

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0504106 DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED SEP 20 1977

DATE ENTERED OCT 28 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Foresters Underground Gardens

AND OR COMMON

Foresters Gardens

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

(N.E. 1/4 of N.E. 1/4 of N.E. 1/4 in section 15,
Township 13 Range 19 E. Mount Diablo Base and
601 West Shaw Avenue, Fresno, California 93711 NOT FOR PUBLICATION Meridian)

CITY TOWN

Fresno

VICINITY OF Fresno

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

4th

STATE

California

CODE

06

COUNTY

Fresno

CODE

019

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDINGS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER Memorial

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Rosario Forestiere

Joseph Forestiere

STREET & NUMBER

609 West Rowland Lane

CITY TOWN

Fresno

VICINITY OF

STATE

California

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Fresno County Records Office, Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

2081 Tulare Street, Room 302

CITY TOWN

Fresno

STATE

California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Heritage Fresno

(Historic Homes - American Ascn. of University Women - Fresno
Branch)

DATE

1975

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Published by Pioneer Publishing Co.,

CITY TOWN

Fresno

STATE

California

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		Page 1 of 2

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Forestiere Underground Gardens in Fresno, California, is in the central San Joaquin Valley, about 100 miles southeast of the San Joaquin River and approximately midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The underground home and gardens of Baldasare Forestiere are contained in the remaining ten acres (less streets and roads) of an original seventy acre fifteen parcel. What remains is basically unaltered and exists in its original form, save for deterioration due to rain, erosion and neglect.

Ravages of fire, reverses of fortune and subsequent neglect diminished the scope and size of the Forestiere Gardens over the years. Several blocks of acreage were sold. Yet in spite of these misfortunes, in spite of subsequent encroachments of commercial and industrial developments and the pre-emptions of land for irrigation ditches, streets, easements and freeways, ten acres remain. These contain the original underground home and gardens of Baldasare Forestiere, parts of which were left to fall into a state of disrepair. Photos and descriptions of many of these neglected areas are dated 1943 and earlier.

The Forestiere Underground Gardens is a complex of underground caverns, grottos, patios, and garden courts encircling the underground home of Baldasare Forestiere. They are inter-connected with underground passageways and promenades together with a lengthy auto tunnel (some 800' long) which winds its way through the gardens. These are embellished with planters of various shapes and sizes, many with built-in recessed seats of hardpan, mortar and cement. There are columns, arches and domes of hardpan - a native sedimentary stone that is pervasive to the area. Some ceilings are vaulted and carved like inverted tea cups under the mantle of hardpan with a shallow layer of thick heavy topsoil. Others have skylights adorned with redwood arbors and pergolas with cascading grapevines. Over his living areas skylights were made which he covered in the winter with window pane glass to keep out the rain, yet allow in natural lighting. In the planters throughout the gardens a wide variety of trees were planted, some of them rare. Many citrus trees were grafted with a variety of citrus; one tree having some 7 different varieties. Some of the rare trees after almost seventy years still prosper and bear fruit. Varieties that he planted are Alcorni, Pomegranate, Italian Pear, Bartlett Pear, Olives, Persimmons, Avocado, Loquat, Quince, Carol (St. John's Bread), Jujube (Oriental Date), Arbutus Unedo (Strawberry tree), Black Fig, Tangerine, Grapefruit, Sweet and Sour Orange, Japonica Kumquat, Lemons, Date Palm and Mulberry.

A small fish pond is found in the garden court off the kitchen and bedroom areas which is crossed by a small foot bridge. Also located elsewhere in the gardens is a walk-in and walk-under aquarium. He made a circular glass bottom through which tropical fish could be observed. On ground level there was a small lake of which only a few remnants remain. Vanishing traces can only faintly be detected, which instead of being enlarged as contemplated, was filled in by tenants for the present parking lot.

The underground home and gardens were designed and sculpted with hand tools by Baldasare Forestiere, a Sicilian immigrant who in the early part of the century

continued

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW		
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1946	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICAL GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION	

SPECIFIC DATES 1906-1946

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Baldasare Forestiere

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Forestiere Underground Gardens in Central San Joaquin Valley, is widely recognized for its originality and uniqueness. Visitors from across overseas declare that there is nothing quite like it. Architects have identified it as "Terra-Texture". (Science Digest - 11/1975). Yet artists call it "Terra-sculpture" a form of walk-in and walk-around sculpture. Both of these two conceptual thought processes for which hardly coined words aptly portray their significance. The Underground Gardens are more than a unique variety of combinations.

Settling on the semi-desert land, baked and scorched by the summer sun, Forestiere began in the early 1900's to carve and sculpt a thorough underground retreat to escape the excessive heat. After nearly forty years of bold and persistent effort, he succeeded in creating a cool subterranean piece of the old Mediterranean world fashioned after the "visionary mind". (Fresno Bee 5/23/24).

To avoid monotony and a barren appearance, these sculptin's and are ornamented with novel landscapes and unique horticultural experiments... are arches and domed ceilings and windows with lovely views and plots (Heritage Fresno). They reveal explorations with the control of controlling of sunlight and root systems. Trees with a variety of trees attest to his experiments with grafting, budding and propagation. Some trees over sixty some-odd years still exist. One tree, some below ground surface has eight grafts of citrus, of which seven still bear fruit today.

By coming to an understanding with his environment, he was able to overcome in temperature (from the low 20's to 115 plus degrees) was accustomed to a Mediterranean frost-free climate could endure. A subterranean environment was moderated and made more temperate. By creating ventilation throughout his underground home and gardens, a dramatic transformation "the fruit hangs almost twice as long...frost never touches this relative seldom changes over ten degrees the year round". (The Fresno

Acting as his own designer and engineer, Baldasare Forestiere used his ability with amazing skill and craftsmanship. He designed just right ventilation, strength and durability. To support the great mass of

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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in his spare time as a vineyardist and horticulturist found sufficient time to devote to such a remarkable and extra-ordinary undertaking.

"Beneath the well cultivated acres of his ranch...working alone in his spare time...Forestiere excavated fifty rooms connected with passageways...rooms are skylighted...clusters of big yellow lemons and grapefruit and orange blossoms...vines spread upward and outward forming a green roof from which clusters of grapes hang...A great tunnel has been excavated for automobile traffic...a glass bottom fishbowl room...a small lake is already in existence and will be enlarged to cover a great extent of the establishment...leading into the center of the lake will be a tunnel from the underground workings which will allow visitors to ascend from the depths and enjoy boating and other aquatic sports...near one of the deeper caverns there is a gasoline engine that operates the pump...there are ten acres with several stories down...A sight worth seeing...it will in years to come be one of the shows places of the west..." (Fresno Bee, 1923-24).

Baldasare Forestiere continued with his creations for yet another 23-24 years, after the above descriptions were written. He died in 1946 at the age of 67. His desire to be laid to rest at the Gardens was never fulfilled. He was buried instead at Holy Cross Cemetery, some five miles south of the Gardens.

Form No. 103-106
(Rev. 10-74)

UNIT

NATIO
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Wit

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Local
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Wamp

Wamp

Receiv

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AS

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Cranz

SIGNIFICANCE

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

Page 1 of 2

LAND ORIGINAL OR KNOWN PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

in Fresno, California, is in the central San Joaquin Valley near San Joaquin River and approximately midway between the underground home and gardens of Baldasare Forestiere ten acres (less streets and roads) of an original seventy and is basically unaltered and exists in its original state to rain, erosion and neglect.

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and is a complex of underground caverns, grottos, including the underground home of Baldasare Forestiere. Underground passageways and promenades together with a long) which winds its way through the gardens. These of various shapes and sizes, many with built-in recessed seats. There are columns, arches and domes of harpan at is pervasive to the area. Some ceilings are vaulted and under the mantle of harpan with a shallow layer of skylights adorned with redwood arbors and pergolas. In his living areas skylights were made which he covered with pane glass to keep out the rain, yet allow in natural light. Throughout the gardens a wide variety of trees were planted, many trees were grafted with a variety of citrus; one tree is rare. Some of the rare trees after almost seventy years. Varieties that he planted are Almond, Pomegranate, Avocado, Persimmons, Avocado, Loquat, Quince, Carob (St. Date), Arbutus Unedo (Strawberry tree), Black Fig, Sour Orange, Japonica Kumquat, Lemons, Date Palm

the garden court off the kitchen and bedroom areas. Also located elsewhere in the gardens is a bridge. He made a circular glass bottom through which. On ground level there was a small lake of which fishing traces can only faintly be detected, which in completed, was filled in by tenants for the present

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continued

PERIOD

PREHISTORIC
 1400-1499
 1500-1599
 1600-1699
 1700-1799
 1800-1899
 1900-1946

ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC
 ARCHEOLOGY HISTORIC
 AGRICULTURE
 ARCHITECTURE
 ART
 COMMERCE
 COMMUNICATIONS

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

COMMUNITY PLANNING
 CONSERVATION
 ECONOMICS
 EDUCATION
 ENGINEERING
 EXPLORATION SETTLEMENT
 INDUSTRY
 INVENTION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
 LAW
 LITERATURE
 MILITARY
 MUSIC
 PHILOSOPHY
 POLITICS GOVERNMENT

RELIGION
 SCIENCE
 SCULPTURE
 SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
 THEATER
 TRANSPORTATION
 OTHER (Specify Unique Conceptual Process)

Page 1 of 2

SPECIFIC DATES 1906-1946

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Baldasare Forestiere

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Forestiere Underground Gardens in Central San Joaquin Valley, in California is widely recognized for its originality and uniqueness. Visitors from across the country and overseas declare that there is nothing quite like it. Architects have attempted to identify it as "Terra-structure". (Science Digest - 11/1975). Yet artists have described it as "Terra-sculpture" a form of walk-in and walk-around sculpture. There is a blending of these two conceptual thought processes for which newly coined words do not adequately portray their significance. The Underground Gardens are merged and blended into a unique variety of combinations.

Settling on the semi-desert land, baked and scorched by the summer sun, Baldasare Forestiere began in the early 1900's to carve and sculpt a thoroughly unique underground retreat to escape the excessive heat. After nearly forty years with hand tools and persistent effort, he succeeded in creating a cool subterranean complex, a piece of the old mediterranean world fashioned after the "visions stored in my mind". (Fresno Bee 5/23/24).

To avoid monotony and a barren appearance, these sculptings and creations are complimented with novel landscapes and unique horticultural experiments... "everywhere there are arches and domed ceilings and windows with lovely views and pleasing vistas" (Heritage Fresno). They reveal explorations with the control of growth through the controlling of sunlight and root systems. Trees with a variety of citrus on a single tree attest to his experiments with grafting, budding and propagating techniques. Some trees over sixty some-odd years still exist. One tree, some twenty-two feet below ground surface has eight grafts of citrus, of which seven still flourish and bear fruit today.

By coming to an understanding with his environment, he was able to modify it. The extremes in temperature (from the low 20's to 115 plus degrees) was almost more than one accustomed to a mediterranean frost-free climate could endure. A severe and semi-desert environment was moderated and made more temperate. By creating varying micro-climates throughout his underground home and gardens, a dramatic transformation soon resulted. "the fruit hangs almost twice as long...frost never touches this region...the temperature seldom changes over ten degrees the year round". (The Fresno Bee 3/23/23).

Acting as his own designer and engineer, Baldasare Forestiere used his knowledge and ability with amazing skill and craftsmanship. He designed just right for light and ventilation, strength and durability. To support the great mass of earth and to

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State or of significance, certified

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Give your answer to his earlier sculptings, he used the ancient Roman arch, column and dome. Marble, pewter and cement were used not only for structural purposes, but for beyond variety and beautification. Being his own architect, he did not require a blueprint. He chose instead to follow his own creative instincts and aesthetic impulses. The plans were made. Every detail in the development of the underground parking has originated in the brain of Forestiere and has never been set on paper. Gradually he has evolved a comprehensive scheme that will connect up into one of the most involved and yet delightful landscapes of modern ages" (Fresno Bee, 3/23/23).

The Underground Gardens stand as a testament to the spirit of individualism and the uniqueness of man. They are physical extensions and representations of unique mental concepts. Level explorations in the control of space and form, the controlling of light and air. The control of and creating of various climates in days before electricity and air-conditioning were available to him. By explorations in the harmony and contrast of textures and materials, creative expressions evoke ever-changing moods and feelings with the varied changes in the physical surroundings..."Variety and originality of design are the predominating impressions left in the mind of the sight-seer. In no two of the reception rooms is an idea repeated. In no place does the working out of the idea of the builder reach the monotonous. A fertile mind filled with ideas is expressed in every turn of the twisting tunnels" (Fresno Bee 3/23/23). One is constantly made aware of the multi-faceted personality of its creator. An imprint of a totally sincere and unpretentious life without tinsel and artificiality.

In the days before power tools and earth moving machinery, such determination and perseverance is a tribute to an indomitable spirit. It is all the more amazing that "with simple hand tools - a pick, a shovel and a wheelbarrow and an incredible amount of hard work, Baldasare Forestiere...created a lush mediterranean setting around his home". (Treasures of America). Forestiere's life and work is a memorial to one who came to terms with a hostile environment and created a life of compatibility and harmony with nature and mother earth.

CO:

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brown, Nathan, The Historical Origins of Landscape Architecture (1879-1946),
 VISION, Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, September 1975.
 Desjardis, Richard, Underground Housing, Science Digest, November 1975.
 Good, C.F., Resort Underground, Fresno Bee, Fresno, California, March 23, 1923 -
 p. 1-3.

continued

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 8.70 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 1	24 310 0 0	14 017 71 5 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Treaty land parcel (less streets and roads) bounded on the north by ^{West} Shaw Avenue,
 on the east by North Cornelia Avenue, on the south by Fairmont (extended) and on
 the west by Panchera Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
None - property situated in Fresno County			
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME TITLE
 Loren Paulke Forester
 ORGANIZATION
 629 West Holiness Lane
 STREET & NUMBER
 Fresno
 CITY OR TOWN
 DATE
 March 28, 1977
 TELEPHONE
 439-734
 STATE
 California 93704

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS

NATIONAL STATE _____ LOCAL _____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE *Robert Kloos*

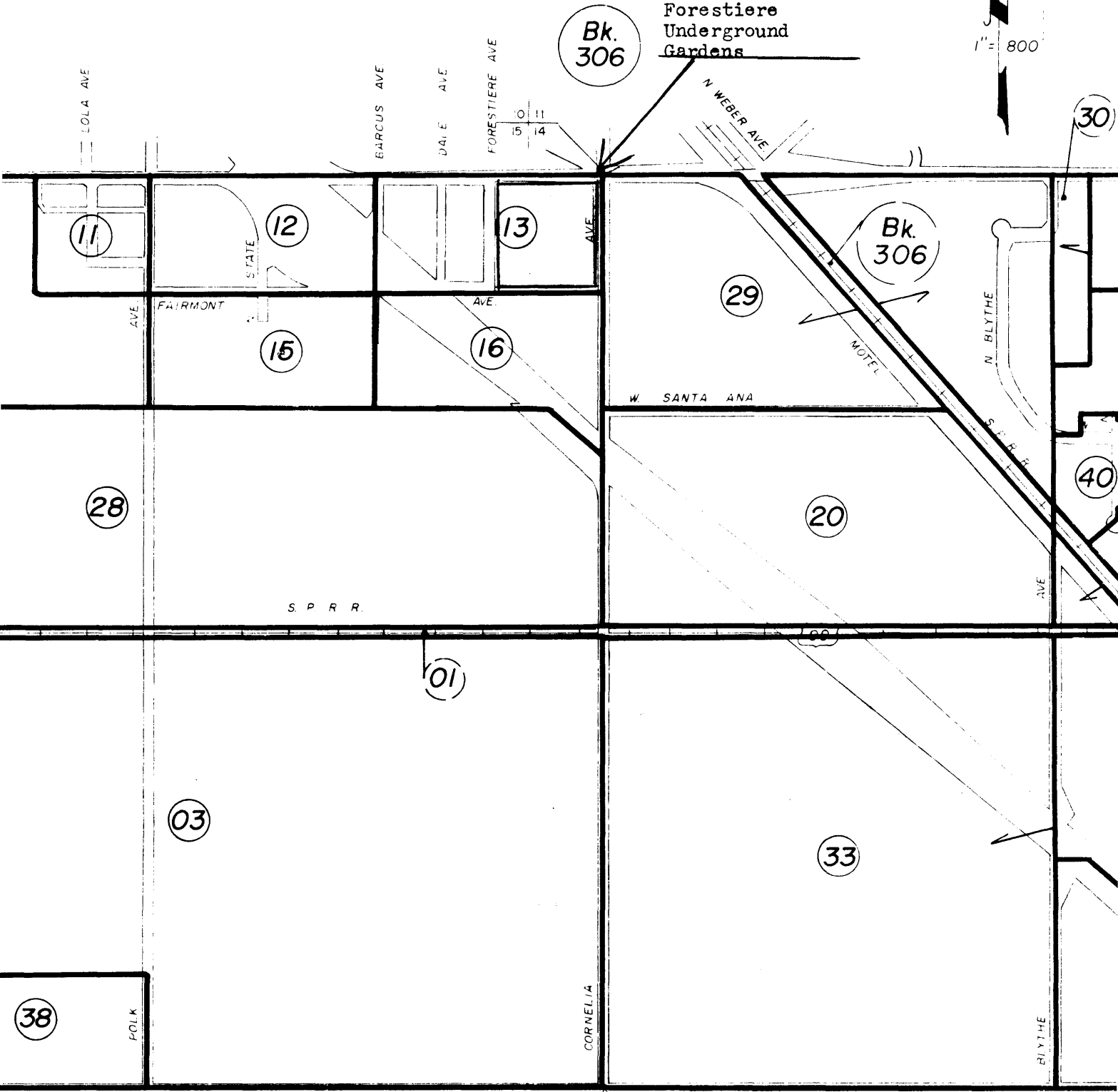
TITLE *SHPO* DATE *JUL 25 1977*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

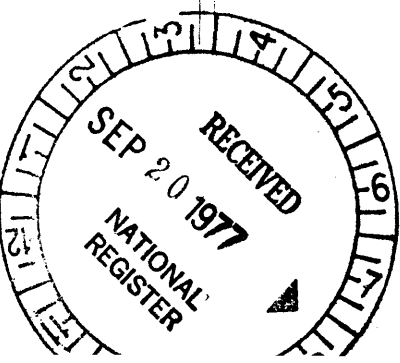
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Ronald M. Humber, Asst. DATE *10-28-77*

SEC'S. 14 & 15, T. 13 S., R. 19 E. M. D. B. & M.



15 14
22 23



MAP PAGE INDEX II
BOOK 311
Assessor's Maps
County of Fresno, Calif.