

# 1. *Overview*

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This draft of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Existing Conditions Profile (Profile) lays the groundwork for the Specific Plan and documents existing conditions. The Plan Area is located at the southwest portion of the City of Fresno and bordered by Highway 180, Highway 99, and Highway 41 (see Figure 1.1). Immediately surrounding the Specific Plan Area to the west and south are unincorporated parts of Fresno County. The Specific Plan Area only includes land within the existing city's limits and is approximately a total of 3,140 acres (see Figure 1.2). Farther to the west are the City of Kerman and the Fresno-Clovis Regional Wastewater Reclamation Facility. To the east beyond Highway 99 and Highway 41 are Downtown Fresno and the remaining parts of Fresno along with many other cities within Fresno County, including Clovis, Fowler, and Selma.

This Profile summarizes existing regulations along with recent plans and projects. There has been extensive planning work done in the Plan Area to date. Therefore, this Profile builds on the priorities that were reached in recent planning work and highlights them so the Specific Plan becomes an extension of previous efforts.

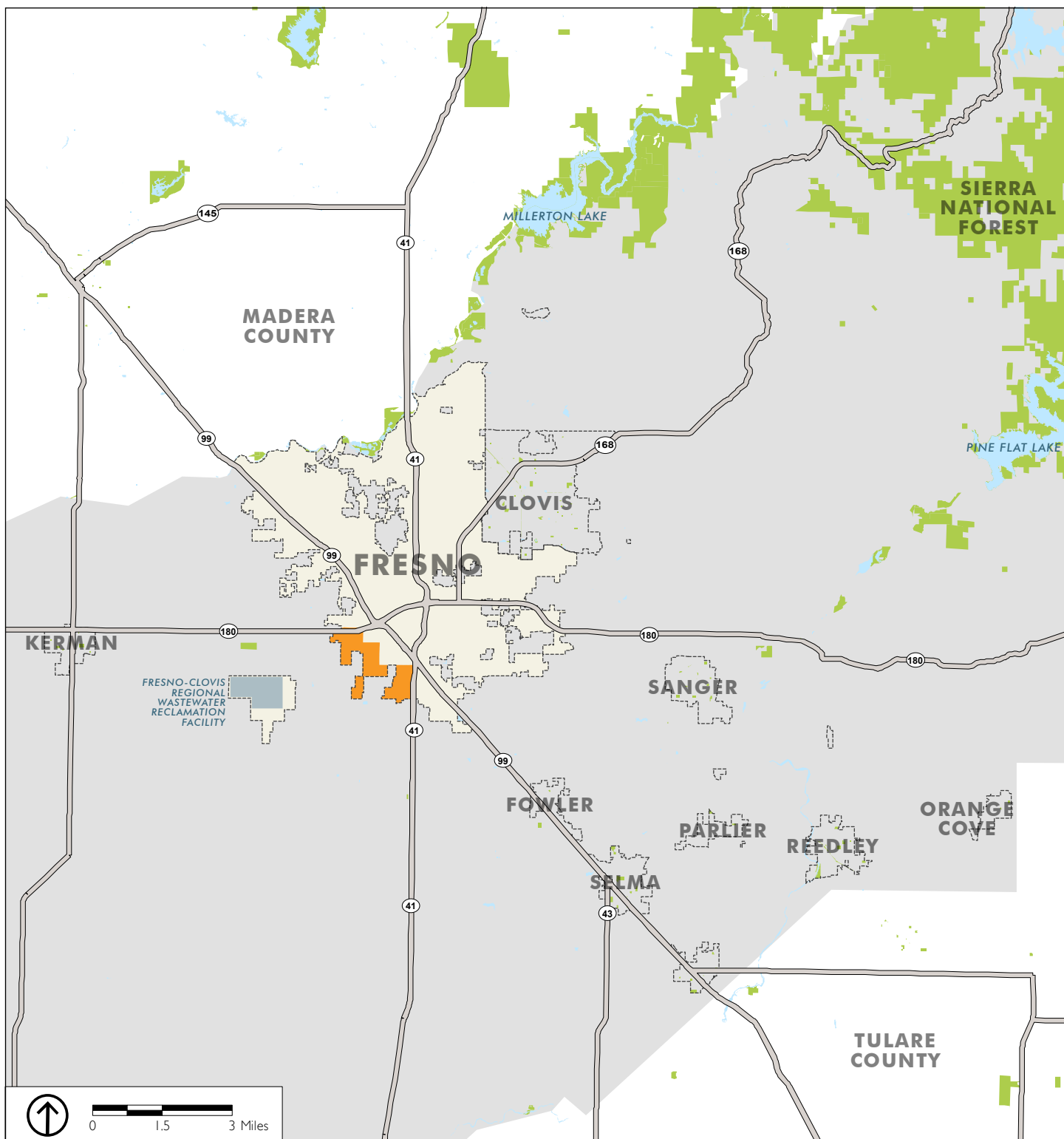
Along with general information on the entire Plan Area, the technical analysis components will focus on opportunity sites where change is anticipated to occur; the technical analysis regarding biological, cultural, and historic resources will be developed throughout the process to inform the Program Environmental Impact Report.

This Profile is a picture of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Area at this moment in time. As the Specific Plan process continues, the project team will continue to identify key issues, opportunities, and sites on which to focus this planning effort.

## 1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The Profile has a total of seven chapters, including this first Overview chapter. Generally, each chapter starts with an overview, details existing conditions, characteristics, and/or the existing regulatory framework, and concludes with a summary of key findings describing issues and potential opportunities.

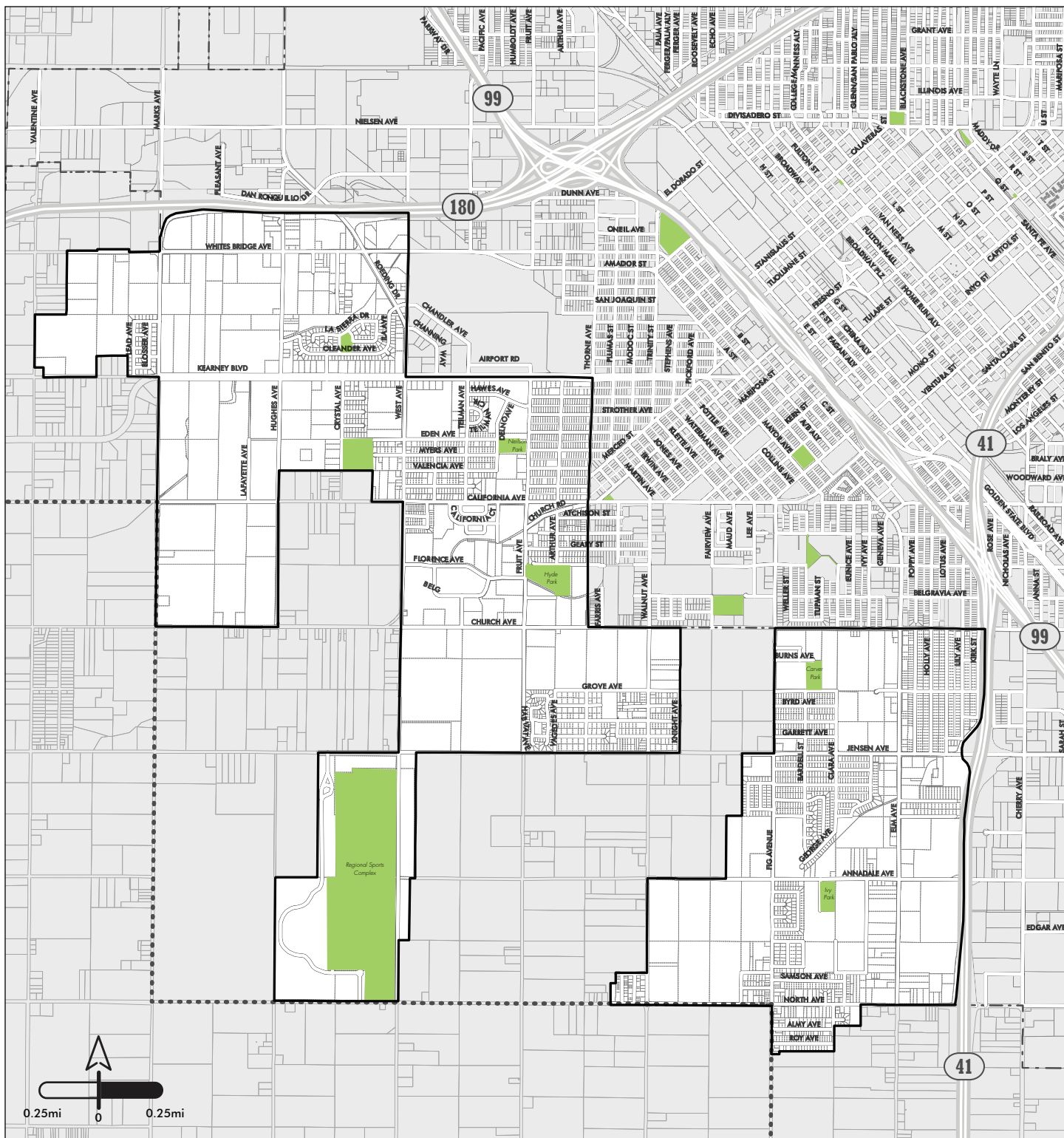
1. **Overview.** This chapter provides a brief overview of the intent and content of the Existing Conditions Profile and historic background of the Specific Plan Area.
2. **Market Demand and Demographics Analysis.** This chapter includes a comprehensive real estate market demand analysis to guide and inform land use in the Specific Plan Area. The analysis will address residential, retail, office, and industrial land uses. It will include a short-term focus to help identify potential opportunities that might catalyze new ideas and plans that arise in the planning process. It will also provide long-term guidance because the Specific Plan will take many years to buildout.



**Figure 1.1 Regional Location Map**



Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Area



**Figure 1.2 Plan Area Map**

- City Limit
- ..... Sphere of Influence
- Plan Area
- Park/Open Space

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3. **Land Use, Urban Design, and Planning Context.** This chapter characterizes land uses and the urban design character, including the existing visual character and quality of the residential districts within and surrounding the Plan Area. It identifies potential incompatibilities between existing uses and potential new uses, including single-family residential, multi-family residential, commercial, institutional, and light industrial land uses and identifies opportunity sites with potential to meet the southwest community's land use needs and enhance the overall character of the area.
4. **Community Health.** As a means to understand the health challenges facing the Plan Area, this chapter reviews and summarizes the work and findings generated by the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative in southwest Fresno to understand the existing state of the community's health; it focuses on honing in on health indicators including parkland opportunities, crime hotspots, retail food environment indices, transit access, income, and education levels.
5. **Biology.** This chapter reviews existing sources of information regarding biology in the Plan Area including aerial photographs, U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps, County Sensitive Species' maps, previous studies and mapping of the Plan vicinity, the California Natural Diversity Database, regional planning documents, species data compiled by the California Native Plant Society, the National Audubon Society, or other public interest groups, and resource agency data. It will inform the Program Environmental Impact Report and include conceptual approximate locations of biological resources to be aware of as land use alternatives are developed later in the process.
6. **Transportation.** This chapter utilizes information from previous and ongoing planning efforts, including the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan, Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan, and Fresno General Plan Update to document the existing transportation conditions in southwest Fresno. It identifies the existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit facilities and service, and roadway conditions and documents existing physical constraints for the circulation system and neighborhood circulation issues within southwest Fresno.
7. **Infrastructure.** This chapter summarizes information pertaining to the existing infrastructure and infrastructure planning for the Specific Plan Area. Infrastructure includes wet utilities (domestic and recycled water, wastewater, and stormwater) and dry utilities (natural gas, electricity, data, cable TV, and communications). It summarizes existing studies, capacities, reports, maps, utility information, current wastewater flows, water consumption, rainfall runoff rates, irrigation water demand, recycled water demand, the existing capacities of the wet and dry utilities, and plans for improvements or expansion of wet and dry utilities. It also includes a consolidated preliminary base map of the existing wet and dry utility systems.

## 1.3 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

In 1870, the Central Pacific Railroad began its diagonal push down the San Joaquin Valley, reaching what is now Fresno in 1872. The Contract and Finance Company, a subsidiary of the railroad, purchased 4,480 acres and laid out a town with 80-foot wide streets parallel to the new rail corridor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clough, Charles W. and William B. Secrest, Jr., 1984. *Fresno County-The Pioneer Years from the Beginnings to 1900*, Fresno, California: Panorama West Books, page 121.

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In 1878, Fresno was described as “not much of a town, a handful of houses in a desert of sand”.<sup>2</sup> However, the 1880s were prosperous years and the desert was turned into profitable farmland with the introduction of irrigation and agricultural colonies. These agricultural colonies, their water conveyance systems, and the landscaped boulevards that led to many of these tracts are intrinsic to the development and cultural history of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan Area. Place names like Kearney Boulevard, Hughes Avenue, Jensen (formerly Jansen) Avenue, and Church Avenue reflect this early history.

### 1.3.1 AGRICULTURAL COLONIES

The model for agricultural colonies that ultimately served throughout the San Joaquin Valley was the Central California Colony, established in 1875 south of Fresno on 6 square miles of land at the southern edge of the Plan Area. The Central California Colony was the “brainchild” of Bernard Marks, a German immigrant who had a vision of 20-acre family-owned farms. Marks saw the potential for farming in the desert-like environment of San Joaquin Valley if irrigation could be guaranteed.<sup>3</sup> Each 20-acre parcel included a 2-acre vineyard of grapevines imported from Spain and each of the Colony’s avenues was shaded with trees to match the street name. Although the colonists faced numerous hardships, including disputes over water rights, the Colony ultimately flourished and served as a model for numerous other ventures<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 1.3).

Between the Central California Colony and the City of Fresno were 6,080 acres, described as a “rough and waterless land” that no one would buy.<sup>5</sup> By 1882, pioneer entrepreneurs Edmund Janssen, Thomas E. Hughes, and M.J. Church had developed and marketed 2,800 acres of this land as the Fresno Colony. This tract represents a large swath of the Plan Area and is bound by California (formerly Canal Avenue), Fruit Avenue, North and East Avenues (see Figure 1.4).

Hughes was born in North Carolina in 1830 and came west to California by wagon train in 1853 arriving in Fresno in June of 1878. He was a man who apparently could sell sand to a camel and, with no capital, turned any number of ventures into a success. In 1881, Hughes helped organize the Fresno County Bank and also incorporated the Fresno Fruit Packing Company. He built the Hughes Hotel, which was, at the time, the most elegant in Fresno. At his zenith, he was one of the richest and most respected citizens in the county. Unfortunately, he lost his entire fortune during the panic of 1893, but his Fresno Colony succeeded and was designated on maps as late as 1935.

West of the Plan Area is the former 6,800 acres of the Fruit Vale Estate purchased in 1883 by Martin Theodore Kearney. Kearney often travelled to Europe and he envisioned an 11-mile avenue in “the French style” leading to his estate. He believed that such improvements would “have a marked influence on attracting ... people of taste, and of means to indulge their taste, who will purchase land and create

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<sup>2</sup> Reps, John W., 1979. *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, page 187.

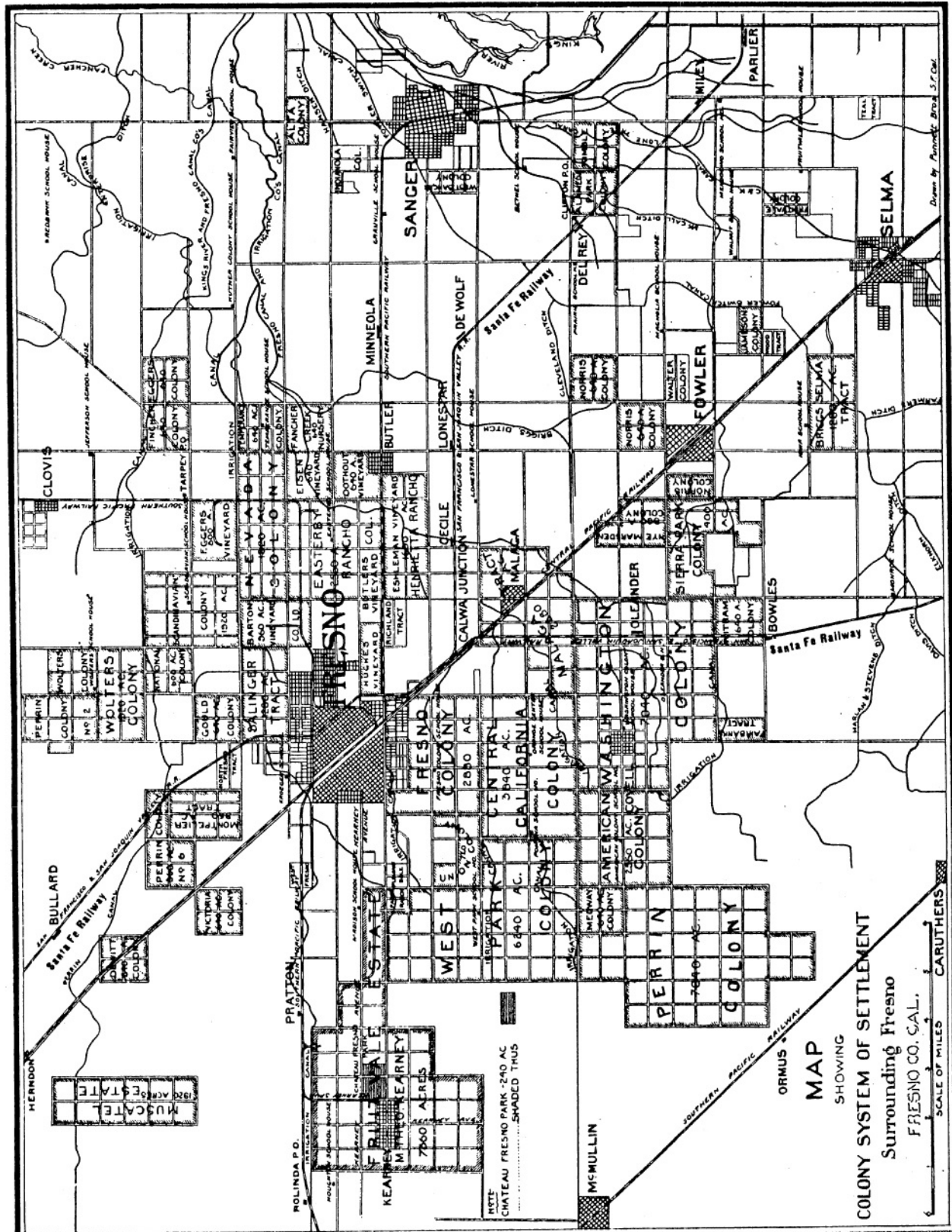
<sup>3</sup> Panter, John, 1994. “Central California Colony: ‘Marvel of the Desert.’” *Fresno Past and Present* 36:2, page 2.

<sup>4</sup> Panter, John, 1994. “Central California Colony: ‘Marvel of the Desert.’” *Fresno Past and Present* 36:2, page 5.

<sup>5</sup> Vantor, Paul E., 1919. *History of Fresno County California with Biographical Sketches*. Los Angeles, California: Historic Record Company, page 247.

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Figure 1.3 Colony System of Settlement Map

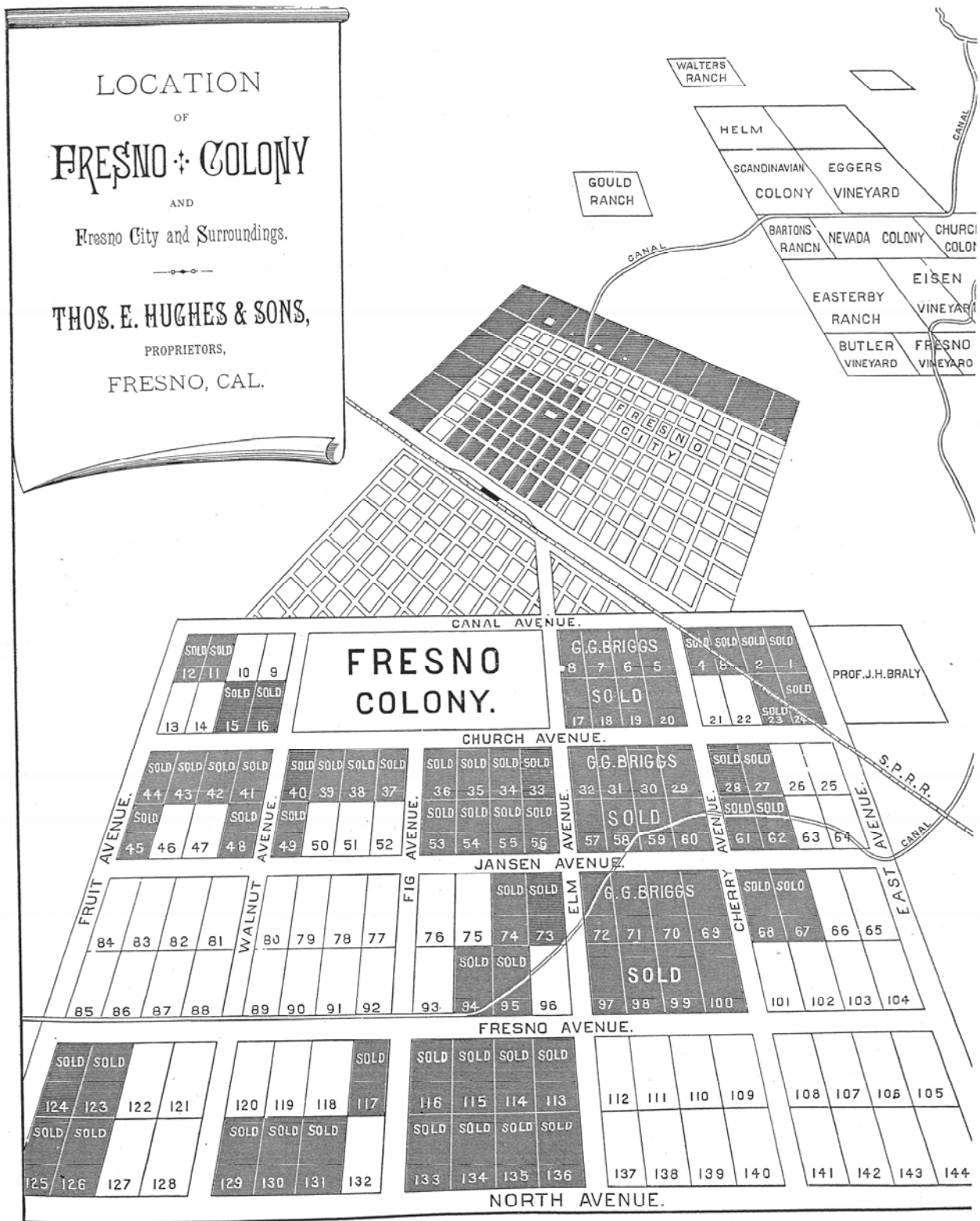


Source: Broadfoot, Barry, 1976, *The Pioneer Years*, page 120.



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Figure 1.4 Fresno Colony Map



Source: Wallace W. Elliott and Co., 1882, *History of Fresno County, California with Illustrations, Descriptive of its Scenery, Farms, Residences, Public Buildings, Factories, Hotels, Business Houses, Schools, Churches, and Mines, from Original Drawings, with Biographical Sketches.*

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beautiful homes thereon.”<sup>6</sup> Chateau Fresno Avenue was completed by 1892 and was a triple road with a wide central lane for light carriages, a northern lane for wagons, and a southern lane for equestrians and bicyclists. The landscape design alternated eucalyptus and palms with pink and white oleanders planted beneath for color. The avenue bisects the northern end of the Plan Area from east to west. Present-day Kearney Boulevard has been described as one of the most “striking drives in all California”<sup>7</sup> and was found eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a crown jewel for Fresno and for this neighborhood.

### 1.3.2 AN ETHNICALLY MIXED PLACE

Many of the earliest farmers in southwest Fresno were former miners as well as Scandinavian immigrants: Danes, Swedes and Norwegians.<sup>8</sup> In the 1870s, the “west” side of the Southern Pacific tracks quickly became “Chinatown,” where Chinese, as well as disreputable whites, were forced to settle. In addition to Chinese and Scandinavian farmers, other early ethnic groups included Germans from Russia, Japanese, and Armenians. Volga Germans first came to Fresno in 1887, seeking work as farm laborers. The first Armenians arrived in 1881 and eventually settled in an area between the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific tracks appropriately called “Armenian Town.” In the 1930s, the farms located in the northeast quadrant of the Plan Area were almost exclusively Armenian-owned<sup>9</sup>.

Kearney Boulevard Heights, northeast of the Plan Area, was known as “Italian Town,” although it was actually an ethnically mixed community. By the 1930s, Fresno’s “Chinatown” also served as a destination and business community for the Valley’s largest Mexican-American population.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the late 1970s, Southeast Asians began to settle in Fresno, most of them political refugees from the Vietnam War. Fresno County is now the largest center of Hmong immigration in the United States.<sup>11,12</sup>



*Barn and tankhouse at former Misita Farm (Fresno Colony)*



*Entrance gate at Tam Bao Tu Vietnamese Buddhist Temple*

<sup>6</sup> Graham Marlea and Julie Cain, 2008. “Rudolph Ulrich, Landscape Designer of Chateau Fresno.” In *Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of California’s San Joaquin Valley*. City of Fresno Planning and Development Department, page 22.

<sup>7</sup> Hoover, Mildred Brooke, 1990. Hero Eugene Rensch, Ethel Grace Rensch, and William N. Abeloe. *Historic Spots in California*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, revised by Douglas E. Kyle. Stanford University Press, page 89.

<sup>8</sup> Rehart, Schyler and William K. Patterson, 1988. M. Theo Kearney Prince of Fresno. *The Fresno City and County Historical Society*, page 8.

<sup>9</sup> Bulbulian, Berge, 2001. *The Fresno Armenians: History of a Diaspora Community*. Sanger, California: World Dancer Press.

<sup>10</sup> Gonzalez, Manuel, 2006. “Arturo Tirado and the Teatro Azteca: Mexican Popular Culture in the Central San Joaquin Valley.” *California History* 83:4, page 48.

<sup>11</sup> Hiigel, Sharon, 2008. “Faces on the Land: A Selective Look at Fresno’s Ethnic Communities.” In *Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of California’s San Joaquin Valley*. City of Fresno Planning and Development Department.



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African-Americans were also present in early Fresno and organized an African Methodist Church in 1882.<sup>13</sup> African Americans from the southern states immigrated to Fresno in the 1930s and 1940s and due to prejudice and redlining, initially lived in tent cities on the western edge of the Plan Area.<sup>14</sup> Several prominent leaders of the African-American community grew up in the area and led the fight in the 1960s for racial equality.

Fresno's ethnic heritage, whether in-town or in the southwest area, was rarely expressed architecturally. The Japanese Buddhist Temple (1920) located in "Chinatown" and outside this Plan Area is an early exception and was designed by a team that included Berkeley-trained architect Toykichi Kurashi. A more recent expression of cultural aesthetics is the 1975 Tam Bao Tu Vietnamese Buddhist Temple located at 2459 S. Elm Avenue. For the most part, the building stock in southwest Fresno is typically "American vernacular," with altered Craftsman bungalows, modest Minimal Traditional, Mid-Century Modern, and contemporary tract homes. The early Colony farmhouses have all but disappeared.



*Distinctive palm tree-lined Kearney Boulevard*

The history of the area, like its early farm houses, is layered. As one group moved out, another moved in. For example, the farm complex located formerly at 1246 S. Marks Avenue, with its c.1907 Queen Anne style residence and detached tankhouse, was initially settled by a refugee from the Armenian genocide. In 1949, the farm was purchased by a Japanese American family whose relatives still live next door<sup>15,16</sup>.

*Thank you to Karana Hattersley-Drayton from the City of Fresno for preparing the Historic Background section.*

<sup>12</sup> Pagoulatos, Sophia, 2008. "Strawberry Fields, Forever." In *Architecture, Ethnicity and Historic Landscapes of California's San Joaquin Valley*. City of Fresno Planning and Development Department.

<sup>13</sup> Clough, Charles W. and William B. Secrest, Jr., 1984. *Fresno County-The Pioneer Years from the Beginnings to 1900*, Fresno, California: Panorama West Books, page 137.

<sup>14</sup> Kris Clarke, Ph.D. Personal communication with Karana Hattersley-Drayton, July 20, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Hattersley-Drayton, Karana, 2003. Interview with Shigeo and Kinuko Hayashi for the Veteran's Home Project, Fresno California, September 15.

<sup>16</sup> Hattersley-Drayton, Karana, 2009. Historic Architecture Survey Report for Plan Amendment A-08-007 and Rezone A-08-034, City of Fresno Planning and Development.

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