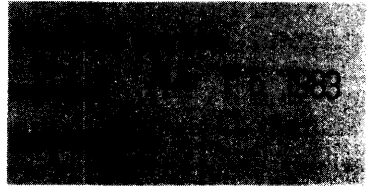


United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



Final

1. Name

historic H. H. BRIX MANSION

RECEIVED
MAR 17 1983

and/or common Same

OHP

2. Location

street & number 2844 Fresno Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Fresno N/A vicinity of congressional district 15th

state California code 06 county Fresno code 93721

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Robert E. Sears and Carmen A. Eanni

street & number 2844 Fresno Street

city, town Fresno N/A vicinity of state California 93721

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fresno County Hall of Records

street & number 2281 Tulare Street

city, town Fresno state California 93721

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Local Official Register of
Historic Resources

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date In Progress federal state county local

depository for survey records Fresno City Hall, 2326 Fresno Street

city, town Fresno state California 93721

7. Description

Condition excellent deteriorated good ruins fair unexposed

Check one unaltered altered

Check one original site moved date _____ N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The H. H. Brix Mansion (1911) is located six city blocks northeast of the Fresno County Courthouse. It is prominently sited on a large urban lot at the southwest corner of Fresno and "S" Streets in downtown Fresno, California. With the exception of a Craftsman Style shingle house, which is its neighbor to the rear, the Brix Mansion is surrounded by recently-built medical complexes. A five-story International-Style wing of the Fresno Community Hospital is the largest of these medical facilities. Consequently, the Brix Mansion, a Beaux Arts interpretation of the traditional Italian Villa, is an isolated reminder of the former character of its immediate neighborhood.

The three-story twelve-room Mansion contains over 4,500 square feet of formal living space, and adheres to the principal features of the Villa Style, including an "L-shaped" plan, an asymmetrically placed observation tower, smooth stucco finishes, and lavishly applied baroque ornamentation. Compared to its lackluster commercial neighbors, the Brix Mansion is a highly visible landmark along the north boundary of the residentially depleted eight-block Cathedral District. Fifteen historic homes and three period-style church structures make up this small pocket of vintage architecture. More than a dozen homes in the district have already been demolished to provide parking lots for the area's medical users. The Brix property, however, is reasonably secure, since it has been thoughtfully adapted for use as corporate legal offices, although the back yard has been converted into on-site parking. The side and front yards preserve the original landscaping scheme.

A 1910 article found in THE FRESNO MORNING REPUBLICAN provided the following detailed description of the residence:

The new home will be one of the handsomest residential structures in the city. Finished in an old Spanish effect of cement over brick, it will have a distinctly Mission flavor in its tiled roof. The house will have three stories and a basement. The general size of the building will be 47 x 84. A private garage will be built close by.

To take advantage of Fresno's magnificent climate, Mr. Brix is having in addition to the regular bedrooms a sleeping porch 12 feet long, which, while thoroughly screened from insects, will allow sleeping out of doors. The floor of this porch will be of painted canvas.

An unusual touch [sic: touch] to the residence is given by provision for an observation tower room on the third floor. This will give a view of the surrounding country and will allow a place which can catch the passing breeze on warm days.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1911

Builder/Architect Edward T. Foulkes, Architect
H. A. Hansen, Builder

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT FOR HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Brix Mansion, located at 2844 Fresno Street, is associated with a family that made a pioneering contribution to the development of Coalinga and was influential in the commercial expansion of Fresno. This palatial residence was constructed for Herman H. and Helena S. Brix in 1910-11. The life of Herman H. Brix is somewhat of a rags-to-riches tale. Born in Namslau, Silesia, Germany in 1862, Brix lost his parents and seven brothers and sisters in a cholera epidemic. After military service in Germany, he immigrated in the early 1880's to a German settlement in Eldora, Iowa. He left for California a year later. Brix and his wife were among the pioneering settlers of the Coalinga area. After an unsuccessful attempt at grain farming, Brix left to seek his fortune in the Alaskan gold rush. In the meantime, Coalinga underwent an oil boom. Returning with a modest stake from his Yukon endeavors, Brix formed a water company on his homestead and made a fortune investing in oil properties. In one case, land which he had purchased for \$4.50 an acre was sold for \$2,250 an acre. By 1915, Brix and his associates owned 1,400 acres of west-side oil lands. Not just an investor, Brix was associated with the Confidence Oil Company, whose #2 well opened up the Coalinga Westside Field in 1900. Brix was also President of the B & B Oil Company, President of the San Francisco Oil Company, a director of the St. Paul & Fresno Oil Company, and a one-sixth investor in the Coalinga Syndicate. Brix thus played an influential role in the development of the Coalinga area, which became by 1910 the largest oil-producing field in California. Having located in Fresno by 1903, Brix invested heavily in properties in that city after 1909. Not only did he commission his magnificent mansion on Fresno Street, but he was an important stockholder in the Hotel Fresno development. He was also responsible for the erection of the attractive four-story Brix Apartments in 1912. Brix died in 1915. His dream of a multi-story office building would be accomplished by the Brix Estate with the construction in 1922 of the imposing Brix Building on Fulton Street. In addition to its historical associations, the Brix Mansion on Fresno Street possesses considerable architectural significance. Designed by Architect Edward T. Foulkes (1874-1967), the H. H. Brix Mansion (1911) represents a brilliant example of a period-inspired Italian Villa, the only such residence located in Fresno built in this lavishly-embellished style. After completing his formal education at Stanford University, M.I.T., and the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, Foulkes apprenticed under several of America's greatest practitioners in the Beaux Arts tradition, among them Clarence Blackall, Cass Gilbert, and Carrere & Hastings. Winner of a prestigious Rotch Travelling Scholarship in 1903, Foulkes spent over two years completing a journey

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation pages 9-1 through 9-10

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.52
Quadrangle name Fresno, South, California

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	1	1
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2	5	1	5	9	0
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4	0	6	9	6	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, in Block 164 of the TOWN (now City) OF FRESNO, according to the map thereof recorded in Book 1, Page 26, of Plats, records of said County. House occupies its original 150' x 150' lot.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ephraim K. Smith, Ph.D.

John Edward Powell, A.B., M.A.

organization Allen Y. Lew & William E. Patnaude, Inc.

date February, 1983

street & number 1050 "S" Street

telephone (209) 486-8150

city or town Fresno

state California 93721

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date AUG 9 1983

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

[Signature]
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 9/15/83

Attest:

Chief of Registration

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Mahogany and oak, varied occasionally with sugar pine, will be used artistically in the interior finishing. Contracts for the wood already have been let.

On the first floor will be a large living room 30 by 18 feet. A den will open off this room. There also will be a dining room 15 by 20 feet and a breakfast room 12 by 15 feet. The floors will be of hardwood. The second floor will be given up largely to the sleeping apartments of the house. In the basement there will be a billiard room. A handsome stairway of hardwood will run up through the center of the stories.

A Mission tiled veranda will be on two sides of the house. The outside will present a picturesque appearance with ornamentation in composition plaster to relieve the tint of the cement.⁵³

Virtually unchanged after seventy-two years, except for minor modifications to the interior, the mansion is in excellent structural condition and is beautifully maintained.

EXPANDED DESCRIPTION

At first glance, the H. H. Brix Mansion has an almost austere quality. This effect results from the use of smooth plaster as the primary finish on all exterior walls. What applied ornament we see is tightly controlled, and almost totally restricted to use around structural openings, including windows, doors, and larger passageways. Such decorative treatments vary widely in composition, but generally follow the basic precepts of the Villa model. Among these characteristic patterns are windows grouped in units of three, such as the living room lunette windows, which are embellished with astragal mouldings, Corinthian mullions, and a simple foliated cornice windowhead. The basic windowform used on the second floor is a double sash casement with a single-light transom. Clustered in couples and groups of three, or used alone, this basic window is surmounted by a shallow-relief spandrel panel in a foliated "bull's-eye" motif. A broad arcade composed of Tuscan columns runs between the tower and a porte-cochere. Such a loggia is typical of the Villa Style, although the balustrade atop the Brix loggia has an inventive variation: Clay tiles are used as screened inserts, rather than turned balusters. Equally unusual are the free-standing iron railings which are mounted between the columns along this veranda. These are necessary since the first floor is nearly 44" above ground level.

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The tower structure has a simple arched passageway that opens onto the loggia directly in front of the formal entrance. The front entry consists of a single-light natural oak door flanked by thirty-light sidelights. A flat-iron window grating is mounted on the door to protect the single glazed panel. This panel is unusual since it is also functions as an operable window to help cross ventilate the reception hall. Compared to this relatively simple entry treatment, the upper levels of the tower are dripping with ornament, including an almost Churrigueresque triptych of bedroom windows on the second floor. These windows are bordered by a running decoration of architectural paterae, fronted by a balconet, and topped by a cornice windowhead enriched with carved foliage, twin volutes, an heraldic escutcheon, split finials, and cabled pendants. Each of the three observation openings on the third deck of the tower have pairs of matched pilasters and columns with flat-bracket capitals. Three shallow balconets with spindle balusters are supported by four pairs of scrolled iron brackets. The tower is capped by a clay tile hip roof with a simple fascia, exposed scalloped rafter tails, and dentils.

The main structure of the Brix Mansion has the heaviest cornice to be found on any residence in Fresno. A simple striated fascia rests on exposed scalloped rafter tails, which in turn rest on a secondary fascia supported by enriched modillion brackets. A modified frieze is embellished with foliated "bull's-eye" ornaments and a band of continuous cable moulding. Rosette panels are inserted between each bracket along the soffit. A third, though much simplified, variation on this cornice is repeated on seven dormer-style attic windows. Even the chimney stacks are embellished with bull's-eyes and triglyphs, attesting to the breadth of the architect's intricate understanding of classical detailing, and his ability to manipulate that vocabulary for dramatic effect.

SUMMARY OF BASIC ALTERATIONS

For its first thirty-four years, the H. H. Brix Mansion (1911) was maintained by the original family as a private residence. Since 1945, the property has been occupied by two different commercial occupants. Changes to the property have been minimal: Two upstairs sleeping porches were closed-in with permanent windows, the upstairs master bath was converted into open office space, commercial boxed fluorescent lighting was installed throughout, a forced-air refrigeration system was added, and an early solar hot water system was abandoned at some unknown date, although a rusted storage tank survives in the attic.

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The most elaborate rooms in the mansion are the reception hall, the dining room, and the living room, the latter having been divided into two office spaces. A gold-leafed cast plaster frieze, embellished with a low-relief Rinceau pattern, borders the cornice moulding in the living room. A similar frieze composed of swags runs below the cornice moulding in the reception hall. A transparent stain has been applied to darken these plaster details to a bronze tone, and the natural oak millwork in these two rooms also appears to have been stained to give it a darker finish. Two sets of French pocket doors in the reception hall have been replaced by solid-core oak doors for privacy, and the hardwood floors have been carpeted wall-to-wall throughout the home. Acoustic tile has also been installed on the ceilings, although with minor effect on the appearance of individual rooms. Exquisitely detailed fireplaces remain in both the living and dining rooms, which now serve as professional offices for the attorney occupants. An extensive legal library is located in what was once the Billiard room in the basement. Other rooms in the mansion have been modified only to the extent that commercial furnishings have been installed to meet the needs of individual attorneys, secretaries, related staff, and document storage.

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through Western Europe, North Africa, Persia, Central Asia, and Japan. He then settled in San Francisco, where he established his first individual practice in 1906. In 1910, Foulkes opened a small regional office in Fresno after winning a private competition to design the Hotel Fresno (1909-1913), his first commission in that City. He discontinued his Fresno practice in 1915, after building at least four imaginative residences and two major commercial structures, in addition to the Hotel. A local catalogue of his works would include the Meehan Residence (1912), the Gundelfinger Residence (1912), the Einstein Residence (1912), the Rowell-Chandler Building (1913), the Brix Apartments (1913), and the spectacular H. H. Brix Mansion (1911), his finest work in Fresno. Foulkes also had an active practice in Portland, Oregon, where his "French Renaissance" Pittock Mansion (1909-1914), has been preserved by the Portland park system. Outstanding examples of his Bay Area projects would include the highly controversial log-adorned Oregon State Building at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which earned Foulkes a medal for design in 1915, and the Oakland Tribune Tower (1922), Oakland's symbolic landmark for over sixty years. The H. H. Brix Mansion represents the significant accomplishments of one of the San Joaquin Valley's more colorful pioneer settlers, and the exceptional design contributions of one of the Bay Region's more important, but underrecognized architects. The Mansion, therefore, qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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DETAILED STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Historically, the residence at 2844 Fresno Street is known as the Brix Mansion. Born in Namslau, Silesia, Germany on February 16, 1862, Brix as a small boy saw his parents and seven brothers and sisters die in a cholera epidemic. A graduate of a military academy in Potsdam, Brix served three years in the German Army before immigrating in the early 1880's to a German settlement in Eldora, Iowa. After about a year, Brix came to California where he was involved in agricultural endeavors near Hanford. He then engaged in the mercantile business in Huron on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley.¹

What little information that has survived about this phase of Brix's life is often sketchy and sometimes contradictory. Except for some hardy homesteaders, the area around Huron in the 1880's was inhabited by "a few scattered stock men, whose herds grazed over the plains during the wet season and migrated to the hills for feed and water at the approach of summer."² While in Huron, Brix may have become interested in oil developments taking place north of present-day Coalinga. The general location of an earlier oil boom in the 1860's, Oil City, some nine miles north of Coalinga, was the site of the area's first commercial producer in 1890. In 1896, Charles Canfield and Joseph Chanslor brought in what historian Frank Latta has called "the first big well."³ Possibly through his mercantiling efforts, Brix made the acquaintance of these two pioneering oil men. According to a later account published in 1915, it was while Brix was in Huron that he "received his initial insight into the oil business with Canfield & Chanslor."⁴

In 1888, Brix moved west and established a homestead in the Coalinga area.⁵ Although the Southern Pacific had extended its line to tap the coal mines northwest of town, Coalinga was hardly a bustling metropolis. By 1889, according to one visitor, it was little more than a railroad section house and Mel Tibbett's saloon. By the following year, some half-a-dozen buildings occupied the town site.⁶ Brix's homestead was located four miles north of town on Section 12, Township 20 South, Range 14 East. His property was adjacent to that of the Pleasant Valley Stock Farm Company, which had filed for considerable acreage under the Desert Land Act. Just one mile to the west was the overseer's two-story house which was a local landmark known as the "White House" and reputed to be the only residence in the area painted with real paint.⁷

Whatever his interest in early oil developments, it appears that Brix had come to Pleasant Valley to farm. Having become a naturalized citizen

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in 1894, Brix voted in the 1896 elections. At that time, the clerk noted that Brix was a "Farmer," thirty-four years old, 5' 6" tall, had blue eyes, light hair, light complexion, and "crooked finger on left hand."⁸ Herman had married Helena Schemel in 1890. His wife later recalled in 1931 that "I came to live with him on this homestead in 1890, and we had no other intentions in view of industries than wheat farming."⁹ Brix was evidently one of those homesteaders who had been attracted to Pleasant Valley during the lush, rainy years of the mid-1880's. In such years, the grass grew "very rank," and wildlife abounded.¹⁰ As Mrs. Brix later recalled, there used to be "quail and deer in the hills....The wild flowers were the most beautiful I ever saw anywhere, and feed for stock, lots of sheep."¹¹

Being semi-arid, the region was also subject to hot summers and drought. Riding through Pleasant Valley in 1889, one visitor later recalled "the sunbaked plain as utterly devoid of vegetation as the center of a city street, and the scorching wind, and the shimmering heat waves that enveloped the plains."¹² There had been, as the son of one of Brix's neighbors later recalled, "some good crops, notably in 1890," but then had come "the hard years - one in which there was not enough grain to sprout the seed - when at one time horses sold for \$1.25 each for chicken feed."¹³ W. J. Kilby's homestead was only a mile and a half from the Brix property. As he later reminisced, the dry years "starved out most of the settlers" except for those like himself and Brix who lived near the mouth of Los Gatos Creek."¹⁴

Brix may well have despaired of success in a region where, as a newspaper later noted, "sheep alone could be raised with certainty, and only an occasional shower of rain rendered a successful crop of grain possible, once in every few years."¹⁵ Even then, one could not always find a market for one's crops. Life was obviously primitive and hard for the members of the Brix family. Recently, Theodore Brix, now 77 years old, recalled how his mother later told of having to kick the rattlesnakes out of the homestead kitchen. Mrs. Brix also mentioned the rattlesnakes in a 1931 letter and recalled that the "wheat growing proved to be a failure, not enough water...."¹⁶ According to Mrs. Brix, Herman then worked in the coal mines for a time "which was quite a help for...it gave employment...."¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Brix decided to seek his fortunes in the Alaskan gold rush. Apparently not certain he would ever return alive, Brix transferred his 160-acre homestead to his wife on November 16, 1897. In addition to the land and improvements, Mrs. Brix received title to two hundred and thirty bales of hay, fourteen tons of loose hay and forty sacks of wheat.¹⁸

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By the fall of 1900, Brix was back in Coalinga. Brix's fortune had improved markedly during his absence. He brought back a \$13,000 stake from the Yukon.¹⁹ Although he had in his possession several tin boxes full of rocks, Brix had not apparently made his small fortune prospecting for precious metals. Instead, according to his son, Brix, in partnership with another man, had cut wood and sold it to passing river steamers. It is also possible, according to a grandson, that Brix may have been engaged in ferrying passengers or supplies.²⁰

During Brix's absence, there had been an oil boom in the Coalinga area. The most famous of the early strikes was the "Blue Goose" which was said to be producing up to 1,000 barrels of oil daily. Shortly thereafter, the Independence Oil Company, drilling to the south and west, brought in the first commercial well in what became known as the Eastside Field. Another new field was opened in September of 1900 when the Confidence Oil Company brought in Confidence #2, producing some two hundred barrels of oil a day. This was the first successful well in what became known as the Westside Field, which subsequently included Brix's old homestead in Section 12. With the strikes in Oil City and the opening of the new fields, annual oil production in Fresno County jumped from 154,000 barrels in 1898, to 439,372 barrels in 1899, and 547,960 barrels in 1900. For each of these years, the average price for light gravity oil was \$1.00 a barrel.²¹

Tradition has it that Brix returned to Coalinga because of the oil boom. One of the most dramatic accounts, published in the Fresno Morning Republican in 1915 after his death, has Brix almost accidentally acquire a huge fortune. According to this version, Brix had tried unsuccessfully to sell his homestead for a few hundred dollars before leaving for Alaska. During his absence, however, "the discovery of oil in the Coalinga country made him a rich man over night." With his fortune, according to this account, Brix invested in other properties, and it "is said that a million dollars was cleared within three years, counting the sale of the first property."²²

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to substantiate this romantic version of how Brix acquired his fortune. There are some disturbing inaccuracies in this 1915 obituary account of Brix's life. This article, for example, has Brix returning from Alaska in 1897. This does not coincide with Brix signing over all his property to his wife in that year or with Mrs. Brix's later recollection that her husband left for Alaska in 1897. Moreover, a search of property transactions in the Fresno County Hall of Records has revealed that Brix did not sell his homestead until years after he had returned from Alaska.²³

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Lastly, other published accounts of Brix's life give a different interpretation of events than that cited in the 1915 obituary. In 1915, for example, a sketch of Brix's life was published in Ellis A. Davis' Davis' Commercial Encyclopedia of the Pacific Southwest. This biographical statement was undoubtedly prepared with the assistance of Mr. Brix or his family. According to this biography, Brix, after hearing of the Blue Goose strike, returned to Coalinga and "became active in the locating and buying of oil lands." "Here," this account continues, "he was hampered by limited capital, and, like many men who have lived in advance of their times, was accused of being a dreamer; even his friends were decidedly skeptical as to the propositions he offered them."²⁴ Rather than sudden accidental wealth, Davis' account suggests that Brix carefully and wisely invested his Alaskan stake in oil lands.

Brix's fortune is also seen as the result of a more gradual process in a biographical account published by Paul Vandor in 1919. Vandor writes that Brix, having returned with \$13,000 from Alaska, "worked in the oil fields to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the business and valuable experience." Recognizing that there was a demand for water for the boilers that powered the drilling rigs and pumps, Brix organized a water company. Tapping the plentiful supply of water on his homestead, Brix "organized a company, laid pipe lines, erected tanks and supplied a number of oil wells with water for the following five years." During this time, he invested in oil stock and lands. Ultimately, he sold his water company and "gave his attention to the oil business entirely, buying and selling oil lands."²⁵

Although it cannot be ruled out completely, it appears that the 1915 obituary account of Brix's fortune is suspect. If Brix made his fortune in 1900, it was not on his homestead, but apparently as part of a group of investors on a nearby property. Since both Vandor and Davis have identified Brix's original well as the Confidence Oil Company, it appears that he was a partner in the famous "discovery well" (Confidence #2) that opened up the Westside Field in Coalinga. One of Brix's neighbors was Frank Cleary. According to a later recollection by Frank's son, Charles W. Cleary, the Clearys "moved to the Herman Brix place near the White House when Herman left for Alaska to join the gold rush, never thinking that fortunes in 'black gold' were underlying his and adjacent properties." It was from this base that Frank Cleary began prospecting for oil. According to this later recollection, it "was from there that Frank Cleary started prospecting for oil and in 1899, when Brix returned from Alaska, we moved to the site of [the] Confidence Oil Company operations."²⁶ This was apparently the beginning of the Brix ventures in oil. Mrs. Brix later recalled that "the Oil business became very interesting" while Herman was

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in Alaska and that after his return "all our efforts were put into this industry...."²⁷ It may have been at this time that Brix and his associates hit oil while drilling for water. According to Brix's son, his father once stated that he had in this manner accumulated some 125,000 barrels of oil, which he sold for \$1.00 a barrel.²⁸

Whatever the origin and date of Brix's initial fortune, he had plunged into the excitement of Coalinga's turn of the century oil boom. With oil selling at \$1.00 a barrel in 1899 and 1900, speculators filed claims on twenty-acre parcels. If eight individuals joined together and formed a company, they could under existing law, file a claim on 160 acres. In addition to his association with the Confidence Oil Company, Brix became a heavy investor and one of the directors of the St. Paul & Fresno Oil Company. Incorporated in 1901, this company had eight producing wells by 1910. In 1906, Brix formed a partnership with John Bunting and established the B & B Oil Company on the east forty acres of his homestead in Section 12. Brix ultimately bought out his partner and became President of this concern. By 1910, the B & B Oil Company had eight producing wells. Prior to his death in 1915, Brix was also President of the San Francisco Crude Oil Company and a one-sixth partner in the Coalinga Syndicate.²⁹

In the meantime, Coalinga had gone through a bust and then another boom cycle. With a rapid increase in production following the opening of the Eastside and Westside Fields, the price of oil fell from \$1.00 a barrel in 1900 to \$.35 in 1902, and \$.24 in 1906. Small independent producers had little choice but to sell their oil at prices offered by such combinations as Standard Oil or Associated Oil. At one point, oil was actually being delivered at from \$.15 to \$.20 a barrel. These were the dark days for Coalinga's oil producers. During this period, the Confidence and the St. Paul & Fresno Company put in new wells although the latter company did have to levy an assessment upon its stockholders in 1904. Prices did not go up until the independents, in the face of a growing demand for oil, organized to force a higher price. By 1907, the average price had risen to \$.40 a barrel and would hit \$.60 in 1910. Production soared as new wells were spudded in. Coalinga's total production of over eighteen million barrels in 1910 made the field the largest producer of oil in California. Not surprisingly, Coalinga underwent a building boom and property values soared.³⁰

A search of public property records has indicated that Brix was a very important investor in the Coalinga area. In many of these transactions he was associated with his attorney and fellow oil pioneer, H. H. Welch. Brix also had partnerships with H. Maxfield, A. V. Lisenby, and John Bunting. According to researcher, Bill Bissell, who investigated

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the Grantor-Grantee and Grantee-Grantor Indexes in the Fresno County Hall of Records, Brix engaged in over 135 property transactions between 1900 and 1915. The bulk of these exchanges occurred between 1905 and 1910. Whereas Brix bought or sold thirteen properties between 1900 and 1905, he participated in one hundred and three such transactions between 1905 and 1910. Many of the latter were parcels near Coalinga, which Brix subdivided.³¹

A shrewd investor with an instinct for potentially valuable land, Brix made immense profits after the boom started in 1907. In December of 1908, for example, Brix sold land which he had acquired for \$4.50 an acre to Mark L. Requa for \$2,250 an acre. In 1911, Brix made a fortune selling off his original homestead in Section 12. The forty-acre parcel and the adjacent 120 acres were sold to British capitalists for \$400,000.³² As one might expect, Brix became somewhat of a legend as an oil field investor. As early as 1910, Brix's name was associated with a handful of others in an article entitled "San Joaquin Valley Men Make Millions Among Great Fields."³³ Even with the sale of his homestead and other parcels adjacent to Coalinga, Brix and his associates still owned by 1915 what has been described in another account as "over 1,400 acres of the most valuable land on the west side."³⁴

Brix's investments were not limited to Coalinga. Having located in Fresno by 1903, Brix made substantial investments in that community after 1909. One of his more dramatic gestures was to construct a palatial residence in keeping with his financial status and reputation. In December of 1909, a newspaper reported that "the Coalinga oil magnate" was ready to construct "what will be the finest residence" in Fresno. Believing that there were "too many Colonial type residences in the valley," Brix indicated that his new home would be on the "Mission style" and would "in its general structure and outside appearance emulate the fashion inaugurated by the mission padres." Although the exterior would "present an aspect of simplicity," however, the interior furnishings "will be luxurious."³⁵

Although Brix ultimately decided, possibly after consultation with his architect Edward Foulkes, to build an Italian Villa mansion rather than a mission style residence, he was apparently determined to build one of the best homes in town. If Brix wished to impress the inhabitants of Fresno with his new mansion, he certainly succeeded. The Fresno Morning Republican, in announcing that Brix intended to spend \$20,000 to \$25,000 on a new residence, commented that it would be "one of the very finest homes in Fresno and will be decidedly different from any which has so far been built here."³⁶ By April, 1910, the structure was described as being "as fine as any residence now in the valley."³⁷ A building permit for the

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Brix residence was pulled in June, 1910, and construction was completed by May, 1911. At that time, the cost of the mansion was estimated to have been \$35,000.00.³⁸

In addition to constructing his magnificent Italian Villa residence, Brix made a number of important contributions to the commercial development of Fresno. According to a 1915 biographical statement, he was a major stockholder and superintendent of construction of the six-story Hotel Fresno. As reported in newspapers of that day, this hotel was modeled on the Palace Hotel in San Francisco and was planned by local investors to be "one of the best between here and San Francisco on the north and Los Angeles on the south."³⁹ This \$200,000 project was completed in early 1913.⁴⁰

In the meantime, Brix had initiated another major construction project in Fresno. Utilizing the services of Edward Foulkes, the same architect who drew up plans for his house and for the Hotel Fresno, Brix started construction on a four-story apartment building on the corner of M and Fresno Streets.⁴¹ Known as the Brix Apartments, this building was constructed of steel and pressed brick with terra cotta trimmings. By December of 1912, with construction well under way, it was described as "an ornament to any city in the state."⁴² With stores and offices occupying the ground floor and some forty-two apartments above, the Brix Apartment Building was alleged in 1912 to be the "Largest Apartment House in the City of Fresno."⁴³ In a later biographical statement on Brix in 1915, the Brix Apartments were described as "the first modern apartment in the San Joaquin Valley."⁴⁴

In addition to the above ventures, Brix planned to build a fourteen-story office building on Fulton Street. This dream was interrupted by Brix's death in Fresno on September 20, 1915, of ptomaine poisoning.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the Brix Estate would construct a scaled-down version of his dream. In 1922, the Estate began construction of a \$400,000 six-story building, containing 190 offices. When the impressive Brix Building opened in September of 1922, the first floor was occupied by Cooper's Department Store.⁴⁶

At the time of his death in September, 1915, Brix was no longer living in his palatial residence on Fresno Street. In a divorce settlement with his wife, Brix had deeded over title to his residence to his daughter, Emma, with a life interest for his wife. Following Brix's death in 1915, Mrs. Brix resided in the house until 1945. In that year, it was sold to the Fresno County Red Cross, who utilized it as their chapter house until 1973. In March of that year, it was purchased by

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Robert E. Sears and Carmen A. Eanni, who, with due consideration for the historical and architectural importance of the residence, have maintained law offices in the structure.⁴⁷

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DETAILED STATEMENT OF ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

When newspaper accounts reported in 1910 that Coalinga oil magnate H. H. Brix had commissioned a San Francisco Architect, Edward T. Foulkes, to design a magnificent home in downtown Fresno, the news coincided with numerous articles announcing dozens of new commercial buildings and residences. This burst of construction activity was destined to permanently change the character of this Central Valley community, for each new construction site signaled the end of the quaint Victorian farm town which dated to the 1890's, and heralded the emergence of the Classic Revival City which Fresno would become by the 1920's.¹ Foulkes was a major force behind these architectural changes, designing no less than four formidable residences and three major commercial structures for an exclusive clientele of prominent local citizens, most extravagant among them being H. H. Brix.

Edward Thomas Foulkes (1874-1967) opened his first architectural office in San Francisco, after completing a brilliant education and a remarkable series of apprenticeships. Born in Monmouth, Oregon, on August 14, 1874, Foulkes attended Portland High School where he reportedly spent a great deal of time working in the science lab. In 1893, he began his architectural studies at Stanford University, completing courses in Civil Engineering, Zoology, Physics, Mathematics, and Drawing.² An excellent student, Foulkes left Stanford in 1895 to complete his studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He graduated from M.I.T. with a Bachelor of Science Degree in 1898, as "one of the top three in [the] Architectural course."³ His senior thesis project, a building for the exhibition of the Fine Arts, was a brilliantly draughted Beaux Arts composition in India Ink and sumi wash, preserved today in the Drawing Collection of the M.I.T. Museum.⁴ Foulkes accepted his first formal drafting position after graduation with Boston Architect Clarence H. Blackall in 1899. Blackall had graduated in 1877 from the University of Illinois, which, along with M.I.T., had offered the first architectural degree programs in the United States beginning in 1868.⁵

[It is of regional importance to note that Blackall more than likely studied under Alexander Culbertson Swartz, who served on the Faculty in Architecture at the University of Illinois from 1873 to 1877. Swartz later settled in Fresno, California, where he opened his first architectural office in 1890. A. C. Swartz's Rehorn Residence (1905), located in Fresno, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.]⁶

Blackall, upon leaving Illinois, travelled to Paris, where he continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts from 1878 to 1880. In 1884, Blackall was chosen to be the recipient of the first Rotch Travelling Scholarship awarded by the American Institute of Architects (1884-1886),

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and was later appointed Secretary of the Scholarship Program in 1891.⁷ During his career, Blackall designed many notable structures, including the first steel frame building erected in Boston in 1892,⁸ the Tremont Temple and Copley Plaza.⁹

After what must have been two influential years working for Blackall, Edward Foulkes moved to New York City in 1901 to work for Cass Gilbert, a fellow alumnus of M.I.T., who would achieve great fame in 1910 for designing the F.W. Woolworth Building in Manhattan.¹⁰ Two years later Foulkes left Gilbert's office to take a position with the prestigious firm of Carrere and Hastings, designers of the renowned New York Public Library.^{11 12} Since three of Foulkes' mentors (Clarence Blackall, John Mervyn Carrere and Thomas Hastings) had graduated from the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and one, Blackall, had been the first Rotch Scholar, it is not surprising that Edward Foulkes was encouraged to leave the United States in 1903, to study architecture in Paris. Awarded a Rotch Scholarship, the most coveted study grant given by the A.I.A. at that time, Foulkes followed in the footsteps of his mentors: He made his way to Europe to attend the Ecole, then travelled worldwide for twenty-seven months. His journey led him to France, England, Wales, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Egypt, Turkey, India, China, and Japan.¹³ He then settled in San Francisco, where he established his first individual practice in 1906.

In 1910, Foulkes opened a small regional office in Fresno after winning a private competition to design the Hotel Fresno (1909-1913), his first commission in that City.¹⁴ Little is known about the competition, other than the fact that Architect Otto H. Neher of Los Angeles was considered for the project. Neher and his partner, Chauncey F. Skilling, are particularly remembered for their exotic "pre-Columbian" Revival Hotel Cordova (1912), located in Los Angeles.¹⁵ The Foulkes' plan, which was ultimately selected for the Hotel Fresno, adapted the Caravansary model of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.¹⁶

While Foulkes was completing the plans for the hotel, he was also preparing drawings for the mansion for H.H. Brix, a major investor in the hotel project. Brix originally wanted his new home to be an example of the Mission Style.¹⁷ Several weeks before builder H.A. Hansen actually began construction on the three-story residence, the FRESNO MORNING REPUBLICAN noted that the new home would "have a distinctly Mission flavor in its tiled roof," and would "take advantage of Fresno's magnificent climate."¹⁸ Far from Mission in appearance, the Italian-inspired design did have a tile roof, which suggests that Brix apparently had some misperceptions about the characteristics of valley

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weather as well. At the time of the ground breaking on June 16, 1910, the mansion was estimated to cost \$27,000.¹⁹ By March 1911, however, H. H. Brix was "sparing no expense in providing conveniences for his future home, ... which [would] cost approximately \$35,000."²⁰ Whatever Brix's notions may have been about the architectural style of his newly completed mansion, he spent extravagant sums of money by the town's standards to build the most imposing residence in the community, and allowed Architect Edward T. Foulkes to create a brilliant example of a period-revival Italian Villa, the only such residence located in Fresno built in this lavishly embellished style.

Since H. H. Brix's intention while building his magnificent home had been to break with what he viewed as the local Colonial tradition of architectural styles, he must have been well pleased with his architect's abilities as a designer, because he recommissioned Foulkes to design the "largest Apartment House in the City" at that time.²¹ Known as The Brix Apartment Building (1912), the somewhat utilitarian structure was built for \$70,000.²² Foulkes' talent did not go unnoticed by other residents of the community, for he rapidly attracted a succession of commissions for three prestige residences and another high-rise commercial block. The stunning Renaissance Gundelfinger Residence was first announced in January, 1912.²³ Completed exactly one year later,²⁴ it was built at a cost of \$15,000.²⁵ Foulkes' remarkable grasp of period styles became even more apparent in February and March of 1912, when his residential designs for the Bernard T. Meehan and Louis Einstein Homes were first revealed. The small Dutch Colonial Meehan Residence, located two doors south of the Brix Mansion and next door to the Craycroft Home (1910),²⁶ was "probably the first electric-heated house in Fresno."²⁷ It was destroyed in 1965. An empty lot remains today where this charming structure once stood. The Einstein Residence,²⁸ which is listed on the National Register on Historic Places, was built for \$28,500, and displays Foulkes' grand version of a cottage-style home with a rolled English roof, including a distinctive "Richardsonian Hump" or eyelid detail along the front eave.²⁹ Construction also began in 1912 on the Rowell-Chandler Building, a richly-detailed six-story office structure that remained undisturbed until it was "modernized" on the ground floor in 1974.³⁰ Of Foulkes' three commercial projects, the Rowell-Chandler Building had the most beautiful facade.³¹

With the exception of the Hotel Fresno, none of the Fresno projects designed by Edward T. Foulkes received extensive coverage in the architectural journals of the day.³² His San Francisco projects, however, were widely acknowledged by the journals, including his competition proposal for the San Francisco City Hall in 1912.³³ The local press, however, followed Foulkes' career attentively,³⁴ and boldly described his

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three largest residences in Fresno as "Representative Homes" in a 1913 full-page photo spread.³⁵ Foulkes discontinued his Fresno practice in late 1914 or early 1915. By that time, he had built a strong practice in his native Portland, as well as San Francisco. Awarded large commissions connected with the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, he may have seen those opportunities as more important than the small prestige office he had maintained in the Valley.

During the period when Edward Foulkes kept an office in Fresno, he was also establishing his practice in Portland, Oregon. In 1909, he was hired by Henry L. Pittock, owner of the WEEKLY OREGONIAN newspaper, to design a mansion for Pittock and his family. "Constructed of reinforced concrete and faced with Tenino sandstone," the French Renaissance Mansion sat above forty-six acres of timberland, "on a 1,000-foot-high promontory overlooking the city."³⁶ Five years under construction, the twenty-two room house cost its owner nearly \$2 million. In 1964, the City of Portland acquired the Mansion, in order to prevent a real estate developer, who intended to build tract houses on the property, from razing the estate.³⁷ This distinguished site is now protected by that City's recently completed Historic Resource Inventory.³⁸

Not all of Foulkes' commissions in Portland were as large and extravagant as the chateausque Pittock Mansion.³⁹ His design for a small hotel (1914) located at 310 N.W. Broadway was a little gem in the "Streetcar Commercial" style.⁴⁰ A Colonial Revival Residence (1913) for Dr. Ammi S. Nichols was likewise moderate in scale with Palladian details typical of that style.⁴² Nonetheless, his Portland office (Foulkes and Hogue) did receive another grand commission during this period for the Oregon State Building at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.⁴³ The structure was "surrounded Parthenon-like by forty-eight magnificent log columns, each six feet in diameter and forty-eight feet high."⁴⁴ Terribly controversial, the "log adorned building [typified] Oregon with its vast lumber industry better than any other design could," but "no matter how classical its proportions, [was] a somber heavy thing."⁴⁵ Using color, the firm brightened up the "Monkish Brown" appearance of the building in order to squelch the controversy, and earned a medal for its design in 1915.⁴⁶ Foulkes' San Francisco office also designed an immense hotel on the exposition grounds called the Inside Inn. Almost a self-contained city, the hotel accommodated 3,000 persons, and provided everything from manicure parlors to Turkish and Russian baths.⁴⁷

For most of his lengthy career, Edward T. Foulkes resided in Oakland, California,⁴⁸ where he was a leader in the growth of that City. His design for the monumental Oakland Tribune Tower (1922) has been that

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City's symbolic landmark for over sixty years. His Oakland projects received occasional press in the journal ARCHITECT AND ENGINEER OF CALIFORNIA, including a photoessay on two small bank buildings designed for the Bank of Italy in 1923.⁴⁹ Among his other prominent Oakland credits would be the Key Route Inn (1906), the Pierce Building (1928), and the Joaquin Miller Memorial Amphitheatre (1931)⁵⁰.

Any catalogue of his works, however, will always be incomplete. Shortly after his death on December 10, 1967, at age 93, family members, fearing legal liabilities from the drawings in his estate, destroyed his entire life's work of tracings and blueprints.⁵¹ Many more buildings designed by Edward T. Foulkes could have been identified in the Bay Region, Portland and Fresno if this tragic loss of documents had not taken place. Such actions by heirs, however, have been altogether too common an occurrence, particularly in Fresno, where similar responses have been the norm.⁵² The survival of representative buildings in Fresno becomes all the more important in order for the architectural history of the San Joaquin Valley to be preserved.

The H. H. Brix Mansion represents the significant accomplishments of one of the San Joaquin Valley's more colorful pioneer settlers, and the exceptional design contributions of one of the Bay Region's more important but underrecognized Architects. The Italian Villa Mansion, the only example of its type in Fresno, therefore qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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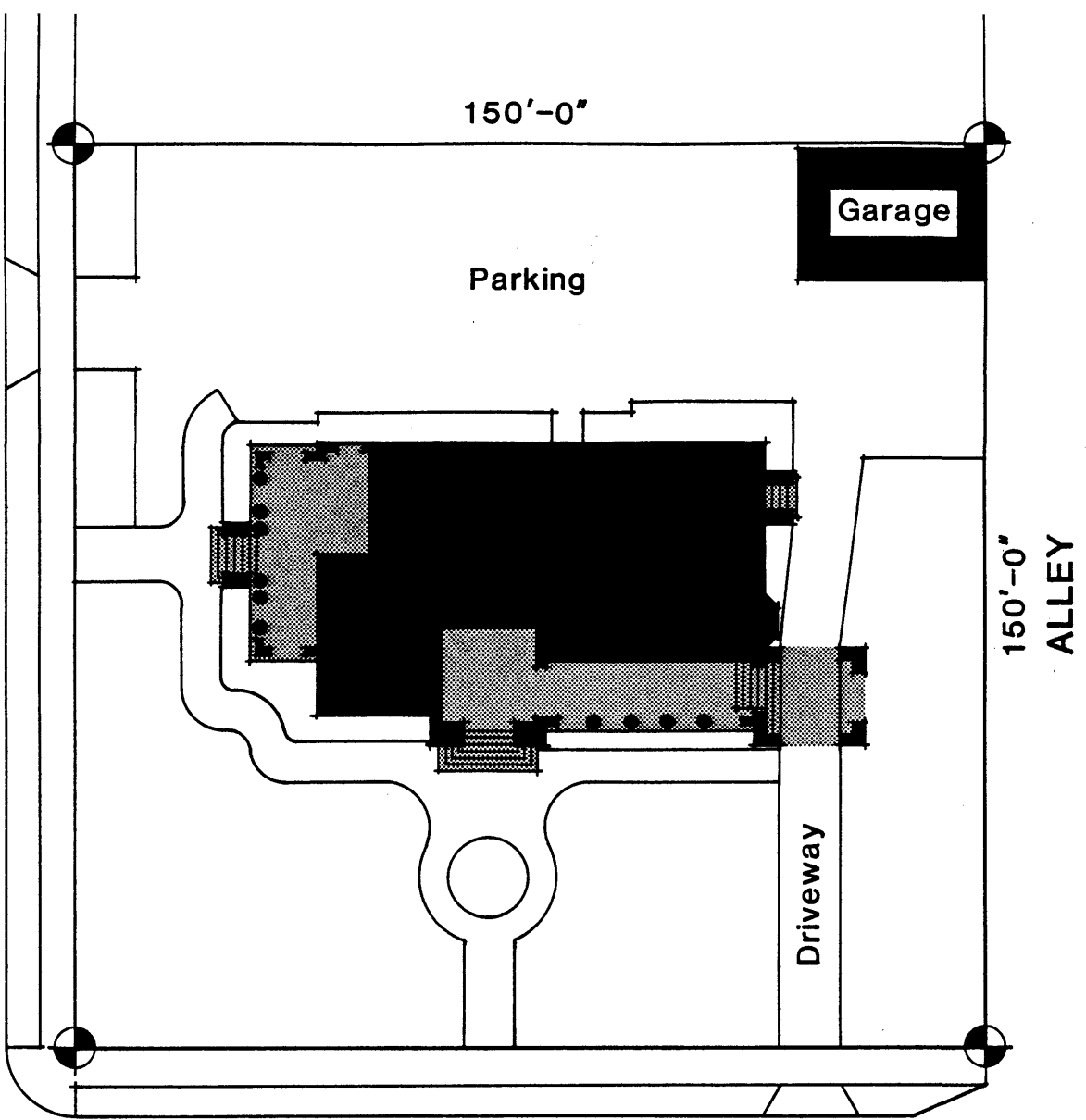
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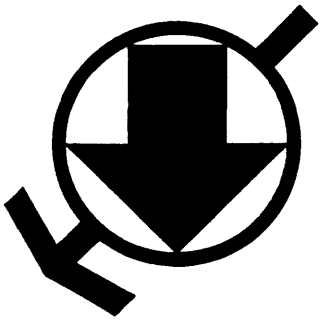
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"S" STREET



FRESNO STREET



H. H. BRIX MANSION

2844 FRESNO STREET
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA 93721

1911

SCALE 1": 30'-0"

Fresno Community Hospital