

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

THE CHARLES COPELAND MORSE RESIDENCE

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

981 Fremont Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Santa Clara

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

12

STATE

California

VICINITY OF

CODE

06

COUNTY

Santa Clara

CODE

085

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED
- N/A

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mr. & Mrs. Vaughn D. Nixon

STREET & NUMBER

981 Fremont Street

CITY, TOWN

Santa Clara

STATE

California

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County Recorder's Office

STREET & NUMBER

70 West Hedding Avenue

CITY, TOWN

San Jose

STATE

California

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Point of Historical Interest - Number 5

DATE

1970

FEDERAL STATE  COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

City of Santa Clara

CITY, TOWN

Santa Clara

STATE

California

# DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED (largely)  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

see below

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Condition: The property is presently being restored to correct deterioration and to restore the structure as closely as possible to its original appearance, both interior and exterior.

The exterior is in its original condition. There has been some alteration of the interior, done many years ago. Specifically, an interior porch was converted into a bathroom, the kitchen was modernized and new appliances were installed.

(See Continuation sheets.)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES built in 1892

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Charles Copeland Morse was an Easterner, born in Thomaston, Maine, in 1842, who came west to make his mark. His parents, Obadiah and Chloe W. (Copeland) Morse, were natives of Maine, and descendants of old Puritan families of England. His father, Obadiah, died when Charles was four years old. Charles grew up on the family farm and took an active part in the work. At the age of seventeen, he went to sea, as had his brothers, and made one voyage to England. Upon his return, Morse became interested in the reports reaching the East about California, and in 1859 he began the sea voyage to California.

Morse came to California by way of Panama. He walked across the Isthmus and then took passage on a ship to San Francisco. After his arrival in San Francisco, he succumbed to the prevalent gold fever and spent two years mining in the Virginia City Comstock Strike. Morse soon became disillusioned with mining camp life, and decided to return to California. He found his way to Santa Clara in 1862.

Santa Clara was then a small town with an agricultural setting. Here, he engaged in several occupations, among them that of a house painter. He eventually became a contractor for work in house painting, following this line of work for twelve years.

In 1877, the opportunity for which Morse had been waiting presented itself. R. W. Wilson, from Rochester, New York, had been growing vegetable seed crops on a small acreage of land about two miles from Santa Clara. Wilson had been in business there since 1874, and was California's first vegetable seed grower. In 1877, Wilson decided to dispose of his business, and for \$20,000, Morse and a partner, A. L. Kellogg, bought the seed farm. In addition to the acreage itself, they also acquired a small list of Eastern seed firm customers, a small warehouse, some canvas drying sheets, two hand cleaning machines and a few farm implements.

From this small beginning, Morse began steadily enlarging the grounds and increasing business, and the company soon developed into one of the largest vegetable and flower seed growers and supplies in the world. Recognizing that California's soil and climate created ideal conditions for seed growing,



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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 6 PAGE 1

Representation In Existing Surveys

Santa Clara County Heritage Resource Inventory  
October 1975                      X County X Local  
Santa Clara County, 70 W. Hedding Street, San Jose, CA 95110

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The Charles Copeland Morse Residence is of late Queen Anne Victorian style. It is the largest residence of Victorian style now remaining in the City of Santa Clara. The home, comprising two stories and a basement, was completed in 1892. The overall dimensions of the residence are 70 feet by 52 feet.

The house is situated on a lot approximately 132 feet by 218 feet on the corner of Washington and Fremont Streets. An iron picket fence borders the property along both streets. The yard is fully landscaped and has a towering Magnolia tree in the front and two huge pepper trees in the rear. Located at the rear portion of the property is a two story carriage house built at the same time as the main house. In the vicinity of the carriage house is a vegetable garden harkening back to the days when Mr. Morse grew his seeds in Santa Clara.

The main entry to the house fronts on Fremont Street. Originally, there was also an entry fronting on Washington Street, but the wooden stairway was removed many years ago leaving an exterior porch or balcony as the sole reminder.

The structure is of wood frame construction with brick foundations and wood exterior stairs. There is a large partially enclosed porch which is on the east side of the house extending to the front entry. The windows are double hung wood and are curved on the corners of the house. Over a number of the windows and doors are tiffany glass windows, providing an array of colors in the home on sunny days. The roof is shingle covered with a duncce cap on the bay window portion of the house and with wood cornices and eaves.

The interior of the home has 1 by 4 pine flooring on the first and second floors and lath and plaster walls. There are numerous ornate fireplaces of carved wood throughout the home with beautiful intricate ceramic inlays. A carpeted wood stairway leads from the first to the second floor and there is an additional stairway to the attic.

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The attention to detail and quality of construction and materials made the home fascinating and pleasing to the eye. One is immediately impressed by the size and design of the house, and upon closer inspection the home becomes all the more interesting. Entering the home is similar to opening a novel, each room providing a different chapter leading the spectator on until the entire home is surveyed. Mr. Morse, in designing his home, created a structure of lasting beauty and elegance. Mr. and Mrs. Nixon have sought to preserve or restore as much of the original character of the home as is now possible so that future generations may appreciate the foresight and industry of a man who played such an important role in the agricultural development of California and the United States.

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many Eastern seed dealers sent seeds to be grown by Morse. As early as the 1880's, when Morse's farm was known as the "Pacific Seed Gardens", the products of these gardens comprised over 150 tons of the best varieties of field, garden, and flower seeds. The business was operated as a partnership until Kellogg retired in 1887, leaving Morse as the sole proprietor. By 1895, the Morse farms not only supplied a great deal of the seed used in the United States, but also shipped large quantities to foreign countries. Morse was internationally regonized as a dependable supplier of vegetable and flower seeds of highest quality.

C. C. Morse and Co. merged with D.M. Ferry and Co. of Detroit in 1930. The production activities of the Ferry-Morse Seed Co. currently runs into millions of pounds annually. Today Ferry-Morse grows seed in the south end of Santa Clara County, the San Juan Bautista area, the San Joaquin Valley, in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

C. C. Morse built his ornate mansion in Santa Clara in 1892. The home has been described in a local newspaper as "the house that seeds built". Morse had married Maria Josephine Victoria Langford in 1868, and they had five children when they move into the twelve-room Fremont Street house. Morse died in 1900 at the age of 58. In addition to being active in seed trade affairs, he also played a prominent part in civic activities in Santa Clara. He was one of the founders of the Santa Clara Bank of Santa Clara, as well as a member and founder of the Advent Christian Church of Santa Clara. After his death, C. C. Morse and Co. was carried on primarily by the Morse family until a merger with D. M. Ferry and Co.

The Old Morse Mansion now represents the sole memorial to the industry and foresight of C. C. Morse. The structure, now being restored by Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn D. Nixon, still retains many of the unique and enchanting features which Mr. Morse chose to have incorporated in his home. Fine examples of this are the stained glass windows, the chandeliers and the hand carved wooden fire places.

This structure is a late Queen Anne style Victorian residence being restored by the present owners. It is the largest remaining residence of Victorian style in the City of Santa Clara.



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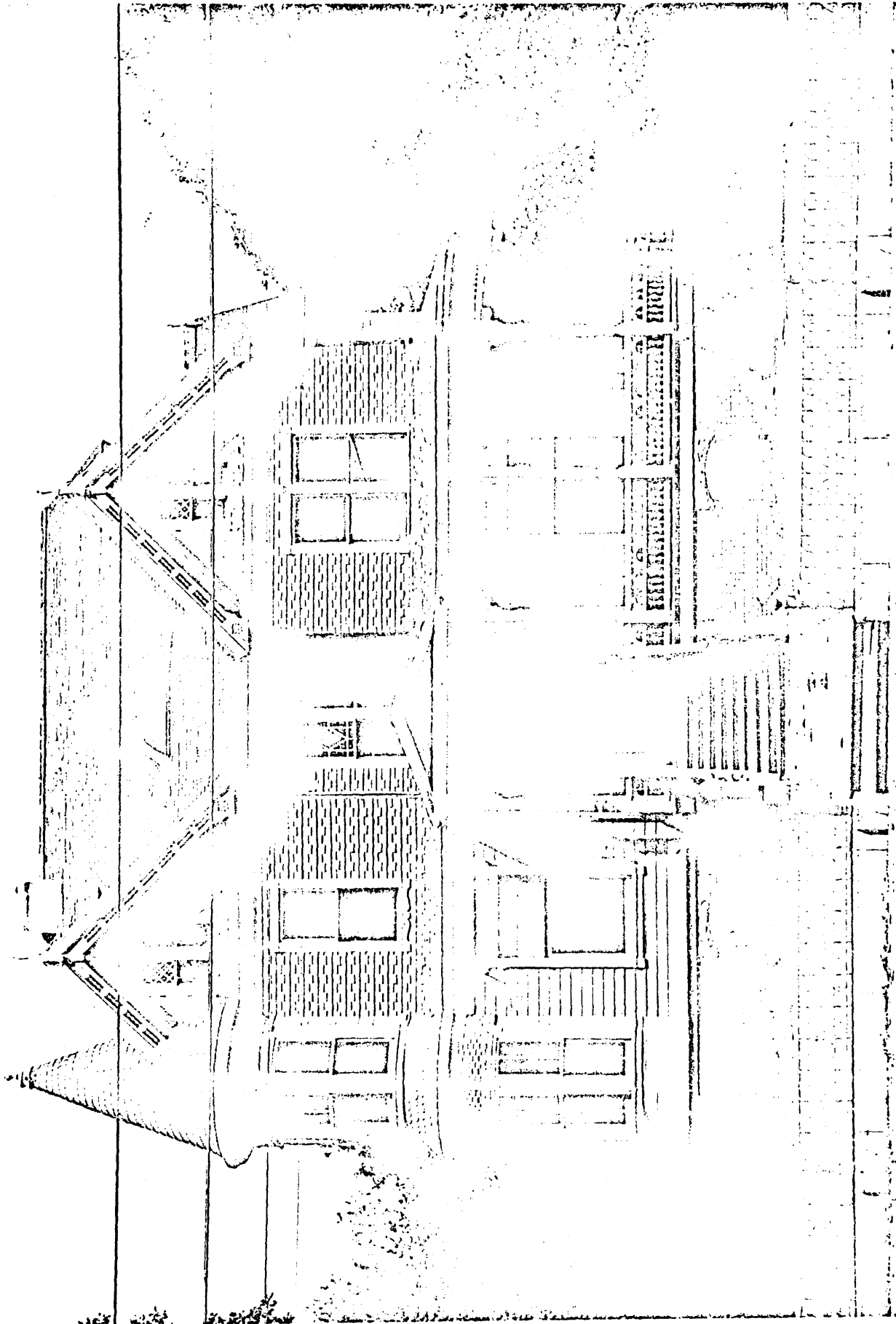
"Santa Clara Seed Farms," Santa Clara County and its Resources - A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury - 1895, (reprint) pp. 52-54.

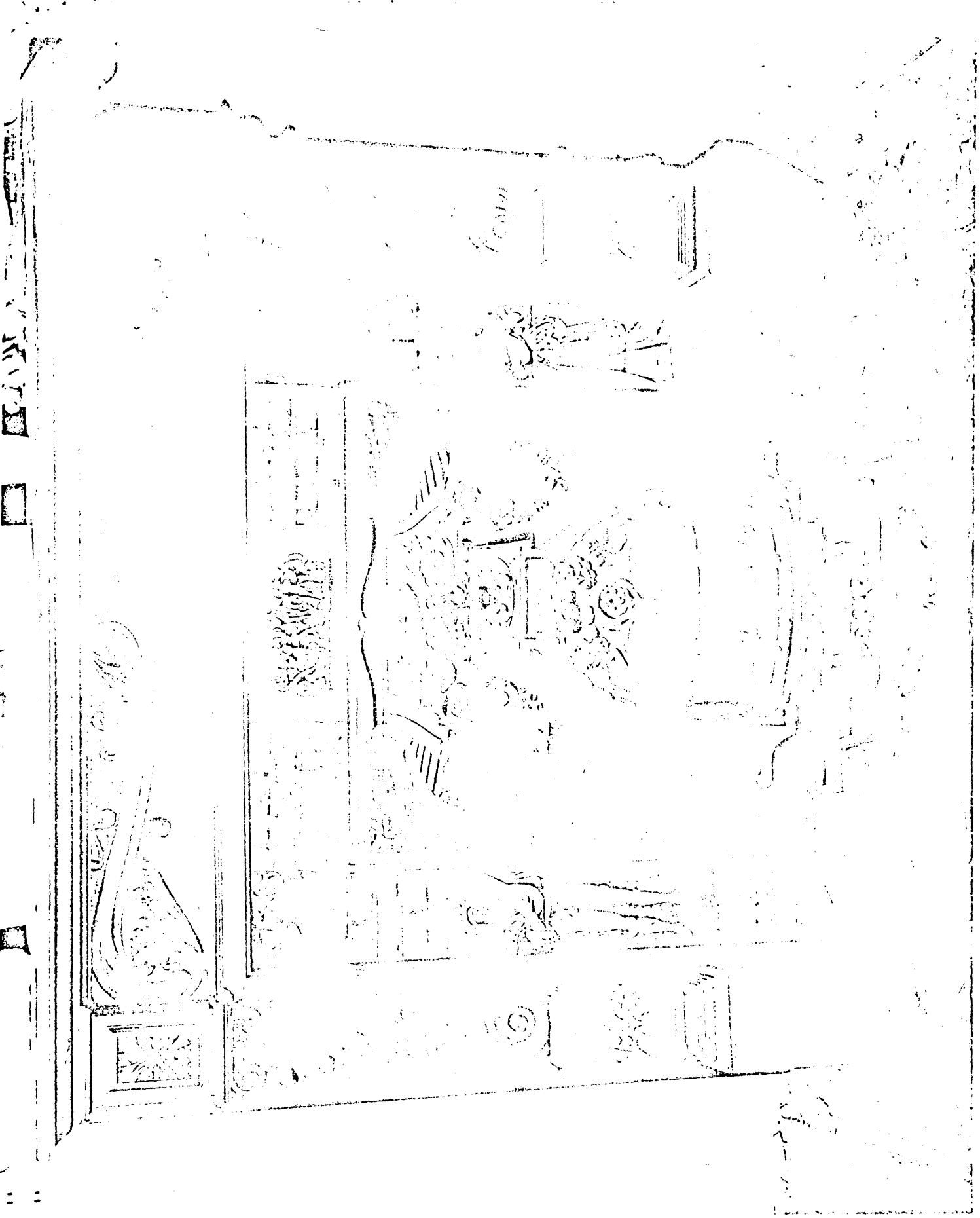
"Building Operations", San Jose Daily Mercury, May 15, 1892, p.10. (see attached photocopy)

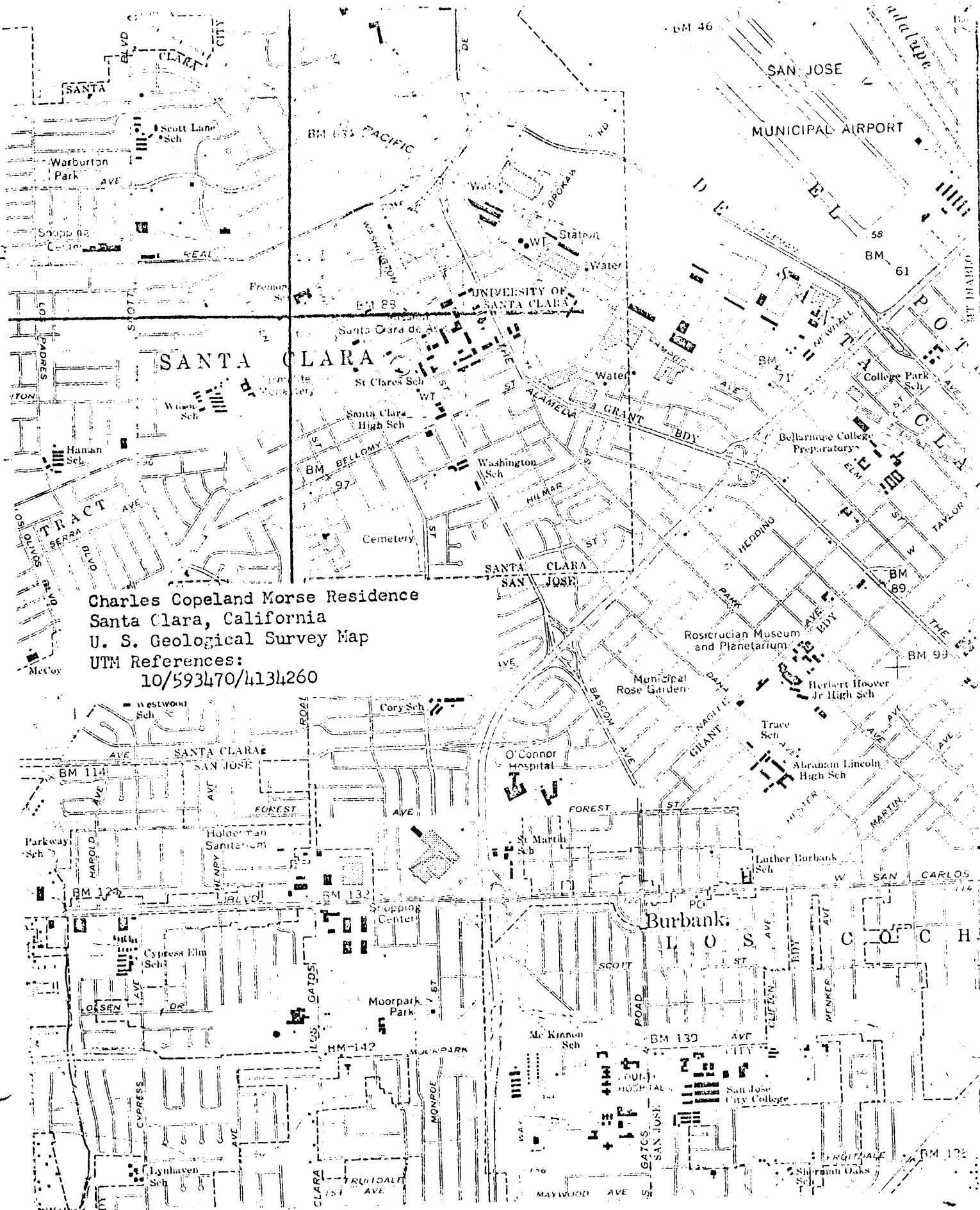
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Butler, Phyllis and Junior League of San Jose, "The Valley of Santa Clara Historic Buildings", 1792-1920, page 92, San Jose, (1975) (see attached photocopy)

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Charles Copeland Morse Residence  
 Santa Clara, California  
 U. S. Geological Survey Map  
 UTM References:  
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