

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Church of St. Joseph

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1109 K Street  not for publication

city or town Los Banos  vicinity

state California code CA county Merced code 47 93635 zip code

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Steph S. Min  
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/5/04  
Date

California Office of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

[Signature]

7/3/04

Church of St. Joseph  
Name of Property

Merced, California  
County and State

**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)

- 2 building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	2	Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Social: Civic  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof Wood shingle  
\_\_\_\_\_  
walls Reinforced Concrete/Plaster  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other Arched wood framed windows  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1923

**Significant Dates**

1923

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Fantoni, Charles (1870-1933) Architect

Wilson, Guy H. – Contractor

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Church of St. Joseph  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Merced County, California  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	691175	4103420	3	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Richard L. Dahlgren, Project Facilitator

organization City of Los Banos, Department of Public Services date January 14, 2004

street & number 830 Sixth Street telephone (209) 769-2604

city or town Los Banos state CA zip code 93635

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**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.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Los Banos Arts Council

street & number PO Box 127 telephone (209) 826-2425

city or town Los Banos state CA zip code 93635

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**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. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page - 1 -

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Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description:

The Church of St. Joseph in Los Banos, California is a large (100 foot by 45 foot) one story building. The structure includes a mezzanine and basement areas in what might be termed "Late Romanesque Revival" style architecture which was popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The interior of the church is a symmetrical three nave basilica configuration. The large central nave ends at curved apse with barrel vaulted ceilings. The narrow side naves are separated from the central space by symmetrical Romanesque arched colonnades. The side naves originally served as small statuary niches next to the central altar. The main apse housed the original altar and now serves as a stage.

The wall above the colonnade extends to the significantly higher ceiling in the main nave. Romanesque arched windows are centered to the interior column bays. The original Romanesque arched wood window frames remain with diffused glass. The original stained glass windows were removed to be installed in a new church structure. The original church building did not have running water or restroom facilities. In 1996 the Los Banos Arts Council restored the interior of the existing building and added a kitchen with restrooms suitable for handicapped access. The new building addition adjoins the West rear corner of the original church structure. A new ramp which is handicapped accessible now provides entry to the building. Mr. Ted Falasco (Contractor) and Robert Beharka (Architect) designed and constructed the addition in keeping with the same architectural style of the original building. The new addition is not visible when approaching the main entrance of the church building. A donation from Mr. Ted Falasco funded the entire project. The integrity of the beautiful old church building has not been altered as a result of the new addition. In 1998 the Arts Council also replaced the wood shingle roof with a new "composition" shingle roof.

The "Rose window" that graced the front elevation (prominently located above the large front doors) was not relocated to the new church building. Currently the area where the Rose window was located has been boarded up for protection pending future rehabilitation of the window. At this time we do not know how the building was originally heated. In the late 1930's a forced air furnace was installed in the basement space located below the altar area. This area is raised approximately two feet to provide a "grating area" through which air was forced to provide heating to the main seating area within the church. A new heating and air conditioning system was installed in the early 1970's. Prior to being air conditioned the area was cooled by a cross breeze when opening "transom windows" on both sides of the building. Persons who attended early church services remember the building being very cold in the winter and hot in the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page - 2 -

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summer. Information regarding the heating and air conditioning system was provided by Richard Young of "Young's Heating and Air Conditioning". Mr. Young was formerly associated with Gardner Plumbing he installed the equipment and has provided maintenance of the systems for over forty year.

The basement area referred to earlier is not a full basement but is rather more of a space for storage and placement of utilities. The basement space below the altar area is the only part of the basement high enough to provide standing room. The mezzanine area is on the East end (entrance area) of the building and is accessible by using wooden stairs. The area was originally used as a "choir loft" but is no longer in use. Access to various lighting is available in the mezzanine.

The Church of St. Joseph was constructed using reinforced concrete walls with a wood structured roof. The marks made from concrete forms on the gray concrete walls were visible until the mid 1940's, when a plaster finish was added to the exterior. In 1923 when the building was constructed concrete was poured by using buckets with hand labor. A tall "bell tower" steeple extends 150 feet high and provides the dominant architectural feature visible from several blocks away. We have summarized the condition of St. Joseph's Church including alterations that have been made to date; none of the alterations have deterred from the building's original integrity. A more detailed description of the Church's architectural features written by architect David Avila is included in section 7 B.

On the property along with the Church of St. Joseph are two other structures which are considered non-contributing. The church, of course, would be contributing. The other two non-contributing structures are one large building, the former church rectory, which is a mid century single story sprawling wood frame and stucco building built in the late 1940's. The other structure was built in 1965 as a garage/storage/ and restroom. This structure was constructed to match the structure of the former rectory building and the building is now used as an office and for storage.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description (Architectural description by David Avila, Architect)

The Los Banos Arts Council facility is prominently located on the corner of Fifth and K Streets, in downtown Los Banos, California. The Arts Council building was originally constructed as a church and served as a religious facility until being purchased by the Non-Profit Arts Council in 1994. With the exception of the stained glass windows, which were removed when the building changed ownership, the exterior of the building remains mostly unchanged. To support the Arts Council's cultural programs, the interior of the building has been refurbished and a fully equipped catering kitchen and handicap accessible toilet rooms have been added to the Southwest corner of the original structure. A new composition shingle roof was installed in 1999. The Arts Council building remains a predominant structure in the community and its steeple is visible for several blocks. The Arts Council is now ready to begin restoration of the building exterior and hopes to retain the building's architectural integrity in the structure's new use as an arts facility.

**Designer, Charles Fantoni, a San Francisco, California Designer**

The building was designed by Charles Fantoni, a San Francisco, California designer. Fantoni (1870-1933) was a marble cutter who became an "Italian/American" architect; he designed only one other church, Saint Peter and Paul's Church located in North beach, San Francisco. The interior of the building is a symmetrical, three nave basilica configuration. The pews have been removed making the interior a large open space. The large central nave ends at a curved aspe with a barrel - vaulted ceiling. The aspe housed the original altar and now serves as a stage. The narrow side naves are separated from the central space by symmetrical, Romanesque-arched colonnades. The side naves originally served as small statuary niches next to the central altar. The wall above the colonnades extends to the significantly higher ceiling in the main nave. The walls above the side naves each have two round clerestory windows that are centered above the first and third column bays. These windows have been covered with plywood. The North and South exterior walls each have six large, Romanesque arched windows that are centered to the interior column bays. The original wood frames remain and diffused glass has been installed to replace the original stained glass windows. The Tuscan columns sit on simple plinth bases. Their capitals are more elaborately detailed with curved bottom and flat-faced panels that have recessed crosses on all four sides. The tops of the column capitals are trimmed in a saw-tooth pattern. The entire column is constructed of gypsum plaster. The structural support of the column interior has not been determined at this time. The side and central naves both have flat ceilings.

**Interior of Original Building Structure**

Upon entering the building there is a small vestibule that houses a storage room and wet bar; originally this area was used for baptisms and confessionals. The stair to the original choir loft is entered from the vestibule. An opening in the storage room ceiling allowed a rope connection to the original bell located in the steeple to be manually operated from the ground floor. The bell has been removed. A small winding stair is the only access to the choir loft. The loft extends the entire width of the ground floor vestibule and was originally adorned with a large round stained glass window on the east wall directly behind the choir seating area. The original stained-glass

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description (continued)

rose window was divided into 12 separate wood mullion sections that terminated in a scalloped pattern at their outer edges. The individual window segments encircled a round center glass panel. The window has been covered over and is scheduled for replacement at the same time as the exterior restoration.

The interior three-nave layout is clearly articulated on the exterior of the building. Pilasters flanking the upper section of the North and South walls align with the interior column bays. The lower, shed roofs terminate against the higher, central nave exterior walls. The bottom edge of the shed roof extends approximately six inches beyond the North and South parapet walls. A built up ledge on the exterior face of the parapet supports a perimeter rain gutter. The central nave walls continue vertically to the gabled roof that spans the entire length of the central section of the building. When the new roof was installed, the lower level gutter was replaced with fascia-gutters. These should be replaced with an ogee profile gutter when the building is restored. The large arched windows along the lower North and South walls strongly reinforce the Romanesque quality of this building. The pilasters along the higher walls do not extend to the lower level walls. At approximately five feet above finished grade, the North, East and South walls are recessed about four inches from what is probably the stem wall of the building's foundation. This elevation is approximately the same height as the interior floor level. The offset is finished the same cement plaster as the rest of the building. Decorative iron vent covers along the North and South walls provide natural ventilation to the crawl space.

The parapet of the rear, West wall, follows the profile of the building's symmetrical shed and central gabled roofs. The only other features on this wall are a modestly detailed, 8 panel curved head window centered to the building, a round attic vent near the top of the gabled parapet wall and a side window opening that has been enclosed. The South slope of the gable parapet is broken by the original furnace or boiler chimney and extends about five or six feet above the parapet. The building's large HVAC units sit on grade level against this wall. Wall mounted electrical power and telephone weather head risers are just south of the HVAC equipment. Adjacent to the utilities is the new rear entrance to the kitchen bathroom addition. The entrance includes a large landing, which also serves as a loading dock. The exterior renovation may include burying the overhead utility lines, enclosing the HVAC equipment and landscaping against the West wall and rear entrance.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

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Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

**North side of the Building**

The North side of the building is adjacent to a public sidewalk along K Street. A second means of egress added to the building over the years required that the lower operable section of one of the large windows be removed to allow for adequate head clearance for a small outdoor porch. The non-descript structure should probably be improved during the exterior renovation by cutting openings into the sidewalls to allow more natural light into the stairway/landing area. The tower and steeple anchors the east end of the north elevation. The lower section of the tower has a large curved-head window that matches the windows along the side naves. This window and its twin on the East (front) side of the tower retain their original diffused glass. The mullion pattern on this and the other nave windows includes a separate hopper window below the large arched windows. When the original stained glass was removed, the hopper windows were covered with plywood. The arched window pattern is comprised of a large lower section that is almost completely rectangular except for two radiused corners at the top of the panel. A half-round glass panel is centered above the lower section. The mullions of the upper arched panel intersect the small radiused mullions of the lower window. A small, third section of glass, is created by the space between the curved sections of the lower and top window and the outer window frame. The large nave windows and windows at the base of the tower and southeast corner of the building, have projecting cement plaster trim around the window openings.

**Original Glass Windows**

A narrower, 14-panel, arched window is located at about the center point of the tower. The glass in this window, and a matching window on the East face of the tower, retains the original transparent glazing. Twin sections of projecting cornice molding about four feet apart, identify the base of the bell tower level. The molding continues along all sides of the tower. Pilasters flank all four corners of the tower and rest on modest plinth blocks at grade level. The plinth blocks align with the foundation wall projection that demarks the foundation wall. The tower pilasters extend to and terminate at the top of the upper cornice. The wall below the upper molding and between the corner pilasters is trimmed with cement plaster panels with a repetitive arch pattern. The arches project out from the wall plane several inches and resemble a Moorish arch pattern. The same detail extends across the gabled front parapet wall above the building entrance. The steeple tower profile changes as it rises above the upper cornice molding. At this level, the corner pilasters are slightly smaller in width and have a simple, double-stepped base. The

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description (continued)

base detail continues around all four sides of the tower. A tall and narrow Romanesque arched opening is centered on each wall section. The original bell was suspended from the ceiling of the steeple and was clearly visible through these large openings. The top of the bell tower is trimmed with a large built-up painted metal molding. Rust at the lower corners of the molding suggests that a rain gutter is incorporated into the molding. The molding is horizontal above the pilasters and rises to a symmetrical peak centered above each arched opening. In addition to defining the top of the bell loft level, the molding is the base of the steeple roof. The steep, hipped roof is capped with a large cross. The ends of the cross have three small scalloped tips. A similarly detailed and slightly larger cross is centered on the gabled roof parapet above the entrance doors.

**Building Entrance**

The front, East, wall is the location of the building's main entrance. The entrance is centered below the upper gabled parapet. The same cornice molding and scalloped trim detail at the bell loft level of the steeple tower is repeated along the gabled parapet. The East elevation is articulated into three sections. The steeple/bell tower anchors the North corner of the wall. The center section demarks the entrance and the south corner resembles a flying buttress-like section flanks the main building entrance. The building entrance is further articulated by symmetrical pilasters located at both sides of the entrance portico. In addition to creating a symmetrical entrance, the northern pilaster also anchors the southeast corner of the steeple tower. The southern pilaster also serves a dual purpose by rising past the parapet to become a small minaret-like tower. The minaret resembles is a scaled down version of the steeple. Its middle section has a recessed Romanesque niche on all four sides with a small cornice molding and steep roof similar to the steeple roof. The top of the minaret is trimmed with a ball finial. The minaret is constructed of cement plaster. Two additional matching minaret towers rise above the building's southeast parapet.

The building entrance is approximately four to four and one half feet above finished grade. A large concrete stair extending beyond the symmetrical pilasters provides non-handicapped access into the building. The large, carved wood panel doors and operable wooden transom panels are similar in design to the original doors. Historical photographs suggest that the original doors may have been wider than the existing doors. This may explain why two full height amber glass sidelights have been installed on either side of the existing doors. The entrance doors are framed by a portico that projects

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7

Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description (continued)

approximately twenty inches beyond the exterior wall. The inner profile of the portico is comprised of a single Romanesque arch that surrounds the door opening. The portico aligns with the center of the gabled parapet of the upper roof. The portico terminates into a gabled pediment with small horizontal sections at the outer edges. A multi-level and coved cornice molding creates a strong visual presence along the top of the pediment. A cross is recessed into the center of the wall below the pediment. The outside ends of the pediment intersect with two pilasters that sit on square plinth blocks at the stair landing. The pilasters have a single recessed panel along their entire length. The pilaster capitals are intricately designed and include a small cross at the top center with a fan-shaped leaf border at the bottom edge. The leaves overlap at the corners. Long curving fluted stalks extend from the center of the pilaster to the top corners of the capitals where the foliage then curves downward. The design resembles a leafy vegetable with scalloped tips. The curving stalks end in a fiddlehead shape that look like new growth is about to blossom or sprout. Small Tuscan column pilasters rest in corner niches on the portico wall directly above the pilasters. These miniature pilasters have small single curved ring bases with double corbelled rings just below the column capital. The capitals are flat faced with curved bottoms and projecting ring on the front and side faces. Inside and setback a few inches from the main portico, is a second set of Tuscan pilasters that support a Romanesque archway. The intricately detailed and projecting arch is approximately 12-14 inches in diameter with a spiraling, three-ring ribbed pattern along its length. A recessed panel below the arch repeats the curved head of the portico opening. The capitals of the round, inner pilasters have a similar foliage pattern as the outer pilasters, except that they do not include a cross. The Tuscan pilasters sit on round plinth block bases. The top and side walls at the door opening have a 45 degree chamfered edge detail that begins at about two feet above the stair landing and stops approximately fourteen inches from the top inside corners of the door opening.

The exterior wall between the full height pilasters is further articulated by ten recessed panels above and to the side of the entrance portico. The panels are comprised of a grid of built up beams and pilasters along the exterior wall. The largest panel is a rectangle centered above the entrance doors. The projecting round trim that frames the rose window is centered on this wall panel. The wall above intersects with the roof parapet resulting in a triangular shaped panel. A round attic vent is centered in this panel. The panel with the rose window opening is flanked on either side by two smaller rectangular sections. The wall below the center panel is intersected by the entrance pediment, which

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 8

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Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

Narrative Description (continued)

results in two small triangular panels above the entrance. Long narrow wall panels flanking either side of the portico extend from the foundation/exterior wall offset to the horizontal section that defines the upper wall panels. The built up trim projects about six inches from the exterior wall and has no other ornamentation.

**Eclectic Features**

The south bay of the East wall elevation is somewhat eclectic, particularly the sloping parapet wall that is flanked on either side by a minaret capped pilasters. The sloping parapet is reminiscent of flying buttresses, which are typically associated with Gothic Architecture. A large Romanesque arched window aligns with the windows on the East and North sides of the steeple tower. An eight panel arched clerestory window is centered above the larger window. The sill of this window aligns with the clerestory windows on the East and North walls of the steeple tower. The parapet of the side bay is approximately two feet lower than the gabled parapet elevation. The slope matches the upper roof section and is trimmed with the same cornice molding. The pilaster/minaret at the southeast corner of the building is noticeably lower than the pilaster/minaret that aligns with the south side of the central nave wall. The lower side bay serves to ground this elevation and is the visual foundation that allows a viewer to follow the cascading roofline upward to its masterfully detailed and elegant steeple. Mr. Fantone has, in my opinion, successfully designed a clearly articulated and symmetrical entrance within an intentionally asymmetrical elevation.

**Mezzanine**

A mezzanine level ancillary storage room South of the choir loft extends slightly beyond the exterior wall of the South side nave. The room then projects west approximately fifteen feet before its rear wall returns to the upper wall of the buildings central nave. This double height space anchors the South elevation with matching pilasters/minarets on its southeast and southwest corners. A single story residential building adjacent to the main building creates a service alley to the new catering facility at the southwest corner of the original building.

Architectural descriptions provided by David Avila, Licensed Architect, Oakland,  
California

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8      Page 9**

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**Los Banos Arts Council Facility  
Merced County, California**

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Los Banos Arts Council Facility, formerly known as St. Joseph's Church, appears eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C – Architecture – within the context of Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture. The building originated as a religious property and, while it is significant for social and historical reasons, its primary significance today derives from its architecture.

Romanesque is a style of architecture using round arches and vaults popular in Western Europe during the early middle ages (eleventh and twelfth centuries) between the period of Roman and Gothic architecture. According to Spiro Kostof in his book, *A History of Architecture*, "There is no typical Romanesque Church. We rarely mistake the Romanesque character, and yet its strength is in variation both regional and programmatic. This is at once a topical and international style. Each built specimen is caught in the great currents of influence that flowed along the pilgrimage route and through the colonizing effect of monastic orders; but it is also embedded in its local tradition through materials favored forms and themes, its conservative or progressive spirit." The name Romanesque was a catchall term coined in the nineteenth century to designate a style that is no longer Roman and not yet Gothic.

In the Romanesque style of architecture, usually basilicas and the three naves was an element of design. The central wider space or nave was usually heightened by thin sheets of clerstory walls with a beam or simple truss roof of timber of fairly low altitude crossing the space. Low pitch roofs covered the flanking apse at a lesser height. A basic feature of Romanesque architecture – the compound pier which replaces the early Christian column and the square pier of Ottoman Buildings. The continuous barrel vault does have a grant effect like a tunnel that draws attention rapidly down the nave towards the altar.

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8      Page 10

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## Los Banos Arts Council Facility Merced County, California

### Narrative Statement of Significance (Continued)

Although St. Joseph's Church is an amalgamation of architectural influences it is most reminiscent of a traditional basilica, three nave designs with rounded arch (Romanesque) forms as a dominant design feature. St. Joseph's Church has the arches and vaults both in the interior as well as exterior, popular in basilican architecture. The center wider space or nave is heightened by clerstory walls enhanced by round windows. Lower pitched roof cover the flanking apse at a lesser height. The outer walls are graced with round arched windows. These Romanesque elements of design were incorporated in the design of St. Joseph's Church by architect and designer Charles Fantoni. According to the Booklet, "The Chronicles of the Italian Cathedral of the West", Charles Fantoni a member of St. Peter and Paul's Church was commissioned to design a church to be located at Grant Street formerly known as Dupont Street in San Francisco. On Sunday, May 7, 1922, the official ceremony inaugurating the construction of the new St. Peter and St. Paul's Church was held. This date coincides with the date for the start of construction of the St. Joseph's Church on September 11, 1922. This bit of historical information would have Charles Fantoni's only two large buildings he designed under construction at the same time. With only these two churches still standing as the only edifice of his work; preservation of St. Joseph's Church is extremely important.

St. Joseph's Church is the only example of Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture not only in Los Banos, but within a 35 mile radius. The town of Los Banos is located in the west side of California's San Joaquin Valley, a mostly rural, small-town area populated by immigrants in the mid- to late 1800s. No where in the surrounding communities of Gustine, Dos Palos, South Dos Palos, Firebaugh, El Nido, or Newman, are there any public buildings of Romanesque Revival architecture left standing. Another old church in Los Banos was the United Methodist Church, originally built on 5<sup>th</sup> and J Streets. It was razed to make room for a bank building. Romanesque Revival architecture was used in our old high school, especially evident in the school's colonnade. That high school was also razed to make room for new construction. Thus, except for St. Joseph's, there are no other public buildings of Romanesque-influenced architecture of any historical significance still standing in Los Banos or the surrounding communities.

Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture is reminiscent of the much larger and grander European cathedrals. The interior of St. Joseph's is a symmetrical, three-nave basilica configuration. The pews have been removed, leaving a large open space. The large central nave ends at a curved apse with a barrel-vaulted ceiling. The narrow side naves

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8      Page 11**

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**Los Banos Arts Council Facility  
Merced County, California**

**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

are separated from the central space by symmetrical, Romanesque-arched colonnades. The church served St. Joseph's parish, consisting of mostly immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Mexico, and the Basque Pyrenees for 72 years, enabling three and four generations to congregate in St. Joseph's for weekly or daily mass, baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals.

The history of this beautiful, small Romanesque-influenced building began on May 23, 1874, when Father Michael McNamara, pastor of the county seat of Merced, wrote to the Archbishop of San Francisco about the needs of Los Banos: "Mr. Henry Miller has made an offer of \$500 and two town lots towards the building of a Catholic Church... The town has a population of about 200 and is being settled quite rapidly." Thus the wheels were put motion for a Catholic Church in Los Banos.

The first St. Joseph's Church was built in 1891, but the earthquake that destroyed San Francisco in 1906 badly damaged it. For years, it remained in a dilapidated condition and unsafe for public use. When World War I broke out, tentative plans for the present church had been made but were postponed until the end of the war. The old building was wrecked in August, 1922, and work on a new building began on September 11<sup>th</sup> of that year. The designer of the building was Charles Fantoni of San Francisco. Fantoni (1870-c. 1933), a Swiss marble cutter turned Italian-American architect, also designed the Saints Peter and Paul Church of North Beach, San Francisco. The latter is also of Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture though much larger and grander than St. Joseph's church. We have included a photo copy of St. Peter and St. Paul's Church of San Francisco at the end of this application. This photo is included as a comparison to St. Joseph Church in Los Banos. St. Joseph's only has one steepled bell tower whereas St. Peters and St. Paul's Church has two grand steeples. There are similarities in the designs of both churches. St. Joseph's is not, nor was it ever, an opulent building. It was constructed for a mere \$38,000 by the tiny local populace of Los Banos and its agricultural environs. Fantoni also designed a few small buildings; though his finest work - the two Romanesque Revival churches - remain standing. SS. Peter and Paul in San Francisco and St. Joseph's in Los Banos endure as fitting examples of Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The builder of St. Joseph's Church was Guy H. Wilson of Los Banos. The pastor of St. Joseph's at that time, the Rev. Joseph M. Phelan, did a great deal of the actual

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8      Page 12**

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**Los Banos Arts Council Facility  
Merced County, California**

**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

construction work. This piece of history has been given to us by Joel Whitehurst whose father, Joel Whitehurst Sr., was a parishioner at that time and living on the same city block. (The Whitehurst family home was located at 5<sup>th</sup> and L Streets.) Stained glass windows were installed in the church later as parishioners would donate funds for the windows. Most windows were installed in the late 1930's. These windows were removed and installed in the new parish church on Center Avenue in 1995. The integrity of the Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture of St. Joseph's was not in any way damaged by the removal of the stained glass windows. The original wood round arched window frames remain; diffused glass has been installed to replace the original stained glass windows

Alterations to this property have been detailed in other sections of this application. In brief, the exterior of the building was plastered over concrete in the late 1940's. This alteration did not change the integrity of the building. Beginning in 1960, work was done to adhere to fire codes. A means of egress added to the building in 1950, required that the lower operable section of one of the large windows be removed to allow for adequate head clearance for a small outdoor porch. This is a non-descript structure that is utilitarian rather than beautifying located on the North side of the building. An exit on the south side was also added at this time with a ramp to allow access for the disabled. In 1956, new front doors were installed. In studying original photos, we have discerned that the new doors are very close in design to the original doors -- however, the new doors are the same height but not as wide. Full-height amber glass panels were installed on either side. The large carved wood panel doors and operable wooden transom panels are similar in design to the original doors.

Regarding alterations to the interior, in 1962, in keeping with the changes brought on by Vatican II decrees, the original altar was removed and replaced with a table altar enabling the presiding priest to celebrate mass facing the congregation. Prior to this, the presiding celebrant would celebrate the mass with his back to the congregation as the altar was set on the apse at the west wall of the interior. At this time, the communion rail that separated the altar area from the seating area of the congregation was also removed.

Other changes occurred in 1994-1995, when a new parish church was built in a new location on Center Avenue. The stained glass windows were removed and transferred to the new location. All the side windows were successfully moved to their new home;



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8      Page 12 A**

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**Los Banos Arts Council Facility  
Merced County, California**

**Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)**

however, the beautiful eight-foot wide rose window that had graced the front elevation was in such a state of deterioration that it did not withstand the move. Currently, the area where the rose window was situated has been boarded up to assuage a dilapidated appearance. The rose window will be restored as close as possible to its original location and also the large wooden carved doors will be replaced in the original design without the side panels of glass. The large arched windows along the lower West, Southwest, and Northeast walls strongly reinforce the Romanesque quality of this beautiful church building.

Historically, the location of St. Joseph's was determined by lots donated by Henry Miller to the Diocese of San Francisco for the purpose of building a Catholic Church in Los Banos for community worship for generations to come. Mr. Miller recognized the importance of the location in the very center of our community. The K Street location, right in the center of Los Banos, is an excellent vantage point. The tall steeple is visible from several blocks in all directions and travelers, as well as locals, have been able to visibly locate the beautiful 150-foot Romanesque steeped bell tower as it rises above the tree tops of this small rural community. Three to four generations of St. Joseph's parishioners were able to worship within its simple, beautiful Romanesque style architecture and, with National Historical Register designation, the architecture of St. Joseph's will be preserved for current and future generations to enjoy this historical landmark as an arts center.

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

**Church of St. Joseph, Merced County, California**

Section number Photos Page 13 \_\_\_\_\_

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All photos were taken by Steve Soares in January 2004. Negatives are on file with the Los Banos Arts Council (P.O. Box 127, Los Banos, CA 93635)

Photo information is included on back of each photo.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 14

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Church of St. Joseph  
Los Banos, California

**Major Bibliographical References:**

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“The Parish Guide”, St. Joseph’s Church, Christmas 1923.

“The Los Banos Enterprise”, Local Newspaper – 1938.

“75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet”, St. Joseph’s Church - Printed 1979.

Milliken Museum Society of Los Banos, Mr. Charles Sawyer – Interview 1999.

Personal Interviews with the following (1999-2000):

Joel Whitehurst Jr.  
Richard L. Young  
Merced Arts Council Members  
Los Banos Arts Council Members  
Mr. Ted Falasco  
Msgr. Wayne Hayes  
Rev. Joseph Heffermon  
David Avila  
Colleen Menefee  
Margaret Patricio

MacDonald, William, “Early Christian & Byzantine Architecture”.

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**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Church of St. Joseph, Merced County, California

Section number 10

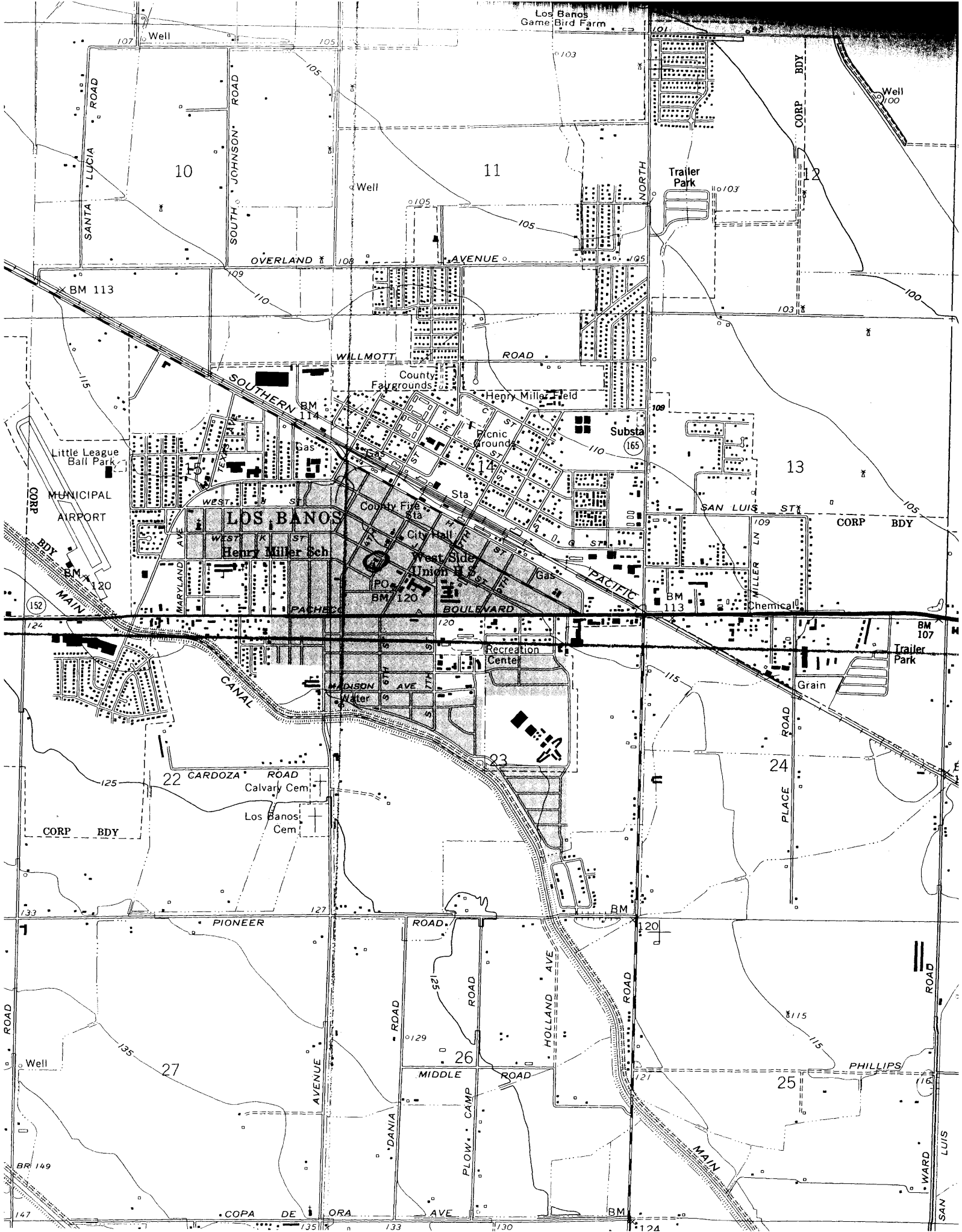
Page 15

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Verbal Boundary Description: APN 26-024-06

Boundary Justification: This is the parcel historically associated with the property



Los Banos Game Bird Farm

Well

10

11

Well

Trailer Park

Well 100

SANTA LUCIA ROAD

SOUTH JOHNSON ROAD

OVERLAND AVENUE

1103

CORP BDY

BM 113

107

105

105

105

103

100

WILLMOTT ROAD

County Fairgrounds

Henry Miller Field

Substa 165

13

Little League Ball Park

MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

LOS BANOS

Henry Miller Sch

County Fire Sta

City Hall

West Side Union H

PO

BM 120

Gas

SAN LUIS ST

CORP BDY

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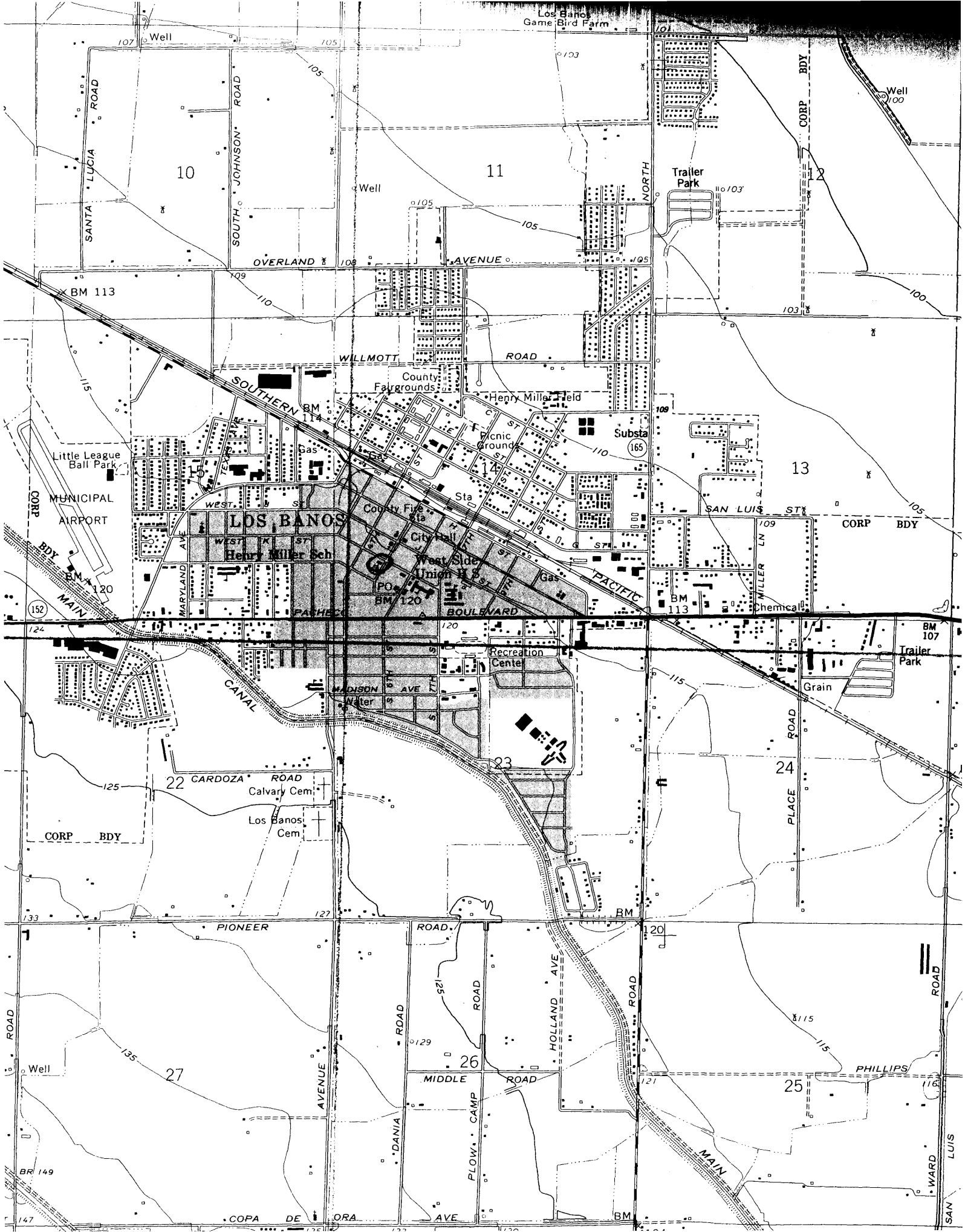
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Los Banos Game Bird Farm

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LOS BANOS

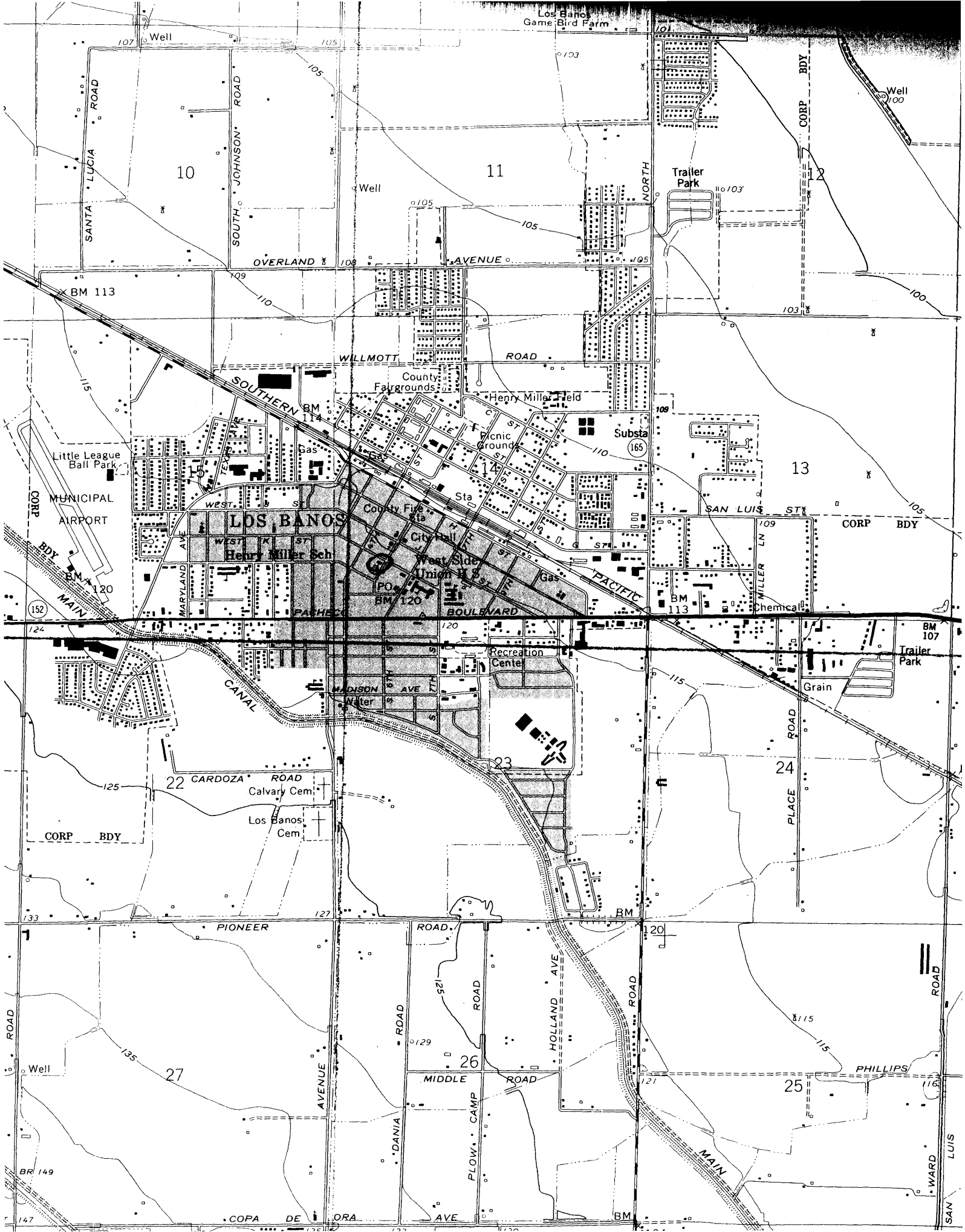
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Los Banos Game Bird Farm

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