

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District

other names/site number Charles D. Smith, aka C.D. Smith and Sons

2. Location

street & number 4770 W. Whites Bridge Road

☐ not for publication

city or town Fresno

☒ vicinity

state CA code CA county Fresno code 019 zip code 93706

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets request does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

request national request statewide X local

W. Wayne
Signature of certifying official

22 Nov. 2010
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property request meets request does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register

request determined eligible for the National Register

request determined not eligible for the National Register

request removed from the National Register

request other (explain:)

W. Wayne
Signature of the Keeper

1/7/2011
Date of Action

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public - Local
☐ public - State
☐ public - Federal

Category of Property(Check only **one** box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	1	buildings
		district
2		site
1		structure
		object
5	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**6. Function or Use****Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURAL: agricultural field,

horticultural facility

Agricultural outbuilding

Irrigation facility

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURAL: agricultural field,

horticultural facility

Agricultural outbuilding

Irrigation facility

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Vernacular

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Brick

walls: Wood, plaster

roof: Sheet metal, shake

other: Concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The 57.2-acre Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is located on Whites Bridge Road (SR 180) in rural Fresno County, five miles west of the Fresno County Courthouse in the central San Joaquin Valley area of California's Central Valley. The surrounding area is flat with an approximate elevation at 290 feet above sea level. The area is divided into a gridiron of parallel roads spaced at intervals one or one-half mile. Few angled or curved road break the pattern. The nominated property is surrounded by farms of 40 to 200 acres. The Schatz Canal is located on the north edge of the property. A cemetery dating to 1959 is sited diagonally across Whites Bridge Road. The ranch consists of the follow contributing resources: agricultural fields, consisting of 55 acres of raisin grapes, some of which are the oldest such plantings in Fresno County, and one acre of naval orange trees (contributing site); a farmhouse (contributing building) and a barn/tractor shed (contributing building) heritage garden (contributing site); and irrigation system (contributing structure). A detached garage with carport constructed in 1938 is a non-contributing building. Charles D. Smith, the property's first occupant, planted the original vineyard and orange trees in 1891, some of which remain and are producing. After Ben Gefvert purchased the property in 1900, he added additional grapevines until his death in 1917. Additional grapevines were added over time. The vernacular style, two-story farmhouse is surrounded by landmark and large trees that date to the construction of the house, and are documented in historic photographs dated 1897 and 1908. An heirloom rose garden was planted along with a variety of shaped shrubs by the Gefverts sometime between 1900 and 1917. The irrigation canal predates the property's development and was constructed sometime in the mid-1880s. Outbuildings removed after 1938 include the water tank house in 1938 and the horse barn between 1938 and 1956. Despite the removal of outbuildings, the property retains a high degree of integrity and continues to convey a feeling of its 19th century origins and development over time.

Narrative Description

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District includes a farm house originally constructed in 1891. The farmhouse was constructed as a one-story vernacular style with a finished attic, a shed type dormer window and clipped gables. The property owner added a second story in 1908-09 to accommodate his growing family. The house sits on its original brick foundation and was constructed with redwood lumber throughout. The building is covered by a side-gable roof covered with flat sheet metal shingles. A cross gable is centered on the primary façade. A Wrap-around porch extends around three sides of the building. The building underwent alterations in 1968 when the original kitchen was converted into a pantry and laundry room, and the original back porch was enclosed and made into a kitchen and dining area. A new back porch was added to the east of the newly created kitchen and dining area and kept within the extended east wall of the house. Also at that time a bay window was added to the dining room, on the east side of the farmhouse. All of the 1968 changes utilized the same exterior materials as the original 1891 and 1908 constructions, and were designed and built by the Taylor-Wheeler Company, one of Fresno's most respected firms during he period .1920 to 1972.

The farmhouse includes 1,714' square feet on the first floor and 1,480 square feet on the second floor for a total of 3,194 square feet. A unique feature of the original farmhouse is the two angled corners of the front wall of the first floor. The wraparound front porch is original. The birth of-Elizabeth Gefvert, in 1908 may have been the reason for increasing the second floor space. The 1908 photograph shows the original vernacular house. The front or south facade is grand with the full width covered front porch. Both the roof-supporting posts and porch railing spindles are chamfered. The front door is original, with an inset panel surrounded by raised trim and bulls eye corner blocks. The door also has a large window with an arched top and raised trim. The hinges of ornamental brass are original as are the door knob and its backing plate. The front door has two side-lights and a solid panel above which may have also been window. The ground floor has small windows in the angled corner walls, one for a bedroom and one for the living room. The living room also has a

large three-part window. The South facade of the second floor has four identical, double hung windows, with shutters. The roof ridge runs east/west with a south facing, gabled, dormer with, an attic vent of horizontal slats. The first floor exterior siding is of narrow 3 inch wide planks, while the second story is faced with 12 inch wide planks. The corners of the lower and upper floors are trimmed with 8" wide vertical planks. The under side of the eaves are finished with 3 inch wide planks. The south facing gable also is clad with 3 inch wide planks. The wrap around porch extends 10 feet along the east and west sides of the farmhouse. The west facade is similar to front using the same materials. There are three windows on the first floor without shutters, and there are two windows, double hung, with shutters on the second floor. The West gable is clad with 3 inch wide planks and also has a rectangular, vertical attic vent with horizontal louvers. The West facade has a door from the kitchen and a small covered stoop. The North or rear facade has three windows on the first floor, added in 1968, and are divided into two vertical panels. The second floor has four, double hung, windows with shutters. The first floor area, which is the enclosed back porch is clad with the same 3 inch wide planks, the corners are trimmed with vertical 8 inch wide planks. The back porch includes a sitting area and has two entrances to the house. One, a solid wood door with two side lights, opens to the dining room and faces north. The other door, with a window, faces east and enters to the family room dining area. To the left of the later door, there is a single pane window. The east facade includes a bay with three large windows. The second floor is a mirror of the west facade with two double hung windows flanked by shutters, with a gable clad with 3 inch wide planks and vertical rectangular attic vent with horizontal louvers. Both west and east facades have gable eave returns that extend the whole width of the gable. The new porch area that faces north has a partial gable on its east facade with a short eave return. The interior of the farmhouse includes many elements of its original construction in 1891 and its 1908-09 addition. The first floor includes a living room, dining room, kitchen/family room, bedroom, a bathroom, and a pantry/laundry room. The second floor contains four bedrooms and two bathrooms. The doors are original solid wood doors with original door hardware. Door and window frames, base boards, wainscoting, crown moldings, and hardwood floors are original throughout the first and second floor. The family room and kitchen cabinets and plumbing and electrical work are modernized. The farmhouse, both exterior and interior reflect the historic materials and spaces of their over one hundred years of providing shelter and life for three generations of the Ben Gefvert family.

The barn/tractor shed was built in 1891 and is visible in the 1897 photograph which was taken from the top of the tankhouse looking east. The barn is constructed with vertical board and batt and has two large doors and a small door on its south facade. There are no windows. The double pitched -roof runs east/west with simple gables at each end. The roof is made of sheet metal tiles, a common roofing material of the period and which was produced in a variety of shapes. The barn originally had a dirt floor, but now has a concrete floor. The barn also included an area for blacksmith work.

The heritage garden landscaped grounds completely surround the farm house. The front yard is in lawn and contains four very large trees, a sycamore, two silk oak, and one palm. A small orange grove is on the east and the larger, one acre orange grove is on the west side of the house. The heirloom roses are in several locations on the east and north sides of the farmhouse. There are four areas of roses in linear planters and two rows of rose bushes in each. The roses are enhanced with formally trimmed shrubbery in the fashion of a formal English garden. The plantings have been studied by a local master gardener and found to be authentic for gardens of this period. The rear yard also contains five historic, very large trees including a pine, palm, sycamore and two eucalyptus. These are remnants of the already mature trees as seen in the 1897 and 1908 photographs, and present the visual appearance of early farmsteads and the much sought after shade. On a drive though the country side today one will often see a cluster of trees in the distance, a clue that it is the present or past location of a farmhouse. The Ben Gefvert Ranch is also located in the central area of the San Joaquin Valley that almost entirely consists of a gridiron of parallel roads spaced at intervals one or one-half mile, with very few angled or curved roads.

The vineyard is planted in straight rows running east-west. They are examples of early period viticulture, with wood posts supporting wires, and closely-spaced rows. Some of the original wood posts have been replaced by steel tees. The orange trees are also planted in straight rows in a grid pattern.

The Schatz canal, originally constructed in the 1880s, is located on the north edge of the Ben Gefvert Ranch, and is eight feet wide and two feet deep. A headgate is located at the northeast corner of the vineyard. The headgate is concrete and steel, and ten feet across with three water diversion valves for transferring the water to the Ben Gefvert Ranch and two adjacent ranches. The headgate spillway is five feet across with a drop of 18 inches. There is a well located near the headgate and if there is a shortage of irrigation water the well water can be pumped to irrigate the vineyard. Pumping the well water is much more expensive than using the canal water.

The non-contributing garage was constructed in 1938 or 1939 using some material salvaged from the removal of the tank house. The garage is of no particular style, and a roof with gables facing east and west, matching those of the house. The garage also has a storage space which includes the storage tank for the domestic water supply. The garage doors face north and the carport extends northward from the storage area side of the garage. The paved driveway is "L" shaped and has access to both Whites Bridge Road and Cornelia Avenue, and also includes two areas of paved parking North of the house.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture

Period of Significance

1891-1968

Significant Dates

1891 First plantings, house and barn construction

1900 Gefvert purchases property

1917 Gefvert dies – daughter manages ranch

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance reflects the period from which the property was established as a farmstead and planted with vines for raisin production through the period the property was owned and operated by Ben Gefvert and includes the period the ranch was operated by Anna Gefvert.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is significant at the local level for its association with agricultural development in Fresno County and meets eligibility for listing in the National Register under Criterion A. More particularly, the property is significant for associations with the practice of viticulture and the beginnings of the raisin industry in Fresno County. The property represents a typical farmstead of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Fresno County. The ranch, originally developed by Charles D. Smith in 1891, was purchased by Ben Gefvert in 1900 and has continued basically unchanged since that time. The site contains a farmhouse and barn constructed in 1891 which are still in use. The ranch is now 119 years old and been owned by the Gefvert family since 1900. The ranch includes 55 acres of raisin grapes, some of which were planted in the period 1890-1917, and are some of the oldest vineyards in Fresno County. In addition there is one acre of naval orange trees and the original farmhouse landscaping which includes nine landmark trees and four plots of heirloom roses. The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District, a relatively small-in-acreage farmstead planted primarily in grapes for raisin production, represents, in type and function, a rare and intact remnant of the agricultural past of Fresno County.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is a remnant from the pioneer era of Fresno County agricultural development. The ranch is located on property that was originally owned by the United States Government. In the 1860's large tracts of land were sold to investors, such as a group from San Francisco who purchased 158,000 acres with each investor having 11,000 or more acres. One of the investors, William Chapman, sold a portion of his land to Henry Voorman, also of San Francisco. Voorman subsequently sold 140 acres to Charles D. Smith in 1890. Smith planted grapes, oranges and olives, and built a home, a tank house and two barns, in 1891.

Most of the early farms were family farms, and many were established by recent immigrants from many different areas of the world including Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Agriculture has therefore contributed to the huge melting pot of ethnic diversity found in Fresno. The Ben Gefvert Ranch has always been a family farm and one with origins of Swedish ancestry. The 1988 publication "Early Valley Treasures" includes the following quotation: "Hard working ranch families were the bedrock upon which the great agricultural wealth of the San Joaquin Valley was built."

Ben Gefvert was born in Sweden in 1867, as was his wife Mary Bengston. Ben immigrated through Ellis Island in 1886 and joined a Swedish colony in Minnesota. He moved to California for health reasons in 1890. Mary immigrated to the United States in 1888 and they were married in the Swedish Mission Church of Enumclaw, Washington in 1894. There had been a migration of Swedish immigrants from the Midwest to Fresno county in 1886, which may have led to Ben's choice of Fresno County as a place in which to settle. The Gefverts had four children; Albert (1895), Paul (1897), Anna (1899) and Elizabeth (1908). Anna never married, only completed the eighth grade, and took charge of the management of the ranch after Ben's death in 1917. Mary lived to be 71 years old (1938). Elizabeth married Rafael G. Tyler (R. G. Tyler) in 1938 and they resided in the family home. Albert was married and had his own ranch. Paul also died in 1938. R. G. Tyler managed the ranch from 1968 to 2002, and R. G. and Elizabeth's daughter, Madeline is married to James Sheldon, and has managed the ranch since 2002. Anna Gefvert lived all but one of her 69 years in the home. Elizabeth lived in the home all of her life and Madeline has lived there all of her life. The actual farming of the ranch has been done by contracted work, since the mid 1960's. Contracting is a common practice in Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley for a number of reasons, such as absentee ownerships, the owner's retirement, or the owner having other full-time employment. Absentee ownership may involve property inherited or purchased for investment by individuals or corporations.

Ben Gefvert purchased 57.2 acres from Charles D. Smith in 1900, and added plantings of grape vines to those already planted by Smith. Ben Gefvert's experience with viticulture was gained from ten years of owning two forty acre parcels located nearby.

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is a relatively rare example of a family-owned ranch that has been continually operated for 119 years. Much of the surrounding land has lost its historic homes, and farm buildings, as well as changes in crops or converted to other commercial enterprises. A survey of a three mile radius of the Gefvert Ranch revealed that there are only four other pre 1900 structures existing and which are unoccupied and not maintained.

The Evolution of Fresno County Agriculture

The development of Fresno County's commercial agriculture began with small areas of produce and livestock to serve the gold miners and a few small pioneer communities and trading posts in the early 1850's. Cattle, horses, sheep and other livestock production increased substantially in the period 1850 to 1870. They were mostly located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada or the Coast Range. Extensive wheat ranches were developed from 1868 to 1890. Clovis Cole, known as the "Wheat King" harvested over 40,000 acres of wheat throughout the county's east side. He had two ranch sites, four hundred horses, and bought the first mechanical, steam powered, wheat harvesting machine in the San Joaquin Valley in 1888. The period of 1870 to 1872 brought together two vital elements that allowed for rapid expansion and diversification of Fresno County's agricultural development. A.Y. Easterby, an early large scale land owner in Fresno County invited his friend Moses J. Church of Napa County to relocate to Fresno County. Church was a sheep man, but also had knowledge of the techniques of irrigation. He devised an irrigation system for Easterby's wheat field. This bright green wheat field was observed, in 1872 by the pioneer California visionary, Leland Stanford and he selected a site nearby for a station of his Central Pacific Railroad, which was connected to the East Coast by the Union Pacific Railroad. Irrigation water and the railroad added to Fresno's cropping due to the many days of constant sunshine. 1872 to 1892 were boom years as the growth of agriculture expanded in quantity and diversity. Two things disrupted the boom. First, there was a nation wide financial decline and also a railroad strike. The financial structure recovered and in 1896 the Peoples Railroad of San Francisco arrived in Fresno to compete with Central Pacific Railroad and the cost of transportation for agricultural products was lowered. Other issues that hampered agricultural interests include other labor issues, especially with Workers Of The World demonstrations in Fresno in 1910 and in the 1920's issues between growers and packers led to violence especially in 1923. In 1950 Fresno County crops produced the greatest dollar value of any county in the United States. That honor has continued every year since with the exception of one year when Tulare County was the number one county. Grapes for wine, raisins and table use have made grapes the most valuable crop in Fresno County. Fresno and neighboring counties produce 95% of all the raisins produced in the United States. In 1894 agriculture expansion was revived as irrigation expanded the potential for increased acreage. New dam projects allowed for more water storage. Agriculture generated numerous elements of the expanding economy such as blacksmiths, transportation, horticulture, packaging, processing, marketing, repair and manufacturing of machinery, intensive labor, need for tools, manufacture of ice, finance and insurance, all of which increased the demand for every other kind of urban services.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The Ben Gefvert Ranch is located on Whites Bridge Road, an important and historic road. It was originally named, Washington, with the current name being applied in 1918. This road was an important route for travelers going from eastern Fresno County to the western Fresno community of Whites Bridge, located on the shore of Fresno Slough, a seasonal connection between the Kings and San Joaquin Rivers. The Butterfield Stage Line connected Kansas City, Missouri with San Francisco, 1858 to 1862. James White had a hotel, trading post, and a ferry which crossed the slough. Later, White constructed a bridge over the slough which led to his location being named Whites Bridge, and later the name of the popular trail which became a roadway.

The Colony System of Land Development

The development of agriculture was encouraged by land speculators, some of which used the Colony system of land sales. Promotional material was sent to the East coast and to Europe, offering a guarantee of success and wealth. Investors had acquired large tracts of land of thousands of acres, which were subdivided into parcels often and twenty acres. The developer guaranteed surface water supply and large irrigation companies were organized which later became public agencies. Even as some land is now being urbanized other lands, previously uncultivated, have been transformed and converted to intensified crops such as fruit and nut trees, vineyards, corn, berries, lettuce, tomato, garlic and more. Fresno County now produces over 200 commercial crops worth over \$2,000,000,000 annually. There are also thousands of acres of non-colony farm land as well the colonies are scattered over an area of approximately 1,000 square miles. There are over 60 such colonies and they are not all continuous.

There is more uncolonized land interspersed and surrounding the colonies. The buying and selling of farm lands whether in or out of the colonies is much the same. Farmers could buy multiples of 20 acre parcels in the colonies, and some bought partial lots. Some farms may have 160 acres of colony developed land and an additional 50 or 100 acres of non colony land. Farmers also bought non-contiguous land. Colony developments range in size from 640 acres to 7,600 acres. The development of mechanized farming has allowed one person or one family to farm anything from 100 acres to 2,000 acres.

The Development of the Raisin Industry in Fresno County

A potential disaster occurred with Francis Eisen's grape harvest in 1875. An unseasonal heat spell happened before Eisen could harvest his grapes and they dried on the vine. Eisen proceeded to stem and clean the dried grapes, labeled them as Peruvian Raisins, and they became very popular, and spawned the raisin industry. In the following years more grapes were planted for making raisins. One of the difficulties of the raisin industry was fractured organization and numerous small packers and a lack of marketing skills in trying to reach the national market and to maintain stable prices. Organization was needed for efficiency and expertise in business. M. Theo. Kearney was aware of those problems and led several attempts to build an organization for the raisin growers. The first attempt at organization began in 1888, but it was not until 1914, that a permanent organization was created, the Sun Maid Raisin Growers Association. Approximately 75% of the raisin growers joined, including Ben Gefvert. Others stayed independent and some used smaller packing houses.

Ben Gefvert was involved in the 1898 California Raisin Growers Association. Gefvert is shown in a photograph of the Association's meeting held in Fresno in June of 1898. Ben Gefvert was a member of the original Sun Maid Raisin Growers that was organized in 1914 and the Gefvert Ranch has continued its membership ever since.

The raisin grower organizational history included the following associations:

- 1888 The California Dried Fruit Association
- 1892 California State Raisin Growers Association
- 1894 California Raisin Growers and Packers
- California Fruit Exchange
- California Growers and Shippers
- 1898 California Raisin Growers Association
- 1914 Sun Maid Raisin Growers

Women Leaders in Agriculture

The Ben Gefvert Ranch demonstrates that women can succeed as leaders in farm management and agriculture in general. When Ben Gefvert died in 1917, his daughter Anna, who was 18 years old and had not

been schooled past the eighth grade, took charge of the ranch management. She successfully did so for nearly 50 years. Madeline Tyler Sheldon succeeded her father, R. G. Tyler as manager of the ranch in 2002 and has continued to do so to the present time. The family operation in its early years after Ben's death included brothers Arthur and Paul, sister Elizabeth, and her husband "R.G.", and they successfully negotiated the difficult years of the Great Depression of the 1930's, when many farms were lost to foreclosure.

Association with Martin Theodore Kearney

Although the Gefvert Ranch was not part of a colony it was adjacent to several colonies including the largest, the 5,400 acre Fruit Vale Estate, which was established by Martin Theodore Kearney (M. Theo. Kearney). In addition to land development, Kearney was a leader in the organization of raisin growers.

The Ben Gefvert Ranch is located in an area containing many farms of diversified nature but predominantly vineyards. The Ben Gefvert Ranch is northeast of the M. Theo Kearney's 5,400 acre Fruit Vale Estate. Known as the "Raisin King of California," Kearney was acknowledged as one of the largest, most prosperous and powerful agricultural leaders in the state by the late 1890's. Among his accomplishments are establishing the colony farm system in Fresno County, the development of his 5,400 acre Fruit Vale Estate, the formation of the California Raisin Growers' Association, and, upon his death in 1906, the gift of his entire estate to the University of California."

Kearney was a frequent visitor to the Gefvert family for both social and business connections. Kearney was more interested in the social life of San Francisco or Germany than in Fresno. Some people disliked his "aristocratic airs" but he was comfortable associating socially with Ben Gefvert, and would have many discussions about farming and the raisin industry. They were neighbors and fellow businessmen.

Fresno County Centennial Farm

The Ben Gefvert Ranch was designated as a Fresno County Centennial Farm, on March 11, 2008 by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors.

Significant dates:

- 1890 Property purchased by Charles D. Smith.
- 1891 Vines planted by Charles D. Smith.
- 1895 Farmhouse and barns built.
- 1897 Published with photographs in book "Imperial Fresno".
- 1900 60 acres sold to Ben Gefvert.
- 1914 Gefvert joins newly formed Sun Maid Raisin Growers.
- 1917 Ben Gefvert dies, daughter Anna takes over management of the ranch.

The role of women in agriculture continues to make headlines in Fresno County. An article in the Fresno Bee, March 1, 2009 carried the headline, "The Changing Face of Agriculture in the Valley, Female Farmers." The subtitle stated that "The economic necessity and opportunity draw more women to operate farms and ranches." Anna Gefvert was one such person from 1917 to 1968. The significance of the Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District and other similar sites has been recognized with the creation of a nationwide program to "Protect America's Historic Countryside." The program, established by the National Trust For Historic Preservation, declares the need to protect hamlets and villages, farms, and roads, fields, and waterways as tangible elements of our rural past.

Additional evidence of the impact of Fresno County's role in the general development of the nation-wide agriculture industry, with mechanical, scientific and financial innovation and creativity in the late 1800s, is the contribution of James Porteous, a Scottish immigrant. Porteous, a blacksmith and inventor opened his business, the Fresno Agricultural Works, in 1874. His 200 patents includes the Fresno scraper, a steel scoop, drawn by horse, to do excavation work such as level fields, dig canals, and build streets and "roads, as well as

create excavations for buildings. He also created a machine to de-stem raisins, which, when done by hand is very labor intensive.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

See attached Continuation Sheets

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☒ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
 Name of repository: Fresno County Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 57.2 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	11	243 290	4069 780	3	11	242 850	4069 200
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	11	243 290	4069 200	4	11	242 880	4069 780
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The southwest one quarter of the southwest one quarter and the south one half of the northwest one quarter of the southwest one quarter of Section 2, Township 14 south, Range 19 East, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian, less rights of way for roads and canals and commonly know as: 4770 West Whites Bridges Road, Fresno, California. Assessor's parcel Number 326-080-19.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The Gefvert Ranch Historic District is located five miles west of the Fresno County Courthouse and consists of that property containing 60 acres less Rights of Way for roads and canals, (a net acreage of 57.2 acres) deeded to Ben Gefvert, on November 23, 1900, recorded on Page 48, in the book of Deeds, Number 262, and is one parcel of land containing a farmhouse, detached garage, and barn/tractor shed, and 56 acres of vines and trees.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Roger Bordeaux Taylor		
organization	Taylor Heritage Services	date	March 2009
street & number	4557 E. Pico Avenue	telephone	(559) 222-7980

Ben Gevert Ranch Historic District
Name of Property

Fresno, California
County and State

city or town Fresno state CA zip code 93726-1209
e-mail _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

See Continuation Sheet

Property Owner:

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Madeline Tyler Sheldon, Sheldon Family Trust
street & number 4770 W. Whites Bridge Road telephone (559) 486-2307
city or town Fresno state CA zip code 93706

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Steve Vasquez, Fresno County Agriculture Advisory.

Judith Geary, Master Gardener (interview with Madeline Sheldon).

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Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District
Name of Property Fresno County, California
County and State n/a
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation

Page _____

Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District
Fresno Vicinity
Fresno County
California
Photographer: Richard Milhorn
Digital Data Located at 4031 East Kerckhoff Avenue
Fresno, CA 93702
Date Photographs Taken: February 27, 2009

Photo #1
Farmhouse, South Façade, camera facing northwest

Photo #2
Farmhouse, West Façade, camera facing northeast

Photo #3
Farmhouse, North Façade, camera facing south

Photo #4
Farmhouse, East Façade, camera facing southwest

Photo #5
Barn/Tractor Shed, South and West Façade, camera facing northeast

Photo #6
Barn/Tractor Shed, South and West Façade, camera facing northwest

Photo #7
Ranch Overview, camera facing southeast

Photo #8
Headgate and Schatz Ditch Irrigation Canal, camera facing west

Photo #9
Close View of Headgate Diversion Control Device

Photo #10
Front View of Headgate

Photo #11
Historic Thompson Seedless Grapevine, Typical

Photo #12
Overview of Canal and Gefvert Vineyard on Left

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Figures Log

- Figure 1. Ben Gefvert family, 1908.
- Figure 2. Ben Gefvert family in carriage, 1908.
- Figure 3. Girls eating watermelon, ca. 1917.
- Figure 4. Ranch overview, looking east, ca. 1938.
- Figure 5. Ben Gefvert, with horses, 1914.
- Figure 6. Ben Gefvert, no date.
- Figure 7. Aerial photo of ranch, 1957.
- Figure 8. Photograph and text, C.D. Smith, ca. 1897.
- Figure 9. Advertisements for M. Theo. Kearney.
- Figure 10. California Raisin Growers Association, 1898.
- Figure 11. Fresno Raisin Day Festival and poster. 1912 & 1916 respectively.
- Figure 12. Sun Maid Raisin Growers logo.
- Figure 13. Fresno County Centennial farm certificate.
- Figure 14. Location map.
- Figure 15. Ben Gefvert Ranch, Thompson Atlas, 1907.
- Figure 16. C.D. Smithy Ranch including portion sold to Ben Gefvert, Thompson Atlas, 1891.
- Figure 17. Site Plan of Ben Gefvert Ranch.
- Figure 18. Site Plan of farmhouse area with historic trees and roses.

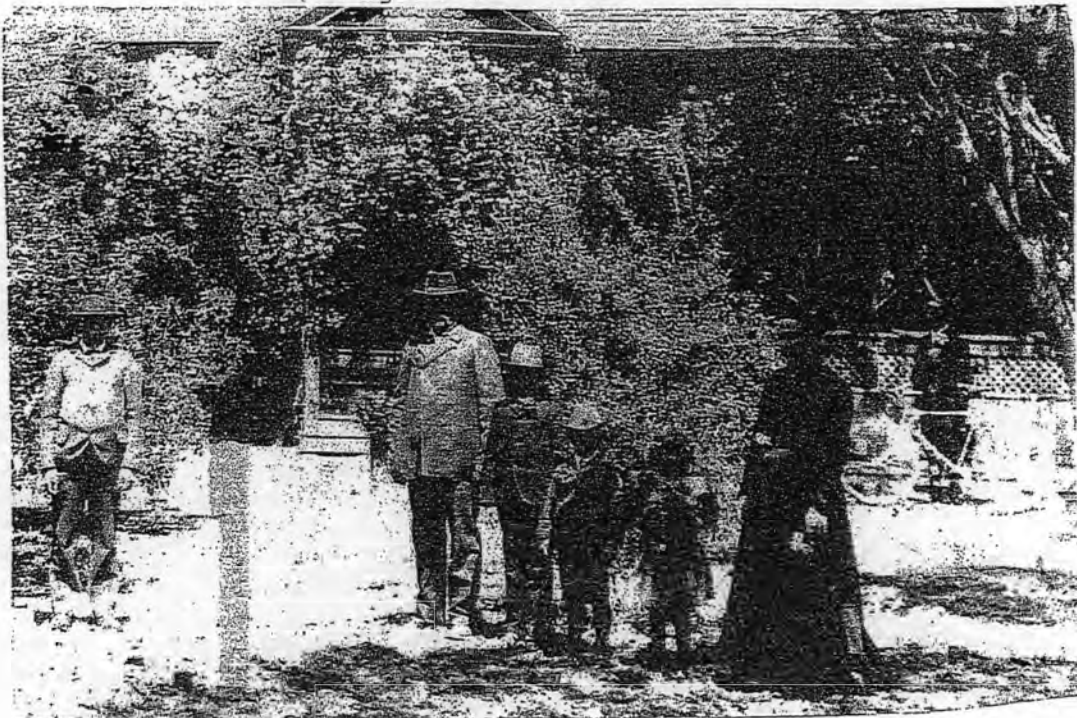
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Fig 1 Figure 1



Girls eating watermelon
(Anna, tallest girl. Ca. 1918)



Fig 2 Figure 3

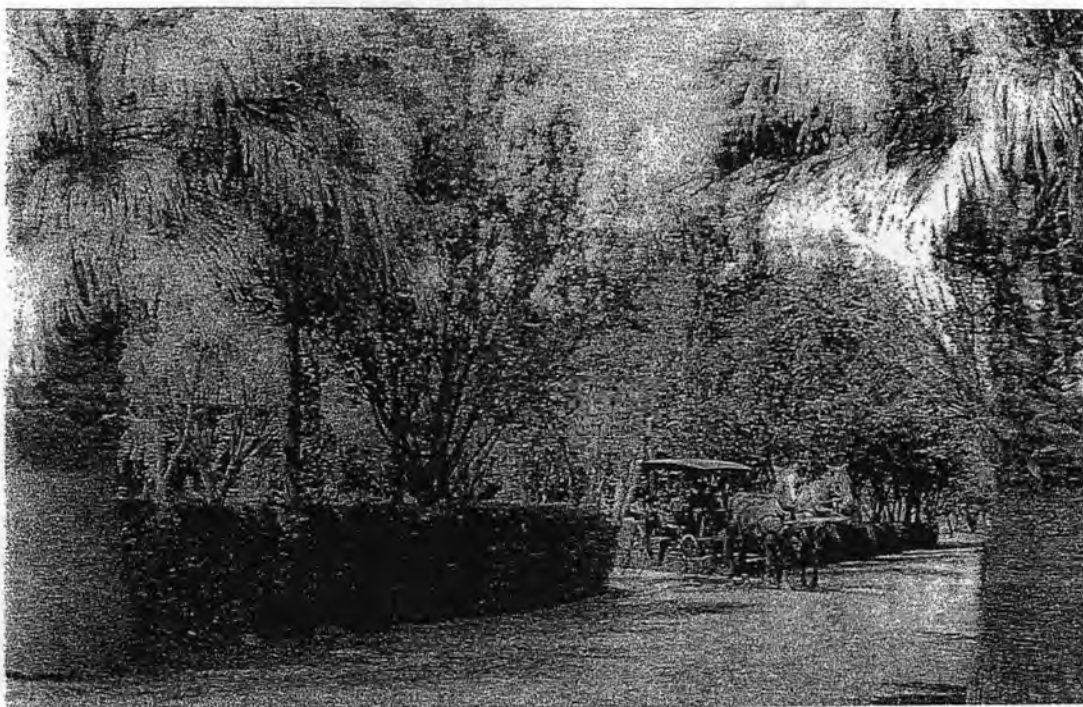
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Figure 2



Ranch overview 1938

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National Park Service

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Figure 6

Ben Gefvert (Date unknown)

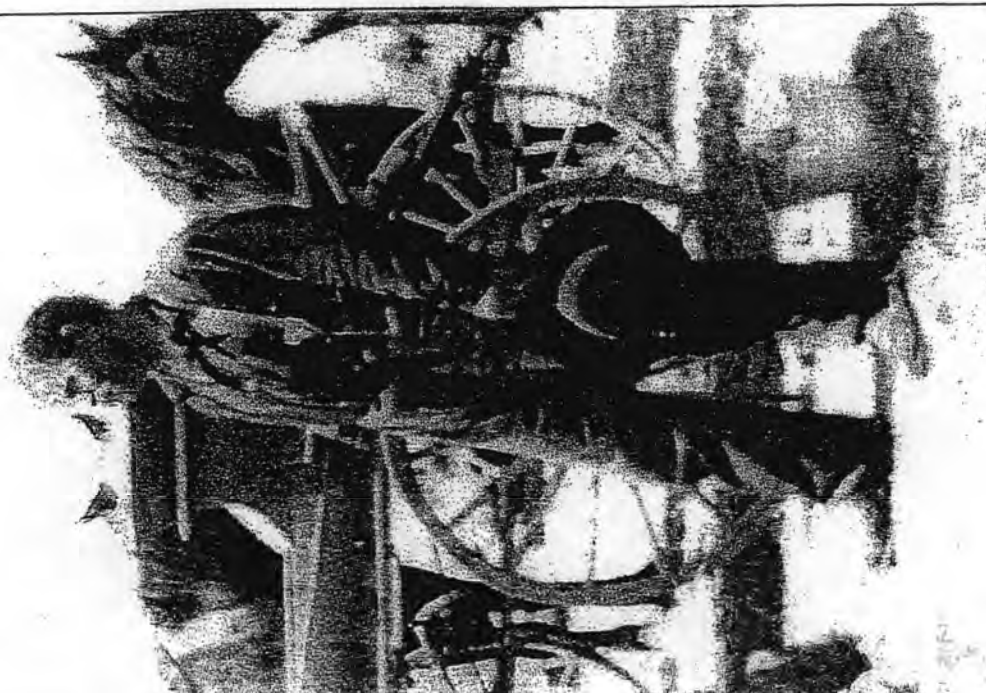


Figure 5

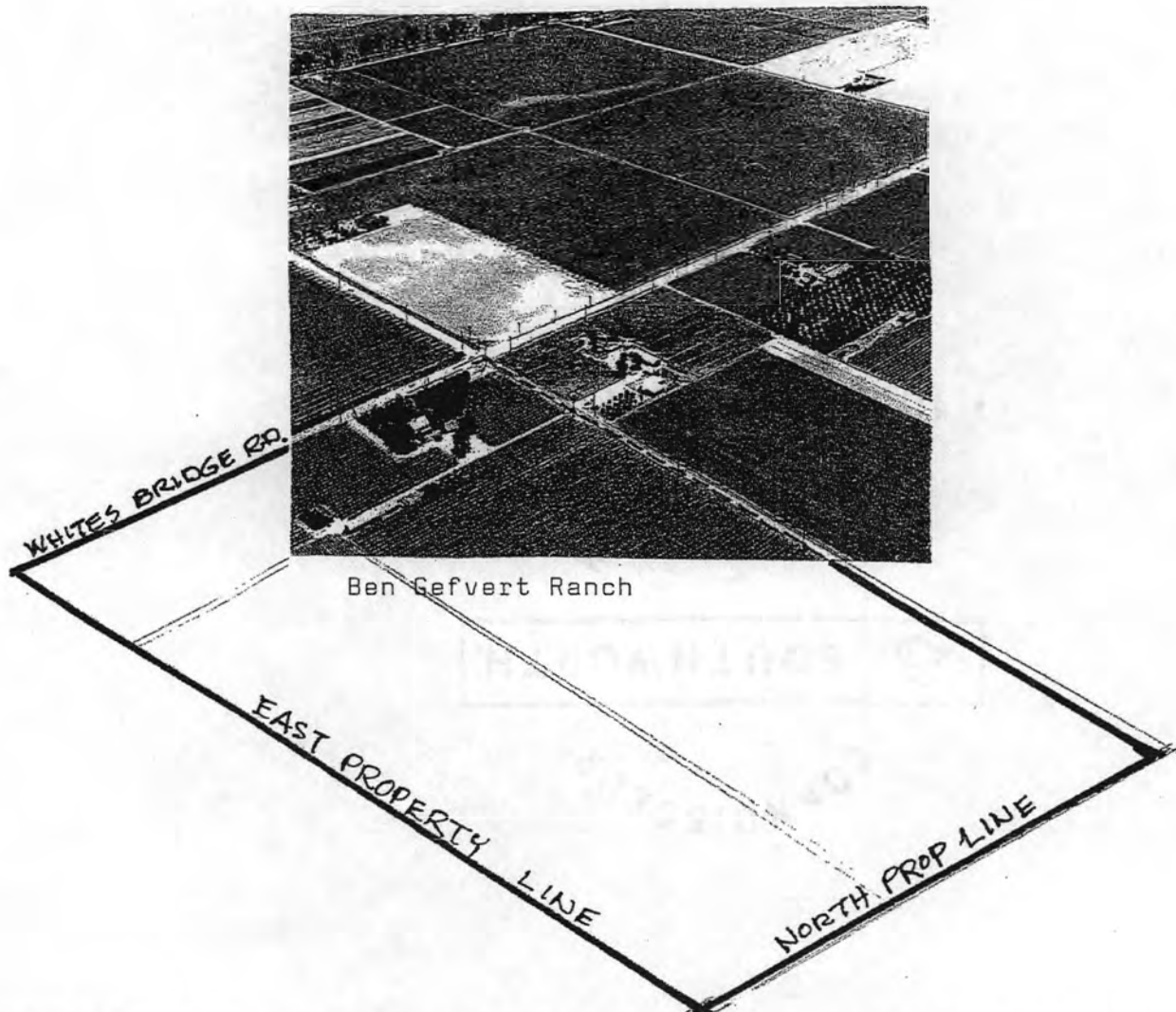
Ben Gefvert with Percheron horses 1914

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Aerial view from the Northeast looking Southwest, as the Ben Gefvert Ranch looked in 1957. Note that all of the vineyard are planted with rows running East/West.

Figure 7

Section number _____ Page _____ Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District, Fresno, Co., CA

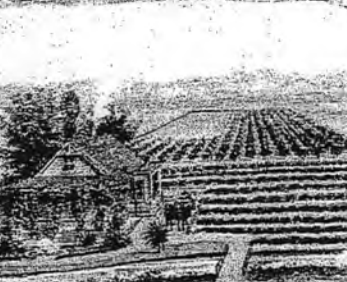
Figure 8

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FRESNO
CALIFORNIA

SUBDIVISION OF THE
FRUIT VALE ESTATE



— 25 ACRES COUNTRY FARM IN FRESNO.
NET PROFIT \$1,000. TO \$3,000. A YEAR.

→ **FARMS OF**
10 TO 160 ACRES EACH IN
THE FRUIT VALE ESTATE ←

→ **M. THER KEARNEY (OWNER)**
FOR SALE AT LOW PRICES AND ON VERY EASY TERMS OF PAYMENT.
SEND FOR MAPS AND CIRCULARS TO

BRIGGS, FERGUSON & CO
AND
FRESNO, CAL.

GENERAL
AGENTS, **FRUIT VALE ESTATE**
314 CALIFORNIA ST.
SAN FRANCISCO.

Two samples of advertisements for the promotion of Fresno County Colony farm development.

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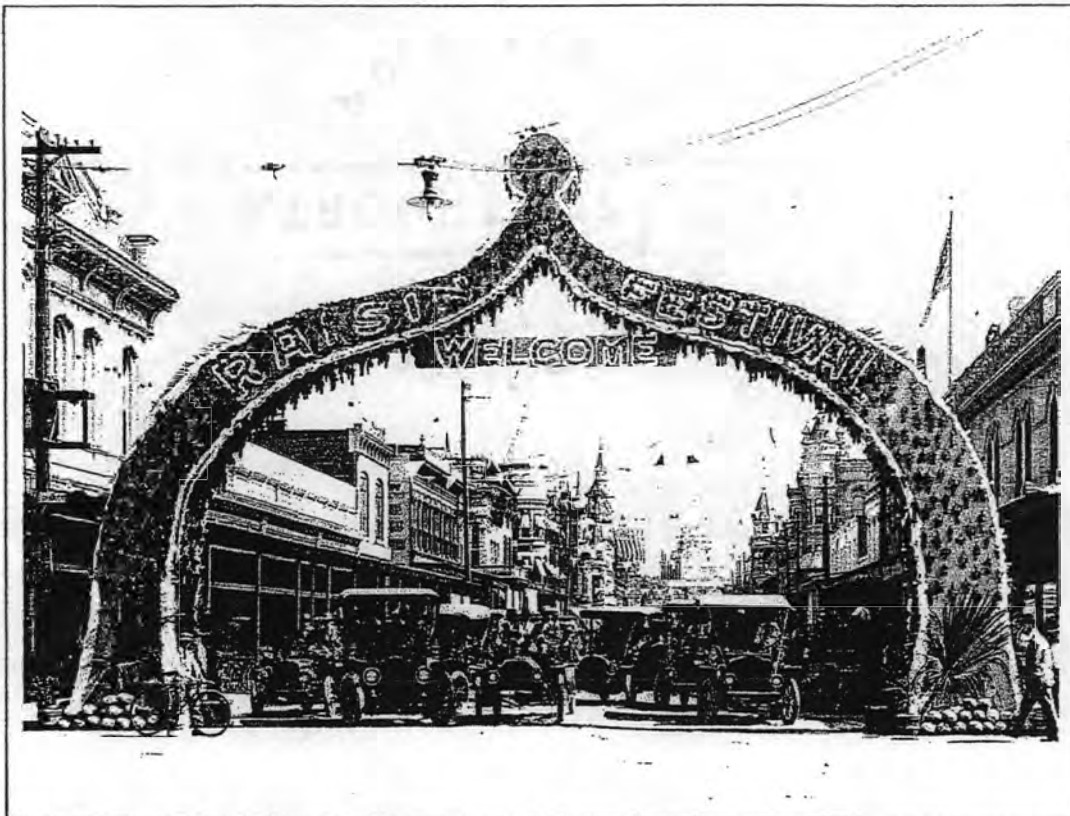
California Raisin Growers Meeting, Fresno, June 1898.
Ben Gefvert see circle lower right of photograph.
M. Theo Kearney, at table upper left of photograph.

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Raisin Day Festival, 1912. With the help of railroads and hotels across the country, raisins were served with every meal to publicize the festival. The raisin was used in desserts and baking, and raisin bread was created.
Fresno Historical Society Archives.

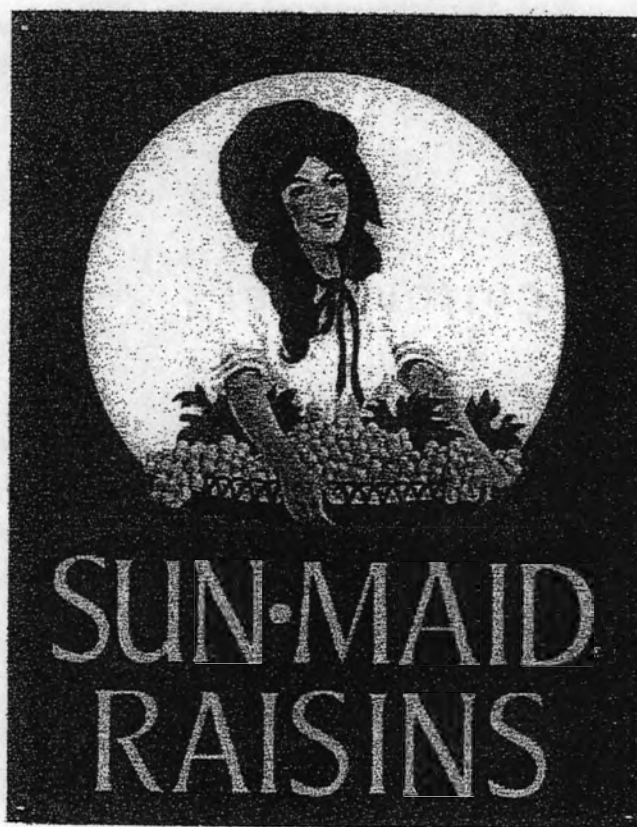


Raisin Day poster advertising Sun-Maid raisins, 1916.
The Sun-Maid Herald. Fresno Historical Society Archives.

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Sun Maid Raisin Logo

One of America's best known product logos and recognized world wide

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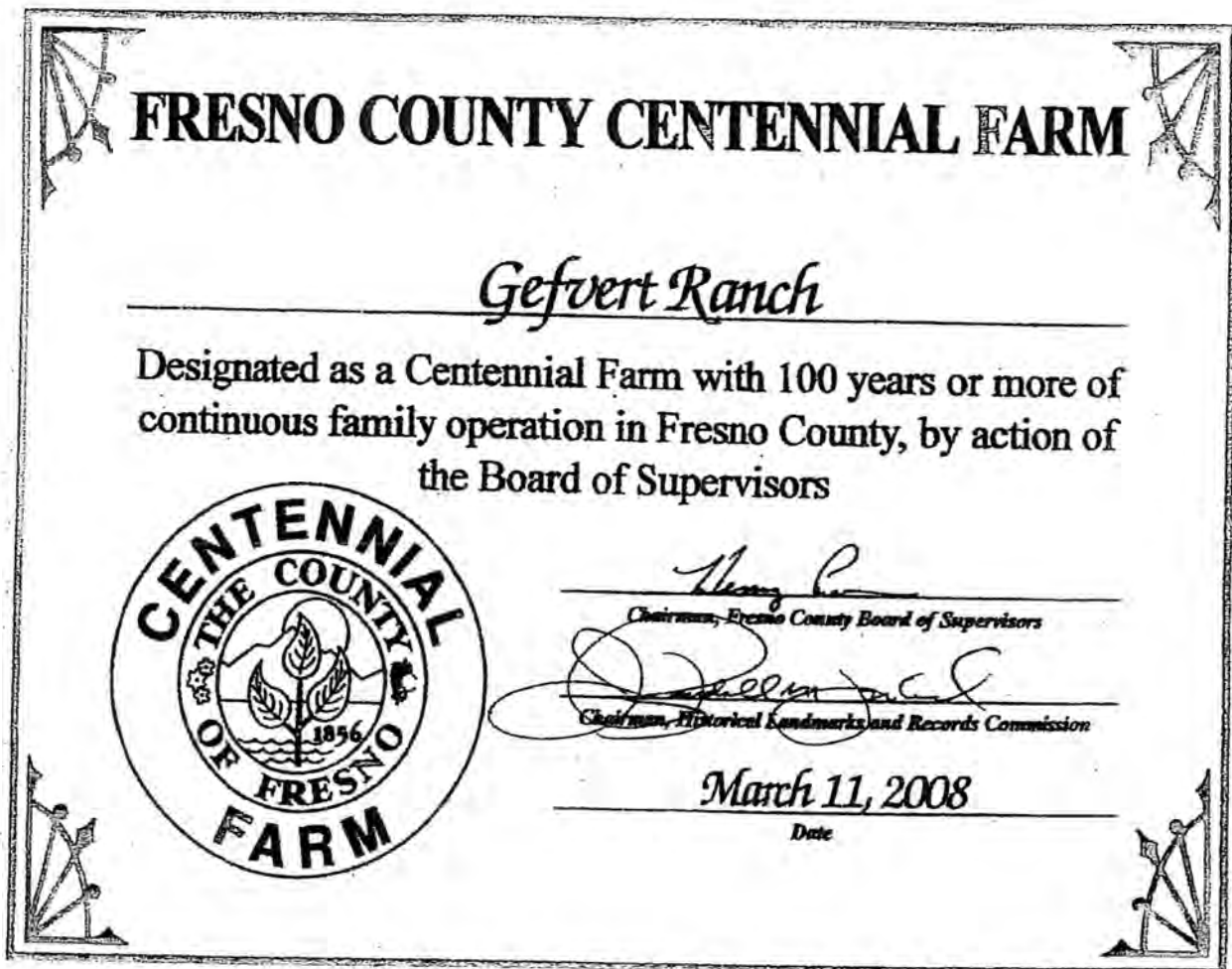


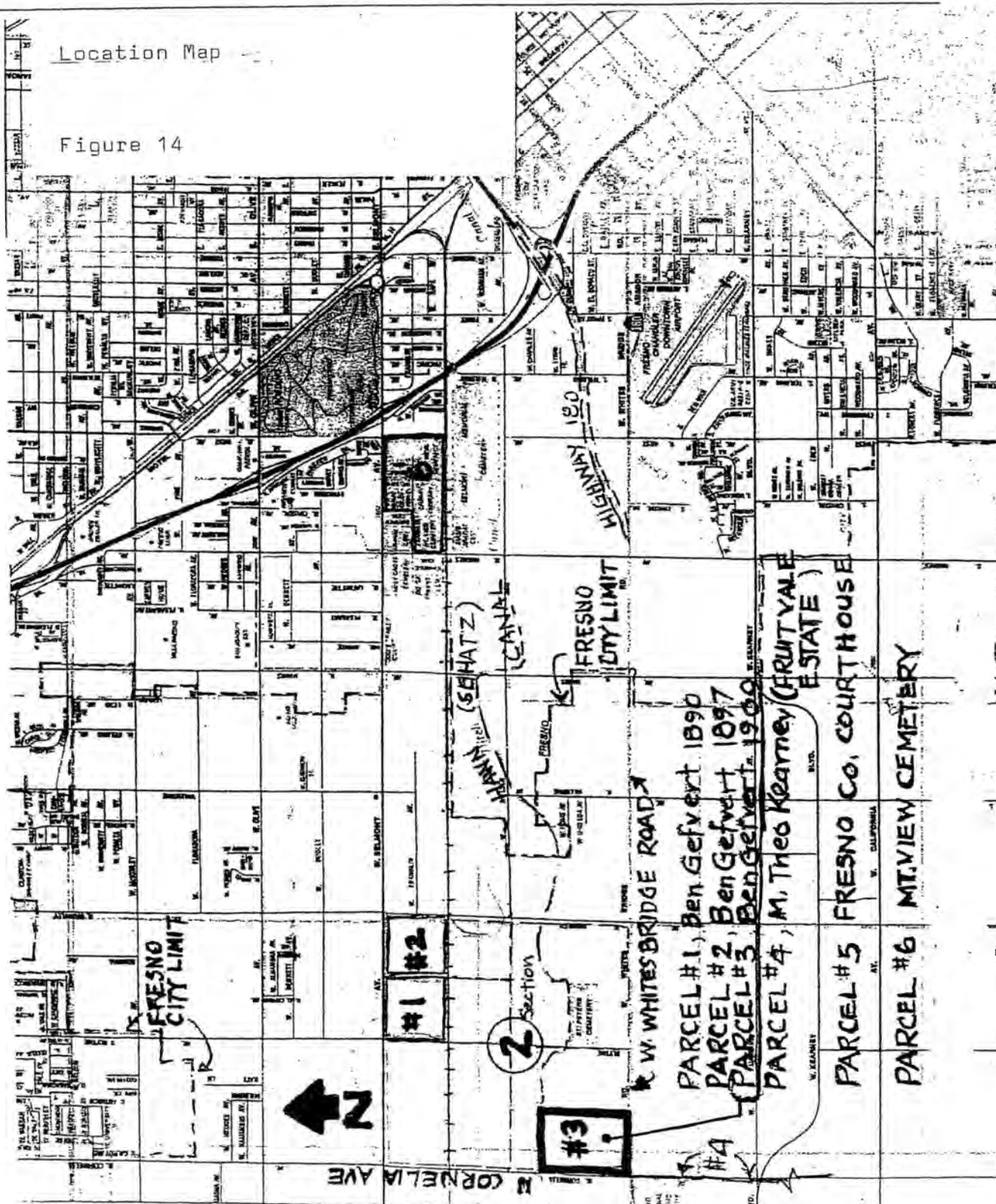
Figure 13

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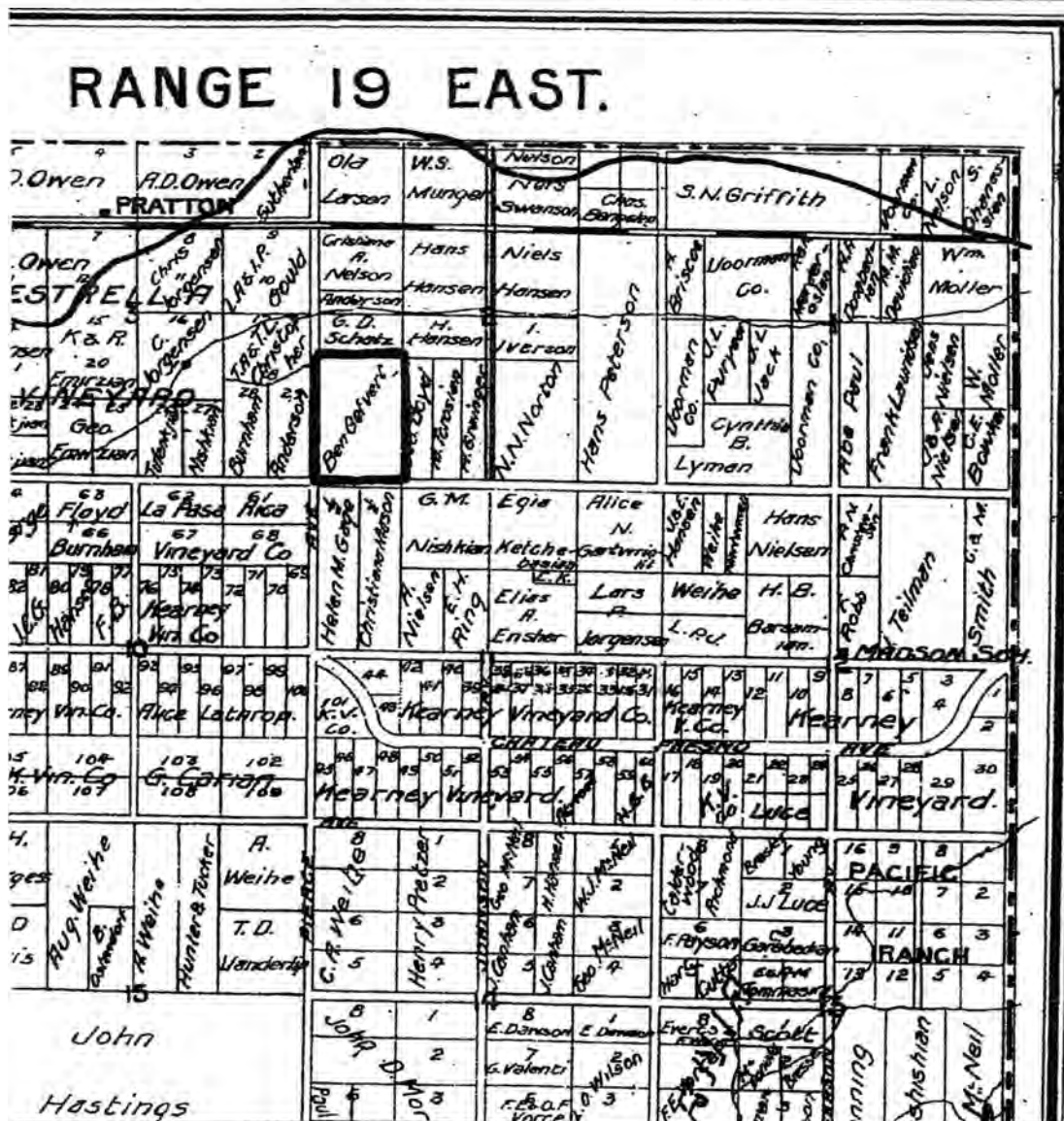


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Ben Gefvert Ranch
Thompson Atlas of Fresno County, 1907

Figure 15

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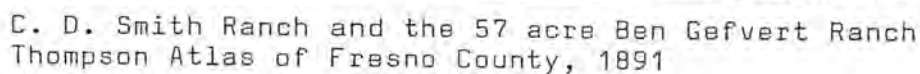


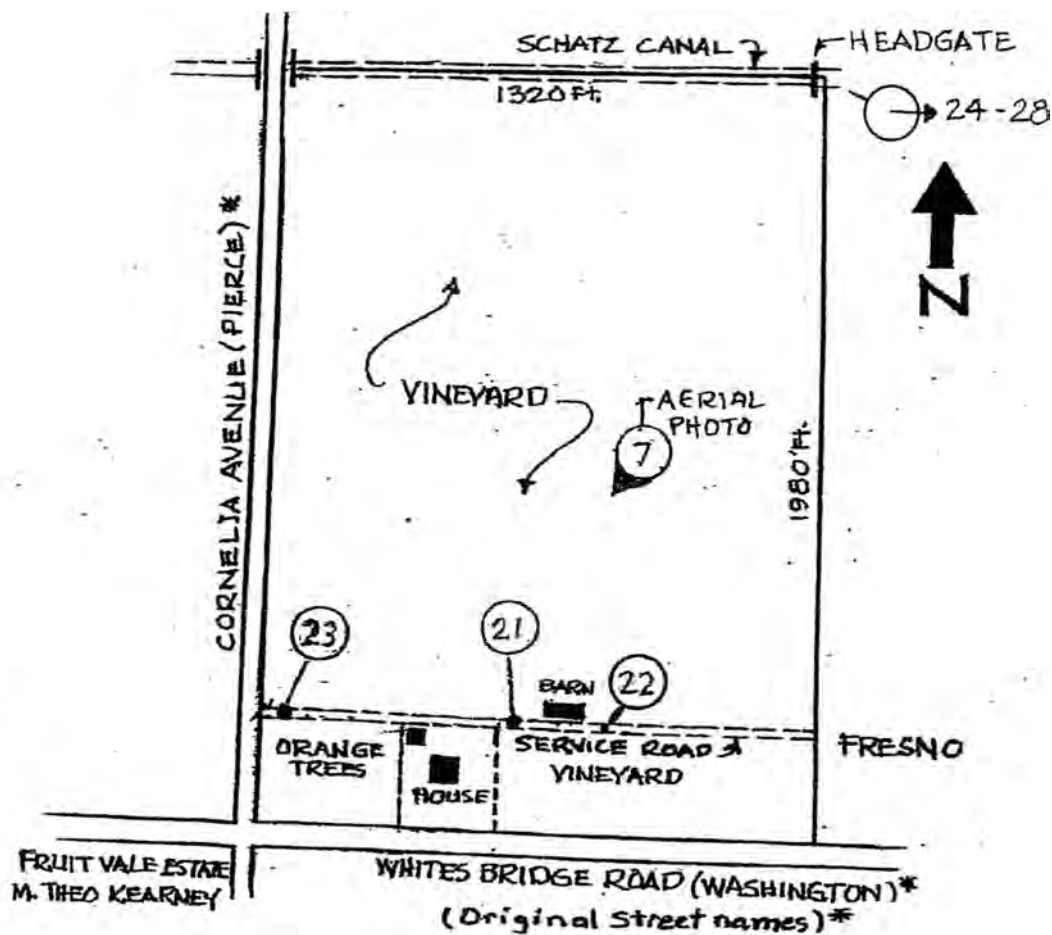
Figure 16

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Site plan of ranch with photo locations.

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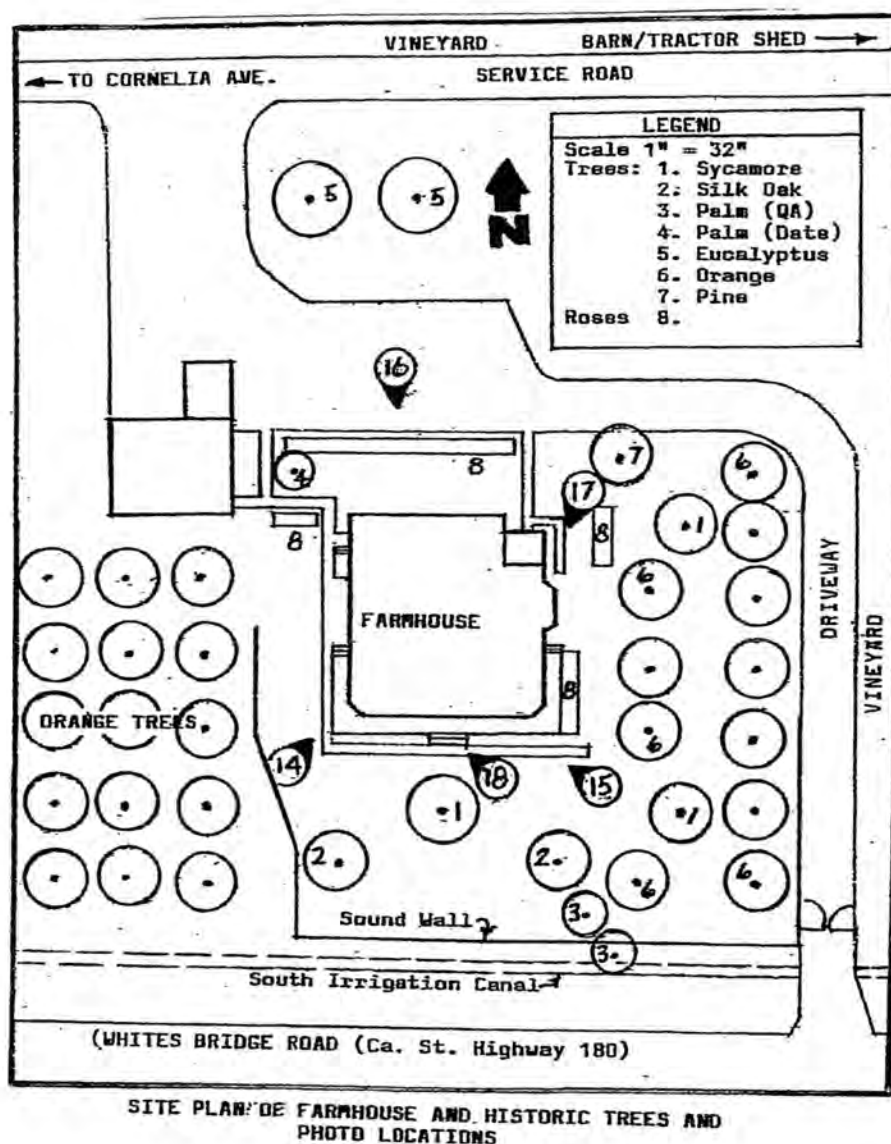


Figure 18

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 10001117

Date Listed: 1/7/2011


Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District
Property Name

Fresno CA
County State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

1/7/2011
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Classification:

The block for Name of Related Multiple Property Submission should read: *N/A*
The block for Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed should read: *0*

Significance:

The Period of Significance is revised to read: *1891-1917*
[This period reflects the era of farm operation associated with the early rise and development of the regionally significant viticulture (raisin) industry, under ranch owners Charles Smith and Ben Gefvert. The primary significance of the property lies in its representation of a typical late nineteenth and early twentieth century family-run farm. (Ben Gefvert died in 1917.) The ranch's later continued use by members of the second and third generation of the Gefvert family while noteworthy, does not reflect the same unique qualities in association with the local agricultural context. The existence of comparable mid-century agricultural operations is unknown.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the CA SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, FRESNO

DATE RECEIVED: 11/24/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 12/22/10
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 01/06/11 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/09/11
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10001117

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ ACCEPT ___ RETURN ___ REJECT ___ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A (Agriculture). First established in 1891, the Gefvert Ranch represents in type and function, a rare and intact remnant of the early pioneering era of viticulture development in the Fresno region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criteria A

REVIEWER Paul R. Lusignan

DISCIPLINE HISTORIAN

TELEPHONE 202-354-2229

DATE 1/7/2011

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

**Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District
Fresno County
Staff Evaluation**

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is located five miles west of the Fresno County Courthouse. The 57.2-acre property is surrounded by 40 to 200 acres farms. The ranch consists of the follow contributing resources: agricultural fields, consisting of 55 acres of raisin grapes, some of which are the oldest such plantings in Fresno County, and one acre of naval orange trees (contributing site); a farmhouse (contributing building) and a barn/tractor shed (contributing building) heritage garden (contributing site); and irrigation system (contributing structure). A detached garage with carport constructed in 1938 is a non-contributing building. The vernacular style, two-story farmhouse is surrounded by landmark and large trees that date to the construction of the house, and are documented in historic photographs dated 1897 and 1908. An heirloom rose garden was planted along with a variety of shaped shrubs by the Gefverts sometime between 1900 and 1917. The irrigation canal predates the property's development and was constructed sometime in the mid-1880s. Outbuildings removed after 1938 include the water tank house in 1938 and the horse barn between 1938 and 1956. Despite the removal of outbuildings, the property retains a high degree of integrity and continues to convey a feeling of its 19th century origins and development over time.

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with the practice of viticulture and the beginnings of the raisin industry in Fresno County. The relatively small-in-acreage, family owned and operated farmstead, planted primarily in grapes for raisin production, is a typical farmstead of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Fresno County, and represents, in type and function, a rare and intact remnant of the agricultural past of Fresno County. Originally developed by Charles D. Smith in 1891, the ranch was purchased by Ben Gefvert in 1900 and still remains in the possession of the Gefvert family.

The property is nominated on behave of its owner. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors approved local Historic Designation of the Ben Gefvert Ranch on March 11, 2008.

Staff recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine Ben Gefvert Historic District meets National Register Criterion A at the local level of significance and recommend the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register.

Cynthia Toffelmier
Historian II
December 30, 2009















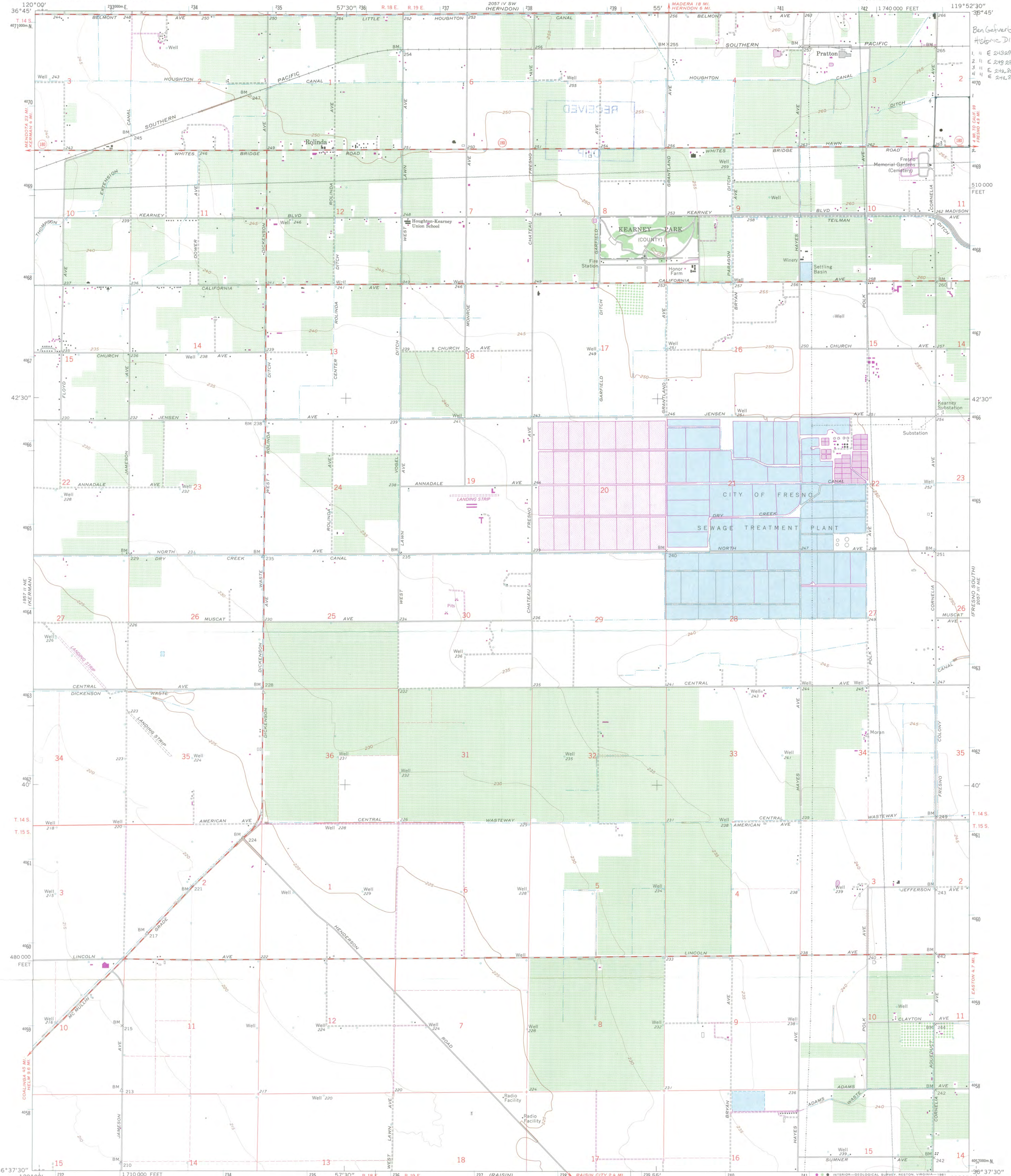








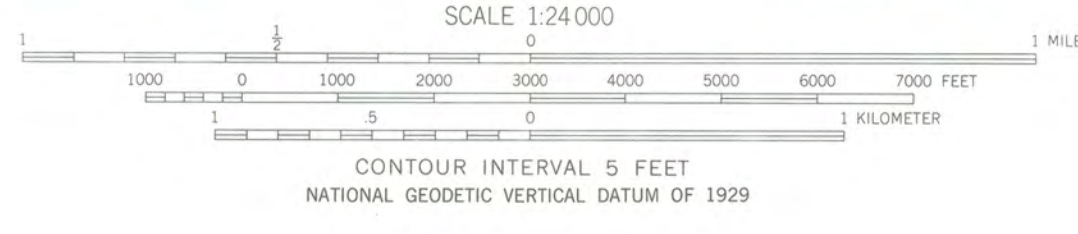




Ben Gehret Ranch
Hobart District
1. 11 E 243280 N 4069 780
2. 11 E 243280 N 4069 800
3. 11 E 243280 N 4069 820
4. 11 E 243280 N 4069 840
470

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial
photographs taken 1962. Topography by planimetric surveys 1963
Polyconic projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks based on
California coordinate system, zone 4. 1000-meter Universal
Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 11, shown in blue
1927 North American Datum. To place on the predicted
North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines
9 meters north and 88 meters east as shown by
dashed corner ticks
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
National or State reservations shown on this map

Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled from
aerial photographs taken 1978 and other sources
This information not field checked. Map edited 1981



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Medium-duty ——— Light-duty ———
Unimproved dirt ———
State Route

KEARNEY PARK, CALIF.
NW/4 FRESNO 15' QUADRANGLE
N3637.5—W11952.5/7.5

1963
DMA 2057 III NW—SERIES V895

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23rd Street Suite 100
SACRAMENTO, CA 94296-0001
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053
calshpo@ohp.parks.ca.gov



November 22, 2010

Ms. Carol Shull, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service 2280
1201 I (Eye) Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Subject: **Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District
National Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District National Register nomination. The California Commission heard and approved this nomination on January 29, 2010. After a delay of several months the applicant provided a complete set of representative photographic prints of the historic district.

The Ben Gefvert Ranch Historic District is being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its association with the practice of viticulture and the beginnings of the raisin industry in Fresno County. The Ben Gefvert Ranch is located near Fresno in Fresno County, California and is nominated to the National Register by the Madeline Tyler Sheldon and the Sheldon Family Trust, the owner of the property.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Jay Correia of my staff at 916-445-7008 or jcorr@parks.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Milford Wayne Donaldson'.

Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA
State Historic Preservation Officer
Enclosures