). Of interest is that contrary to the expressed egalitarian nature of Forkner’s Fig Gardens, the Garden Home Tract was a “restricted district” with covenants that ensured “good neighbors.” The Garden Home Tract is that part of the Fresno County Island now referred to as “Old Fig.”

Forkner and Giffen had apparently planned the Garden Home Tract since 1916 (*Fresno Real Estate Market* 1919:10). The two were leading businessmen of the day and had numerous opportunities, both business and social, to interact. Wylie M. Giffen farmed thousands of acres of wheat and cotton but is best remembered for his contributions to viticulture. In 1912 his vineyards of Thompson grapes were the largest in the world as were his 1,300 acres of muscat grapes (Catherine Rehart 1997: 108). He was one of the charter directors in 1912, along with A.G. Wishon, of the California Associated Raisin Company. He served as the director of the company which in 1922 changed its name to the Sun-Maid Raisin Growers. In 1920 he also was a major force along with J.C. Forkner in the organization of the Fresno Irrigation District (Smith 2004: 642, 731).

Depression and World War II

The fig industry in Fresno was hard hit by the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Figs were a luxury crop and demand ceased with the Depression with the price for the best dried fruit dropping from \$150 a ton to less than \$50 a ton. The bottom also fell out of the real estate market in the 1930s. “By 1934, the situation was so bad that what remained of Forkner’s Fig Garden holdings were confiscated by the county and state governments because he could not pay the taxes owned on them” (Schyler Rehart 1977:6). Forkner used his powers of persuasion and talked the franchise tax commissioner into leasing him the properties so that the fig trees could be watered and cultivated. With the end of the Depression and the beginning of World War II Forkner’s financial situation improved. At the time of his death at Northfield in 1969 his family owned more than 1,500 acres in the Fig Garden area, valued conservatively at several million dollars (*Ibid.*). Forkner left a legacy on the land, but also contributed in numerous other ways to the history and welfare of the region. He was key to the creation of the community of Highway City, developed during the Depression for industrial and agricultural laborers, and in 1921-22 Forkner served as the Chairman of the State Water Resources Investigation Commission (*Ibid.*).

Architecture and Landscapes of Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens

The lush urban forest and gardens of Old Fig are critical to the neighborhood's "sense of place." The landscaping along the right-of-way in the Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens was designed by Horace Cotton (1891-1972) of San Francisco. Cotton was born in Africa of missionary parents and received his B.S. from U.C. Berkeley. By 1919 the developers and the landscape architect had planted over 20,000 ornamental trees and estimated a final planting of 100,000 trees stretching from the city limits to the San Joaquin River along Van Ness Boulevard (John Edward Powell, 1994).

Christmas Tree Lane:

The deodar cedars that line Van Ness Boulevard through the Forkner-Giffen (Old Fig Garden) Tract ultimately lent themselves to a winter landscape that each December is transformed into Christmas Tree Lane. In 1920 Mrs. W.P. Winning decorated the tree in front of her home at 3938 N. Van Ness Boulevard in memory of her young son who had died. In 1928 the Fig Garden Woman's Club asked residents along the boulevard to decorate one tree, which culminated in 12 trees, ten with lights. The following year there were 17 participants. The first "Christmas Tree Lane" was advertised in 1931 with 30 decorated trees and a special holiday program at the Fig Garden Woman's Clubhouse (Fig Garden Woman's Club, n.d.). Since 1920

the lane has only been dark two years: in 1941 following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and again in 1973 due to the energy crisis. The event now extends along two miles of Van Ness Boulevard with 300 trees and 140 decorated homes, attracting 100,000 visitors annually (www.oldfig.org accessed 14 February 2013). Two walk-only nights draw families with children in strollers, dogs on lease, carolers, Scottish highlanders in kilts---a literal cacophony of residents from Fresno and beyond.



Christmas Tree Lane, 1933 (Pop Laval Foundation)

Thomas Church Gardens:

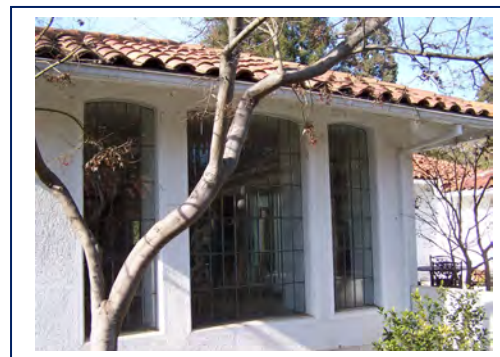
Thomas Church, the preeminent 20th-century residential landscape architect in the United States, designed at least 14 gardens in Old Fig and its adjacent subdivisions. Church was born in Boston in 1902 and was a graduate of U.C. Berkeley and the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Following Harvard, Church spent a year in Italy, France, England and Spain. In 1927 he returned to California where his first designs reflected his thesis on Mediterranean gardens. Through collaboration with architects William Wurster and Cliff May, Church moved to a more informal design vocabulary, including courtyard gardens that connected outdoor patio living spaces with the indoors. However, he also remained partial to the more formal symmetry of the Beaux Arts. As local landscape architect Robert Boro has observed, Fresno and Old Fig Garden in particular offered Church the patrons, the large lots, and the climate to design gardens for year-round indoor-outdoor living (Boro 2008: 50-51).

*Hilliard Giffen Adobe (1940)
(Franklin and Kump)
Thomas Church Garden*



Architecture:

The earliest residences in Old Fig were all built in a variety of architectural styles. The George Reasor Home (1919) is a very modern interpretation of the Spanish Revival, the Elmer Cox Home (1920, the original Christmas Tree Lane residence) is a wood sided American Foursquare, Twin Acres (1920, Charles Butner) is a three-story Colonial Georgian, the White Home (c1922) is an English-French mix and the Charles Stewart Home (1922) is an Airplane Bungalow. The most salient feature in fact of Old Fig Garden architecture is its diversity, in part due to the fact that parcels were developed over time with new construction as recent as... today. One short block of E. Hampton Way, as an example, includes Colonial Revival, Tudor, Minimal Traditional, Ranch and Contemporary style residences. Architect-designed homes on large lots line the main axis of N. Van Ness Boulevard, but side streets often include modest buildings from the 1940-1950s.



*Detail, the George
Reasor Home
4222 N. Van Ness*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines architectural style as “a definite type of architecture, distinguished by special characteristics of structure and ornament.” These “special characteristics” are also referred to as “character defining features,” thus what helps to differentiate a Craftsman bungalow from say a Mid-century Modern Ranch. The original multi-sash windows, the porch balustrade, the Spanish tile roof of a home are all aspects of a building that property owners should strive to preserve and protect. But in talking about style we need to note a few caveats. Many buildings in Old Fig are a stylistic mix, as if the builder or homeowner went down to the lumber yard (or perused a catalogue) and grabbed a handful of this and a handful of that and threw it on the blank walls of the building under construction. Many styles, such as the Prairie, borrow from a variety of sources. Finally, it is important not to rely too heavily on style alone for classification. Some buildings may be plain and without articulation, but still have a rich cultural history such as the American Foursquare or the Hall-parlor cottage. It is therefore important to recognize **type** as well as **style** in discussing the architectural history of an area.

What follows are brief descriptions of the most popular building styles in Old Fig.

Craftsman Bungalow. “Bungalow” is a traditional East Indian house (the word is Bengali) that included an open floor plan and wide verandas. Around 1905 the house form merged with the Arts and Crafts tradition to produce the craftsman bungalow. Character defining features include the one-story

plan (the **Airplane Bungalow** pictured with its second story, usually set back from the front elevation is an exception); wide overhanging eaves; projecting rafter tails; an informal floor plan that opens to the garden (and use of a pergola to bridge the home and garden); chimneys of cobblestone, or rough-faced brick; and piers or columns as porch supports.



*Charles W. Stewart
Home (1922)
3889 N. Van Ness
Blvd.*

American Foursquare. One of the most prevalent house types in early Fresno is the American Foursquare: a one or two story symmetrical “box” with hipped or pyramidal roof and four roughly equal rooms downstairs and upstairs. The type was popular in the Midwest by the mid-19th century and was brought to this area by Fresno’s early settlers. Most Fresno Foursquare homes were built between 1900 and 1920 and are two-story, with a full width one story porch with classical columns. A hipped roof dormer is often present. Two-story pilasters may be present at the corners of the building.

The only known example in Old Fig is the Elmer Cox Home, where Christmas Tree Lane began in the 1920s.



The Elmer Cox Home (1920) 3938 N. Van Ness Boulevard

Prairie. The “Prairie School” was a style of architecture and aesthetics that flourished in the American Midwest, c1900-1920 and is one of the few indigenous American styles. Character defining features include a full two-story plan; emphasis on horizontal lines with bands of wood, concrete coping or cast stone; low hipped roofs with overhanging eaves; clean masonry or stucco over masonry walls; a single story porch or porte cochere and use of natural materials.



The DeVaux Mansion (Fig Garden Swim Club)

Neoclassical architecture was initially inspired by the use of classicism at the 1893 Columbia Exposition. As applied to residences the style is characterized by a symmetrical façade; full front porch supported by classical columns; centrally placed doors with elaborate surrounds; boxed eaves with a moderate overhang, often with dentils or modillions beneath, and occasionally a wide frieze band; rectangular and double hung sash windows.

*McMahan Home
(University House) (1941)
Taylor-Wheeler
4411 N. Van Ness Blvd.*



Colonial Revival refers to buildings that quote the domestic architecture of Colonial America, whether English, Dutch or even German in origin. Most Colonial Revival homes have a symmetrical facade with paired double hung sash windows usually with multi-pane glazing. The front door is often accented with a decorative pediment supported by pilasters and may have an overhead fanlight or sidelights. The Colonial Revival was a popular style in Old Fig.

*Cape Code Style Colonial
(1942)*



Spanish Eclectic (Spanish Colonial) was developed in 1913-1915 for the San Diego Panama-Pacific Exposition at Balboa Park. Distinguishing features of the Spanish Revival, which draws from a variety of Spanish architectural influences, include stucco wall surfaces often with ornate low-relief carvings, red tiled low pitched roofs, arcaded porches, iron window grills and balconies. The style was popular in the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s and quickly passed from favor during the 1940s. The Spanish, Mission and Italian Villa styles often melded into a **Mediterranean style** which also featured a red tile roof usually with rounded or arched windows.

*J.G. Teeple Home (1928)
4464 N. Van Ness Blvd.*



Monterey Revival. The Monterey Revival is an adaptation of an architectural style that developed along California's central coast between 1835 and 1840. "The Monterey," became a popular revival in the 1920s. Always two-story, the most significant feature is the second story balcony which extends across the façade and is generally cantilevered over the first floor.

Monterey (1946)



Tudor Revival. The Tudor Revival style is loosely based on a variety of Medieval English prototypes. Characteristic of American houses is the steeply-pitched front facing gable and ornamental false half-timbering, or strapwork. Other features include tall narrow windows usually in multiple groups; multi-pane glazing; massive chimneys, commonly crowned by chimney pots; round-arched doorways with heavy board and batten doors. Windows are often casement but are also double-hung sash.



*Tudor (1932)
4318 N. Van Ness Boulevard*

French Norman. The French Norman style was loosely based on the vernacular architecture of Normandy and Brittany and is often confused with the Tudor Revival. Character defining features include a round tower with steep conical roof which is frequently the focal point and main entrance for the residence and a steeply pitched roof with rolled composition shingles (to simulate thatching). French Norman style homes are fairly rare in Fresno.



*Ryan Home (1928)
Fisher McNulty
4585 N. Van Ness*

Streamline Moderne. During the 1930s architects and designers began to search for a visual vocabulary that was not rooted in antiquity. Streamline Moderne developed out of the Art Deco style of the 1920s and reflected the essence of all machines, thus motion through the reduction of friction. Buildings have rounded (streamlined) corners, flat roofs often with a small ledge or coping at the roof line, smooth stucco walls, windows or walls of glass blocks, and nautical details like portholes and handrails of tubular metal.



*The Ben Levy Home (1933)
4138 N. Van Ness Boulevard*

Minimal Traditional style homes were built at the end of the Depression and through the 1950s. They mimic the form of prior Period Revival style buildings but are usually lacking in the decorative detailing. Roof pitch is low or intermediate and eaves are close rather than overhanging as in the Ranch style which followed. They often have a large chimney and one front-facing gable and may appear to be a simple version of a Tudor cottage.



(1940)
E. Buckingham Way

Ranch. The Ranch home was developed in the mid-1930s by several California architects and was to a great extent a response to the growing reliance on the automobile. Thus unlike the Minimal Traditional style home, the Ranch sprawled across a larger lot and encompassed a built-in garage. Most Ranch homes are one story with low pitched roofs with either boxed or open eaves. Many have details borrowed from earlier traditions such as decorative shutters and iron or wooden post supports. Ribbon windows and expansive picture windows and large rear yards are other features of the Ranch.

*Typical Ranch
(1950)*



Contemporary. The Contemporary style gained popularity between the years of 1950 and 1970. Contemporary homes represented a growing demand for housing that reflected the latest styles and materials including such modern features as aluminum frame windows, sliding-glass doors, interior courtyards, and carports or garages. Homes constructed in the Contemporary style often reflected a vernacular form of the International style with the characteristic flat roof, and absence of exterior decoration.



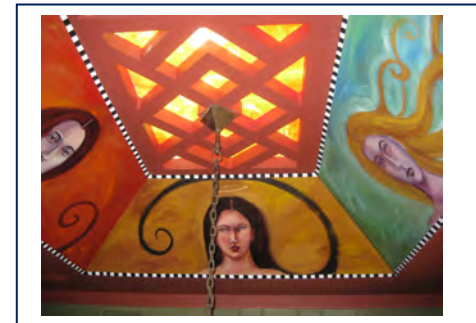
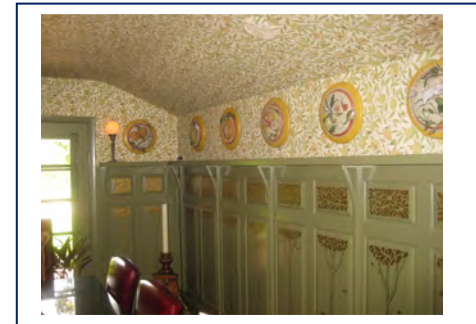
*Interior of the Larsen
Home (1964)
4777 N. Wishon Ave.*

Interiors

The Old Fig neighborhood has long been a mecca for artists, architects, university professors and intellectuals from a variety of disciplines. As such even modest homes often “hide” amazing interiors, with antiques, free standing works of art, painted murals and stained glass windows.

One renovated c1944 home on N. Wishon includes a *dale de verre* (“slab of glass”) installation in the dining room designed by the owner’s father, Fresno artist “Corky” Normart. Normart received international attention in 1994 when he was chosen to design and supervise the restoration of the Great Dome in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Another home, constructed originally in 1940 as a small adobe, is now a rabbit warren of rooms large and small with a spacious landscaped garden by Adam Holland, Tim Woods and Terry Broussard. A Four Seasons sitting area and decorative beams and lintels were painted by Piet Ogata. The ceramicist Pat Hopper was commissioned to create the medallions in the dining room, which depict the history of Old Fig. Hopper herself purchased a Fig Garden ranch style residence designed by Taylor-Wheeler Builders on E. Pontiac and enclosed the carport for a studio. She added a dining room which includes a ceramic installation on one wall and created a fanciful water feature for the side yard.



The Adobe Tradition

One special aspect of Fig Garden architecture is the numerous adobes, constructed either with traditional mud bricks made on site by itinerant Mexican crews, or with stabilized adobe bricks by the Coalinga-born inventor, Hans Sumpf. Many adobes were architect designed to reflect the “Early California” style, others were homeowner built.

During the Depression and World War II, adobe construction was widely adopted throughout the San Joaquin Valley due to several factors, including economic hardship, a shortage of building materials, and a consciously-developed aesthetic by architects who looked to both early California as well as the buildings of Mexico and Spain for inspiration. Vernacular builders continued to construct homes using materials at hand, including adobe and hardpan.

San Joaquin Valley architects in the 1920s-1940s began to explore and reconsider California’s “indigenous architecture,” in hopes of developing a new vernacular, a new California Colonial style. One of the most influential architects in this tradition was Clarence Cullimore. He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1910 with a B.S. in Architecture and went on to the University of Southern California, where he received a Masters in Architecture with a thesis on California adobes. Cullimore constructed his first adobe residence in Bakersfield in 1926 and another for the family in 1930. He designed

adobe houses and ranch outbuildings up and down the Central Valley, as far north as Redding and Red Bluff. There are at least two of his homes in Fresno—the O. W. Hunsaker Home in Fresno’s Old Fig Garden neighborhood and the W. Roy Peterson Residence (c1936) near Roosevelt High School. His trademark was the use of Chinese blue tiles for vents.

*The Hunsaker Adobe
(1935)
Clarence Cullimore
4649 N. Van Ness*



Cullimore developed a highly-regarded technical drawing curriculum at Kern County Union High School in Bakersfield. One of his star pupils was Ernest J. Kump Jr. who eventually completed his M.A. at Harvard under Walter Gropius, the German Bauhaus Modernist. In 1937 Kump Jr. formed a partnership with Charles Franklin with offices in Fresno and Bakersfield. Ironically, while Franklin and Kump were pushing Fresno’s architecture into modernism, they were also looking back to a romanticized early California by designing adobe homes for clients in the Fig Garden area such as the Gilbert Jertberg Adobe completed in 1936. Numerous

adobe homes were constructed, particularly in Fig Garden, for professors, artists, and leading professionals of the community. As one local resident recalls, adobe building was “real popular” at the time. Mexican crews went throughout the neighborhood making adobe bricks dug on site—several homes still have ponds at the site of the borrow pits. The bricks were sun dried and the crews later returned to begin construction. Adobe was a “great insulator” and cool in summer.



*The Nevins Adobe (1920-1947)
4478 N. College Avenue*

In early March 1938, the Herndon Canal flooded, inundating blocks of homes in the Old Fig Garden neighborhood. As a consequence, traditional adobe brick structures such as the Jertberg Home literally melted. Fortuitously, a young Coalinga-born inventor and entrepreneur, Hans Sumpf, had recently perfected stabilized adobe bricks. When Fresno was hit by the floods in 1938, Sumpf returned to Fresno and set up a plant, first at Sierra and Maroa Avenues, and then at Chestnut and Teague Avenues. By 1970 Hans Sumpf had moved to 80 acres in Madera County and annually produced millions of bricks. His adobe bricks were used not only in residential building but also in the numerous Garden Office complexes designed by Robert Stevens and Gene Zellmer. In addition Hans Sumpf bricks were used as accent on building facades, for garden walls and in mailboxes and are an important part of the area’s vernacular landscape (Hattersley-Drayton 2008:88-98).

*Claude Simms
Family
Evacuation,
Herndon Canal
Flood, 1938*

*Photo:
Fresno Historical
Society*



Shaw Avenue Garden Offices

Numerous Shaw Avenue garden offices along Old Fig's northern boundary were designed by Robert Stevens and Gene Zellmer, all built with Hans Sumpf adobe bricks. Architect Robert Stevens was a graduate in architecture from the University of Southern California and a confirmed modernist with influences from Schindler, Johnson, and Neutra. In 1949 he founded Robert W. Stevens and Associates and in about 1970 merged with a young architect Gene Zellmer. Stevens is credited with pioneering the "garden office" style of architecture; 80 percent of the buildings along one stretch of Fresno's Shaw Avenue were designed by the firm. Stevens, and later Stevens and Zellmer, used stabilized adobe brick in many of these office complexes. The building at 567 W. Shaw Avenue features Stevens' signature Richardsonian arch—what local architects referred to as a "mouse hole." Stevens' favorite complex was 5151 N. Palm Avenue, with massive stabilized adobe brick walls, many of them canted with pier buttresses, all designed around a garden breezeway (Hattersley-Drayton 2008: 88-98).

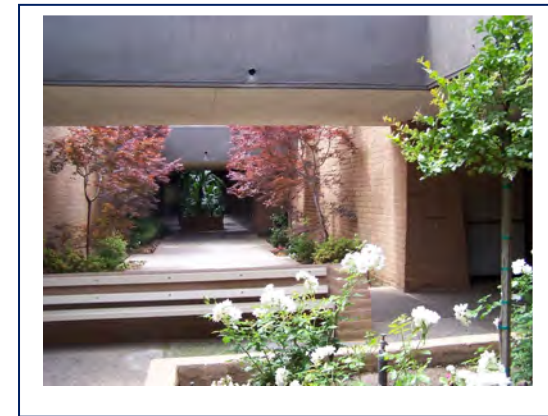


Fig Garden Village

Only two non-residential buildings are located within “Old Fig,” the Neoclassical style Fig Garden Woman’s Club and the County fire station. However, on the northern boundary of this residential neighborhood are numerous office complexes (as discussed above) as well as the Fig Garden Village, the first of the City’s regional shopping centers, which opened in 1956. The Village was designed by John Fennacy in the style of the “Town and Country Villages” popular at the time in the Bay Area and Sacramento. Fennacy used recycled telephone poles and railroad ties in the initial construction. The earliest buildings in this complex include the current CVS Drugstore (formerly Longs) and the row of shops adjacent to it that includes La Boulangerie. Fig Garden Village was developed by the property owners Ellen and Allen Funch, who invested 5 million dollars in the project. Ellen Sherman Funch grew up on the property on her parents’ farm. Ironically, the Shermans farmed peaches and grapes and never grew figs (Thompson 4 March 2005; Weil 4 March 2005; Clough 1984:215 and Catherine Rehart 1997:78-79.)



Recommendations for Future Planning

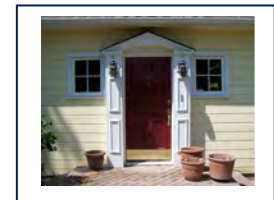
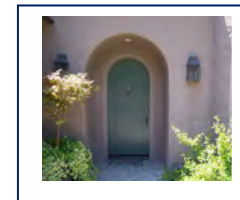
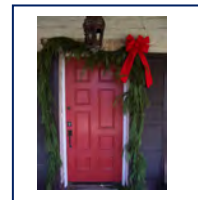
On May 25, 2010 the Fresno County Board of Supervisors designated the “Old Fig Garden Historic District” to the Fresno County List of Historic Places. The Historic District includes approximately 1800 properties and with one exception follows the boundaries of the County Island, rather than the Tract map boundaries of the Forkner-Giffen Fig Gardens. The action by the Supervisors ensures that the District and its individual contributors meet the definition of a presumptive historical resource for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (California Code of Regulations 15064.5(2)). What exactly does this mean, and how, if at all is the neighborhood protected and preserved for the future?

Discretionary actions that require CEQA review must take into consideration the effects to the environment, including historic and cultural (sub-surface) resources. Projects such as a street widening or other civic improvement that could potentially demolish buildings or adversely affect the District would need to first consider the effects to the historic resources. However, most construction work is NOT discretionary; it is “ministerial.” Building permits, including demolition permits, are traditionally considered ministerial actions under CEQA and do not require review. As an example, a few years back a 1930s Prairie style home on

N. Van Ness Boulevard was demolished without review of any kind.

Historic Preservation Ordinance:

In order to protect the historic character of Old Fig, it is recommended that the County adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance with provisions for permit review for properties listed on the County Register. Building permits to alter an historic resource would then be reviewed for compliance with the ordinance which would include design review guidelines, either a set of best practices such as the “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties” or guidelines particular to the neighborhood or region. A Fig Garden Specific Plan could also include design guidelines, which would be enforceable if the Specific Plan was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors. Design guidelines would help property owners understand the “character-defining features” of their historic homes and that repair, or, when necessary, replacement with like style and like materials, protects the value of the home and the neighborhood.



New infill in Old Fig would need to have appropriate massing, setbacks and use of compatible materials in order to preserve the character of the neighborhood.

Window Replacement:

A significant loss of integrity to a historic property occurs when property owners replace their original wood or steel sash windows with vinyl, hoping to save energy and thus money over time. Studies conducted by the City of Fresno, PGE and other groups across the country indicate that most heat loss and gain is through the attic, through inadequate insulation and faulty ducting, through cracks around doors and windows. Heavy drapes, shutters, storm windows and awnings are traditional and less expensive methods to save energy.



"Remodeled" Home, Tower District



A Fig Garden Park:

Only a few years ago there was a parcel, on the east side of N. Maroa Avenue, planted with old fig trees. The trees have since been removed. Perhaps it is too late but an easement or small pocket park with fig trees and appropriate signage discussing the history (and thus the name "Old Fig") could be a valuable teaching tool for local schools.

Project Staff Qualifications

Karana Hattersley-Drayton has a M.A. and completed three years of coursework towards the Ph.D. in Architectural History at U.C. Berkeley. For three years she served on the State Historical Resources Commission and has also served on the Board of Directors for the Vernacular Architecture Forum. Most recently she was the Chair for the VAF's annual conference which met in Fresno in May 2008. Ms. Hattersley-Drayton moved to Fresno in 1999 to work as an architectural historian for Caltrans District 06 and in June of 2002 was hired as the City of Fresno's Historic Preservation Project Manager. She has taught courses in California architecture and American urbanism at Sonoma State University and most recently for the OSHER Institute at Fresno State University. Areas of particular interest include the vernacular, gendered and ethnic landscapes of the San Joaquin Valley, sustainability and preservation. The publication, "Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of the San Joaquin Valley," for which she wrote several articles and served as Executive Editor, won a 2008 California Preservation Foundation and a 2009 Governor's Historic Preservation award.

References

Books, Reports and Journal Articles:

"A Fig Garden Home Fresno, California." Fresno, California: The J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens, Incorporated, 1922.

Boro, Robert. "Thomas Church Gardens in Fresno." In Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of California's San Joaquin Valley. Ed. Karana Hattersley-Drayton, 50-51. Fresno, California: City of Fresno Planning and Development Department, 2008.

Bulbulian, Berge. The Fresno Armenians: History of a Diaspora Community. Sanger, California: World Dancer Press, 2001.

Clough, Charles W. et al. Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980s. Fresno, California: Panorama West Books, 1986.

Clough, Charles W. and William B. Secrest Jr. Fresno County-The Pioneer Years from the Beginnings to 1900. Fresno, California: Panorama West Books, 1984.

Datel, Robin Elisabeth. "Picturing the Central Valley through Maps." In Picturing California's Other Landscape: the Great Central Valley." Ed. Heath Schenker, 93-116. Berkeley, California: Heyday Books, 1999.

Eaton, Edwin M. Vintage Fresno: Pictorial Recollections of a Western City. Fresno, California: Huntington Press, 1965.

Gayton, A. H. "Yokuts and Western Mono Ethnography II: Northern Foothill Yokuts and Western Mono." University of California Anthropological Records 10(2):143-301. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948.

"Germantown, Fresno Historical Context." Prepared by Architectural Resources Group for the City of Fresno 4 April 2006.

Hamm Jr., Edward. When Fresno Rode the Rails. Glendale, California: Interurbans Publications, 1979.

- Harris, Cyril M. Dictionary of Architecture and Construction: Third Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
- Haslam, Gerald. The Great Central Valley: California's Heartland. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.
- Hattersley-Drayton, Karana, Executive Editor. Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of California's San Joaquin Valley. Fresno, California: City of Fresno Planning and Development Department, 2008.
- Heritage Fresno: Homes and People. Fresno, California: American Association of University Women, 1975.
- Hoover, Mildred Brooke, Hero Eugene Rensch, Ethel Grace Rensch and William N. Abeloe. Historic Spots in California, 4th edition, revised by Douglas E. Kyle. Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Imperial Fresno: Resources, Industries and Scenery Illustrated and Described. Fresno, California: Fresno Republican, 1897 (rpt.1979 Fresno City and County Historical Society.)
- Latta, Frank F. Handbook of Yokuts Indians. Santa Cruz: Bear State Books, 1977.
- Liebs, Chester H. Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, Second edition 1995.
- McAllester, Virginia and Lee. A Field Guide to American Houses. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- "Mid-Century Modernism Historic Context." Prepared for the City of Fresno, Planning and Development Department by Planning Resource Associates, Inc, September 2008.
- Panter, John. "Central California Colony: 'Marvel of the Desert.'" Fresno Past And Present 36:2 (Summer 1994) 1-11.
- Rehart, Catherine Morrison. The Valley's Legends and Legacies. Fresno, California: World Dancer Press, 1996.

- _____. The Valley's Legends and Legacies II. Fresno, California: World Dancer Press, 1997.
- _____. The Valley's Legends and Legacies III. Fresno, California: World Dancer Press, 1999.
- _____. The Valley's Legends and Legacies IV. Fresno, California: World Dancer Press, 2002.
- Rehart, Schyler. "J.C. Forkner Turned Fresno's 'Hog Wallows' Into 'Garden of Eden.'" Fresno-Past and Present 19:3 (September 1977) 1-7.
- Reps, John W. Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Shallat, Todd A. Water and the Rise of Public Ownership on the Fresno Plain: 1850 to 1978. City of Fresno Public Works Department, 1978.
- Smith, Wallace. Garden of the Sun: A History of the San Joaquin Valley 1772-1939. Second Edition. Edited and Revised by William B. Secrest, Jr. Fresno, California: Linden Publishing, 2004.
- Walker, Ben R. The Fresno County Blue Book: Containing Facts and Impressions for the Better Understanding of Fresno Past and Present/Collected and Prepared by Ben R. Walker with Biographies of Representative County People. Fresno, California: A.H. Cawston, 1941.
- Winter, Robert. The California Bungalow. Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1980.
- Winter, Robert and Alexander Vertikoff. American Bungalow Style. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Newpapers Articles, Interviews, Advertisements and Sundry Notes:

"Cultural Resources Inventory Report for the Proposed Mojave Northward Expansion Project." Prepared by JRP, Davis, California (July 1995).

Donaldson, Mart V. "Wonder Fig Garden of Fresno: Five Thousand Acres in Planting North of City," The Fresno Morning Republican 4 November 1917.

_____. "Fig Garden Dream is Realized: First Step in Development of Great J.C. Forkner Holdings," The Fresno Morning Republican [n.d.]

"Draft Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the City of Fresno Herndon Bankside Trail Project, Fresno County, California." Prepared by AppliedEarthworks Inc. for the City of Fresno Public Works Department, August 2006.

"Fig Garden Village 30th Anniversary (1956-1986): A Brief Look at Almost 200 Years of History of the Fig Garden Area," April 1986.

"Fig Garden Woman's Club," 1980 (?).

"Fresno City, Fig Garden," Fresno Bee 16 September 1986, B-10.

"Fresno Real Estate Marker: Garden Home Tract Plans," The Fresno Morning Republican: LVI:74 (12 September 1919) p. 10.

"Garden Home Tract" (advertisement, no date).

"In Fresno---Where Fine Homes Become Islands," San Francisco Examiner 17 March 1938.

"J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens," The Fresno Morning Republican 4 January 1920.

Laval, Pop. "Blasting a Dream...." Fresno Guide 31 March 1960.

_____ "' Pop' Recalls Vision of Early Developer." Fresno Guide 24 March 1960.

McGill, Jenny. "Historic Forkner Home to Be Destroyed," Northwest Neighbors II, 1991, 1.

Mellon, Dolores. Notes, "Ranch Turns 50 Tour" (Fig Garden) 11 May 1999.

"Mima Mounds." Wikipedia. Accessed 4 February 2013.

Powell, John Edward. Personal Notes for Wilson Avenue Walking Tour, 1994.

"Proposed Figarden Woman's Clubhouse," The Fresno Morning Republican 2 April 1925.

"Shaver Lake Pioneer Lewella Forkner Dies," Fresno Bee 5 March (?) 1991, B1.

"Survey Report of 'Old Fig Garden Homes' Made by Fig Garden Woman's Club for Its Community Improvement Program," 1988.

"The J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens," The Fresno Morning Republican 15 November 1917.

"The J.C. Forkner Fig Gardens, W.W. Stanforth Selling Agent," The Fresno Morning Republican 27 November 1917.

Thompson, Warren. Personal Communication 4 March 2005.

Weil, Steve. Personal Communication 4 March 2005.

Maps:

"Map of the Forkner Giffen Fig Gardens Subdivision No. 1."

"Map of the Forkner Giffen Fig Gardens Subdivision No. 2," Recorded 25 November 1919.

Subdivision and Tract maps for Fig Garden Area.

"Residence on Forkner Fig Garden Tract" (1920) (Pop Laval Foundation)

