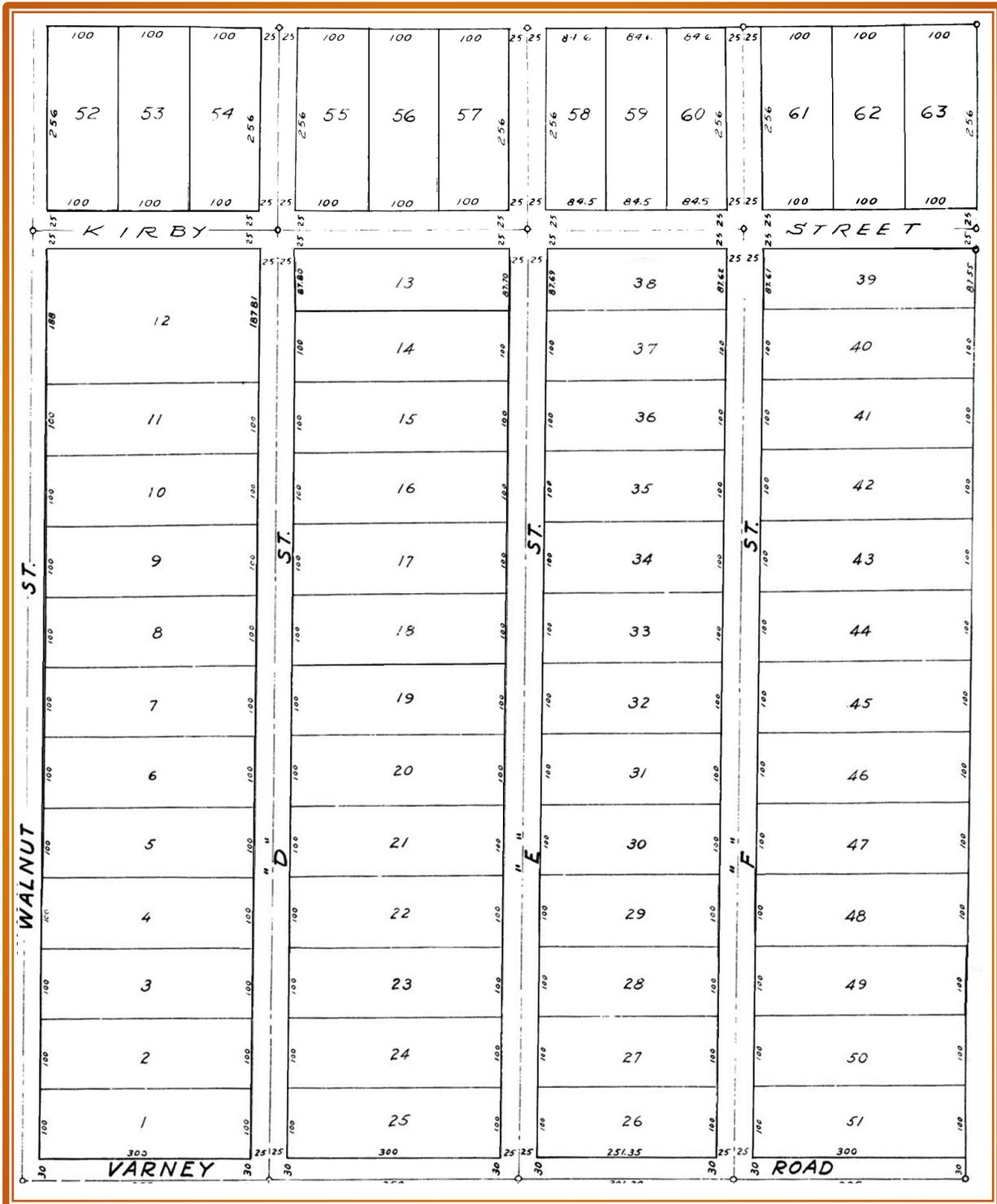


# The Varney Story



Historic Context Survey

# THE VARNEY TRACTS HISTORIC RESEARCH REPORT



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## Introduction

The following report creates a historic context for the properties within two adjacent and related subdivisions within the city of Peoria, Arizona, jointly referred to in this document as “the Varney Tracts.” The purpose of this report is to provide guidance in the preservation of historic resources within these two subdivisions by establishing an appropriate context for determining their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This report supports the goals and objectives of the *City of Peoria Historic Preservation Master Plan*.<sup>1</sup>

The Varney Tracts are two platted subdivisions named for William L. Varney and Lena J. Varney, a married couple who subdivided their property for the creation of residential subdivisions during the 1940s. The Varneys were farmers and, prior to the creation of the two subdivisions, they used the property for agricultural purposes, similar to most of the acreage in the area. At the time, Peoria was an unincorporated farming community located on the northwest fringe of the Salt River Valley, a vast area reclaimed from the desert for farms, orchards, and ranches.

Subsequent to the end of World War II, a transformation began where valley farms and ranches quickly became residential and commercial developments. Peoria was slow to become engaged in the decades-long real estate boom, but the ripple of residential development eventually made its way to the farming community. Between the 1980 and 2000, the population grew from 12,251 to 108,364 and the incorporated area expanded exponentially. The Varney Tracts represent an early facet in the history of this development; the two subdivisions were the first created after the war’s end and, comparatively, the most successful up to that point.<sup>2</sup>

## Description

The original Varney Tract is located in the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 23, Township 3 North, Range 1 East, Gila and Salt River Baseline and Meridian. The subdivision covers approximately forty acres and is bounded on the west by 81<sup>st</sup> Avenue, on the south by Varney Street, on the east by 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and the north by Kirby Street. Significantly smaller than the first tract, Varney Tract Plat 2 encompasses approximately nine acres within the southern 306 feet of the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 23. Located directly north of the original plat, Plat 2 extends from the original tract,

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<sup>1</sup> *City of Peoria Historic Preservation Master Plan*, (City of Peoria, 2012), 19-22.

<sup>2</sup> Philip VanderMeer, *Phoenix Rising: The Making of a Desert Metropolis* (Carlsbad: Heritage Media, 2001), 91.

following the same street layout, and is bounded in the north by Cherry Hills Drive (see figure 1).

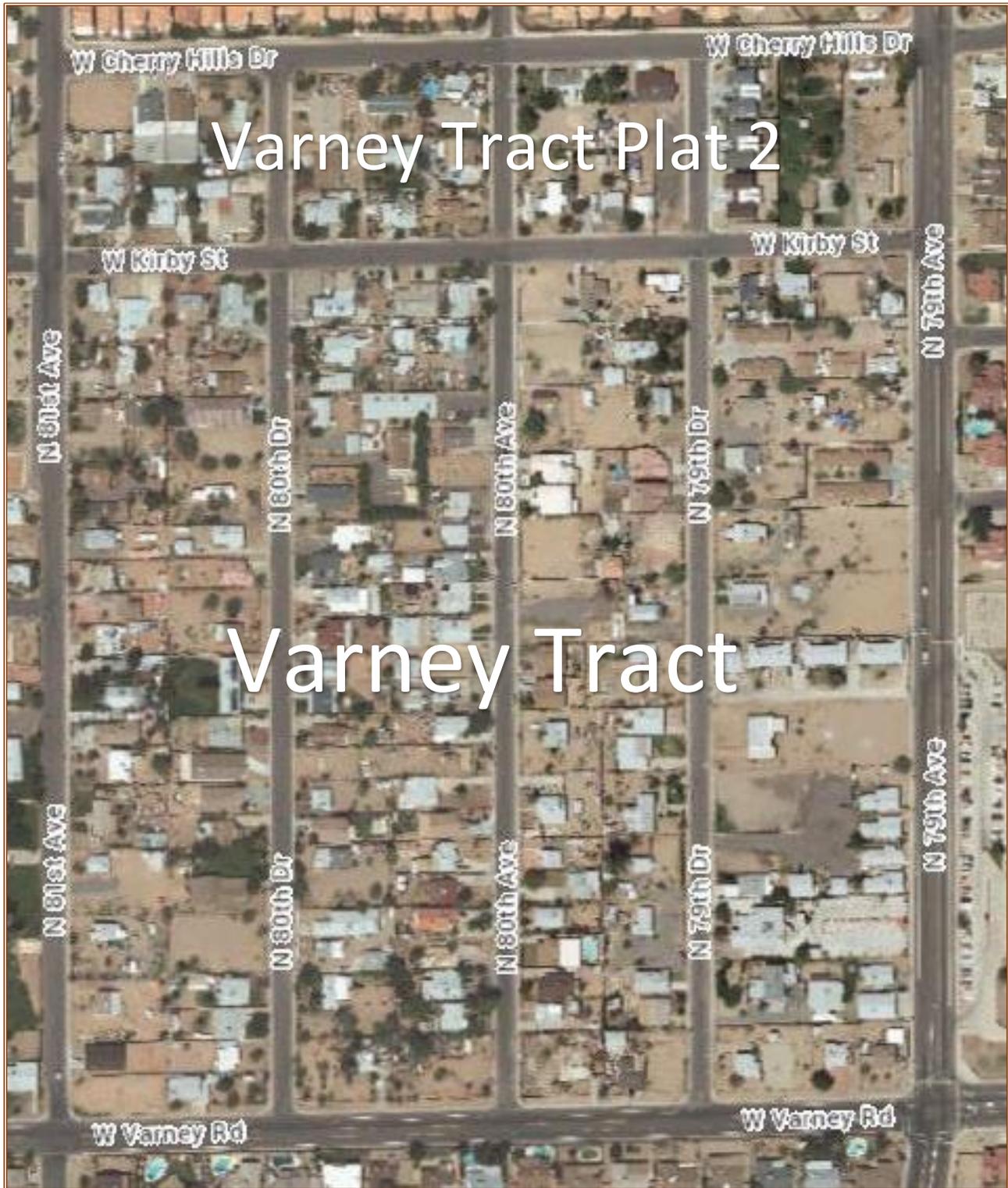


Figure 1. Aerial Photograph of the Varney Tracts, circa 2013. Courtesy of the Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

## Methodology

Utilizing primary and secondary sources, including public records, ownership maps, local histories, and newspaper articles, this report details the early history of the Peoria's subdivisions culminating with the Varney Tracts, chronicling the area's transition from open desert to early residential subdivision.

## Early Residential Subdivision Development in Peoria, 1887-1946

Though the growth of the city of Peoria primarily occurs in the late twentieth century, the circumstances that led to its development began with the initial homesteading of the area a century earlier. In 1887, a group of immigrants and investors from Peoria, Illinois, founded the community in the northwest Salt River Valley. As described by the *Arizona Silver Belt* of October 1st that year:

On the desert fifteen miles northwest of Phoenix, is a small settlement of people from Peoria, Il. They are the vanguard of a large colony, who have bought lands and water rights from the Arizona Canal Co. A town site has been located and called "Peoria," after the Illinois city of that same name from whence they came.<sup>3</sup>

The Illinoisans were encouraged by the 1885 completion of the Arizona Canal, a forty-mile canal that led to the eventual reclamation and development of thousands of acres in the Salt River Valley. Unlike the earlier canals, which were built and maintained by agricultural cooperatives, the Arizona Canal was a corporate endeavor constructed for speculative land development by the Arizona Canal Company. Subsequent to the canal's completion, canal investors formed the Arizona Improvement Company under the promotional leadership of William J. Murphy to assist in the procurement of homesteads and the distribution of water rights.<sup>4</sup>

Around the same time the people from Illinois were planning their town, the Arizona Improvement Company was laying out Grand Avenue. The new road provided a straight route northwest from Phoenix to emergent farmland irrigated by the Arizona Canal. The company deeded the road to Maricopa County in November of 1887 and the county board of supervisors promptly declared it a public highway. When completed, Grand Avenue consisted of a one-hundred foot wide right-of-way stretching from the northwest corner of the original Phoenix townsite (at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Van Buren Street)

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<sup>3</sup> *Arizona Silver Belt*, 1 October 1887, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwest Metropolis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 29.

to—and through—the southeast corner of Section 16, Township 3 North, Range 1 East, Gila and Salt River Base Line and Meridian (91<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Cactus Road).<sup>5</sup>

Changes in the homestead process, specifically the advent of the Desert Land Act, fueled the Arizona Canal Company and Arizona Improvement Company's development efforts. Under the 1877 Congressional act, homesteaders could apply for up to 640 acres of public land providing they brought irrigation to the land within three years. Though the intent of the legislation was to develop and settle lands in the American West, unlike previous homestead laws, residency was not a requirement. Guided into purchases of new and relinquished homesteads by the Arizona Improvement Company, homesteading in the area was simplified and expedited by the ease of obtaining water rights from the Arizona Canal Company.<sup>6</sup>

In conjunction with acquiring water rights, the Illinoisans filed their homestead applications ranging from eighty to 640 acres within selected sections east and south of the terminus of the new public highway, and entirely within the thirty-six square mile township. Consisting of both settlers and investor-speculators, the Midwestern group represented a wide range of various occupations and income levels, from immigrant laborers, store clerks, and housewives to civil engineers, physicians, and business moguls. Most hailed from Peoria, Illinois, though a few were from Chicago and elsewhere. While some acquired water rights with an intent to work the land, others secured the rights only to complete the patent requirements and sell the land for profit.

One of the first homestead applicants was Samuel B. Chase, a property assessor from the Chicago area. Chase homesteaded Section 14, with no intent to settle or develop the land. In January 1890, two months before he received his patent, he subdivided the section, splitting it between John Chapman and Cyrus Burns, both of Spokane Falls, Washington. Though Chase paid the federal government eight hundred dollars for his 640 acres, he sold Chapman and Burns their 320 acres for \$4000 each.<sup>7</sup>

Also from Chicago was a then-popular civil engineer with the Union Pacific Railway, George F. Davis. Davis homesteaded Section 23, and acquired four water rights from the Arizona Canal Company covering the eastern 320 acres. However, the civil engineer was

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<sup>5</sup> *Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Clerk of the Board, 1887), 3:367-368.

<sup>6</sup> Earl Zarbin, "Desert Land Schemes, William J. Murphy and the Arizona Canal Company," *The Journal of Arizona History*, 42:2 (Summer, 2001), 159-164.

<sup>7</sup> "Desert Land Certificate 118," *Book of Deeds* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office, 1891), 28:231-232; *1880 United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010); *Book of Deeds* (1890), 17:254-258.

more interested in the mining in the mountains of Yuma County than the agricultural potential in Maricopa County. Like Chapman, Davis split his homestead selling the east half to Joseph Elder in 1889 for two thousand dollars, and the west three years later to James McMillan for \$8,720.<sup>8</sup>

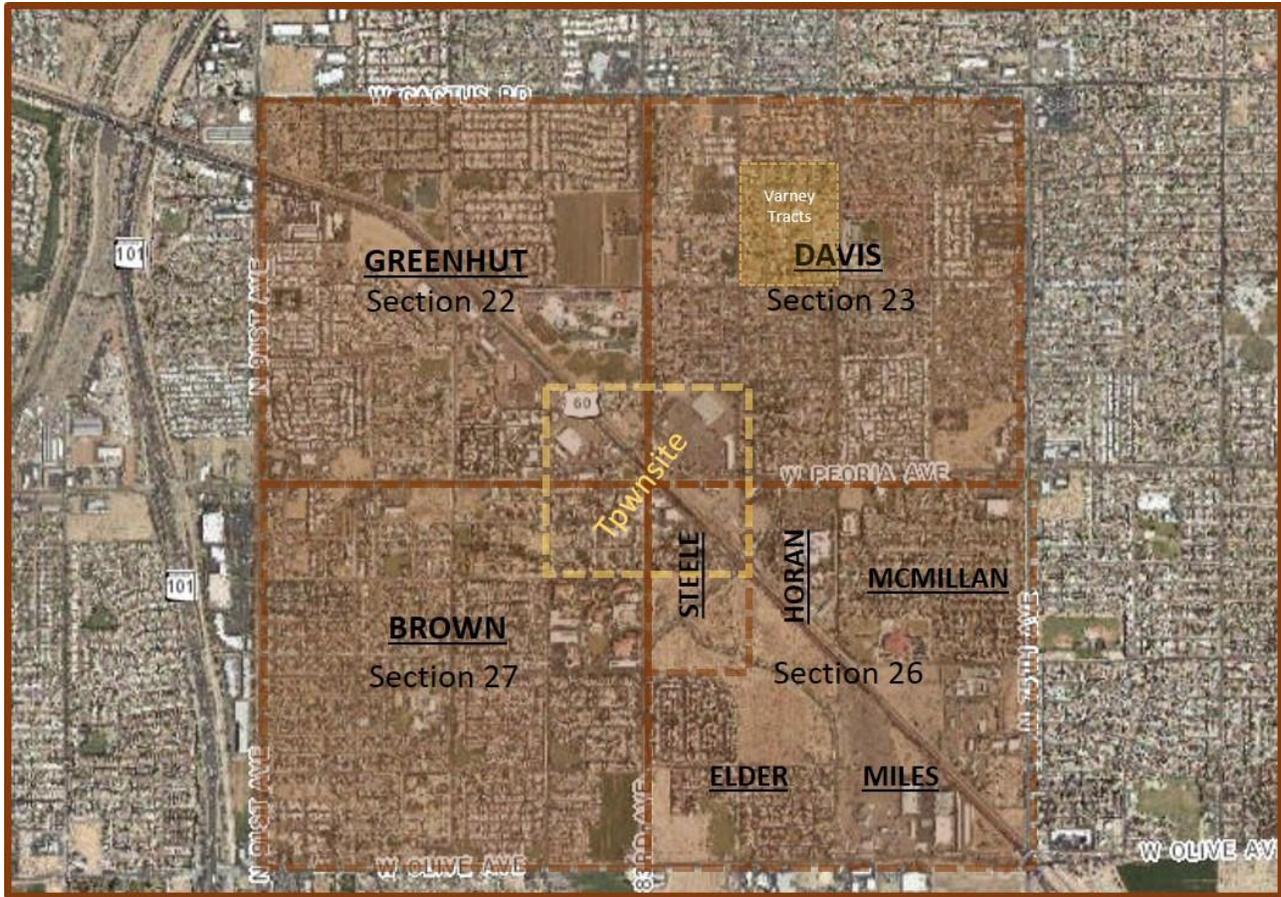


Figure 2. Homesteads and the Peoria townsite.

### The Peoria Townsite

The first subdivision of homesteaded property specifically intended for residential development was the townsite. However, there seems to be some disagreement as to its origin. According to the *Arizona Silver Belt*, the townsite was laid out as early as the fall of 1887; however, the townsite plat was not recorded with the Maricopa County Recorder's Office until a decade later. Kathleen Gilbert in *More Than a Century of Peoria People, Progress, and Pride* attributes ownership of the townsite to Joseph B. Greenhut

<sup>8</sup> "Mining Patents," *Mining Industry and Review*, 9 April 1896, 467-468; *Serial Patent* (Washington: Bureau of Land Management, 1890), AZAZAA 01383; "Water Right Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1888), 15:507-514, "Deed" (1889), 21:116-117, and (1892), 30:245; "Personal," *Arizona Republican*, 11 January 1891, 4; *1900 United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004).

and Deloss S. Brown who “...acquired four sections of land from the government through the Desert Lands Act [*sic*].” The original townsite was 160 acres, positioned at the intersection of Sections 22, 23, 26 and 27, created from an allocation of forty acres from four homesteads—one in each section (see figure 2). The four homesteads were those of Greenhut (Section 22), Davis (Section 23), Harrison Steele (Section 26), and Frances L. Brown (Section 27).<sup>9</sup>

Greenhut was an Austrian immigrant who rose to prominence in Peoria, Illinois, eventually becoming the owner of the Great Western Distillery. Built in 1881, contemporaries touted Greenhut’s distillery as the largest in the nation, if not the world. In 1886, Greenhut began his homestead effort with the acquisition of water rights for his 640 acre homestead. The water rights provided evidence or bringing irrigation to the desert, a prerequisite of the Desert Land Act.<sup>10</sup>

Back home in Illinois, Greenhut was in the process of forming the Distillers and Cattle Feeding Trust—also known as the “Whiskey Trust”—which, according to Greenhut, was “...a cooperative concern, intended to ensure concerted action, but not to corner the market.”<sup>11</sup> Modeled on the Standard Oil Trust, the Whiskey Trust was a collaborative attempt at hegemony of the alcohol industry in the United States. Under Greenhut’s leadership, the trust assembled distilleries and industrial alcohol plants—companies that manufactured industrial alcohol and produced grain neutral spirits used as a base to make whiskey brands—throughout the country by offering a profit share. Once part of the trust, most of the participating distilleries were shut down to control the market. While this was not illegal at the time, not all distillers were in favor of becoming members and some that rebelled were coerced by undercutting prices and worse.<sup>12</sup>

When the Chicago distillery of H. H. Shufleldt fought the Whiskey Trust, an attempt was made to dynamite the building. A federal grand jury began an investigation after the trust’s secretary, George Gibson allegedly tried to hire a government employee to make a second arson attempt. During the investigation, the grand jury also indicted Greenhut, along with Gibson and others, for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. By 1892, all

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<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Brown, *More Than A Century: Peoria People, Progress, and Pride* (Peoria: City of Peoria, 2004), 3.

<sup>10</sup> “Water Right Deed,” *Book of Deeds* (1886), 13: 98-113; *Serial Patent* (1890), AZAZAA 013086; the Sale-Cash Entry Act (3 Stat. 566).

<sup>11</sup> “The Whisky Trust Investigation,” *Bradstreet’s*, 7 January 1888, 513.

<sup>12</sup> “The Distiller’s Combination,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 July 1887, 2.

indictments were nullified, however, the efforts of the government to deal with the monopoly continued.<sup>13</sup>

Though impeded by the accidental destruction (by fire) of the trust's records, a Congressional investigation into the organization lasted through the end of the century. During this time, the trust unraveled, eliminating the monopoly, and eventually going into receivership. Much to the chagrin of lawyers involved in the bankruptcy, the Illinois courts appointed Greenhut as one of the receivers and the distiller continued to profit from the reorganization. By 1897, the Whiskey Trust had ceased to exist. That year, Greenhut also pulled out of Peoria, Arizona.<sup>14</sup>

Frances L. Brown was the wife of Deloss Stoddard Brown, who was also involved in the Whiskey Trust, albeit not as actively as Greenhut. Deloss had been operating a jewelry store in Elmwood, Illinois, when he married Frances in 1869. Seven years later, the Browns moved to Peoria and Deloss became a partner with his father-in-law, William R. Bush, in the Bush & Brown Distillery. Around 1886, after he sold his interests in the distillery to the Whiskey Trust, Deloss bought into a music store partnership, which became the Brown, Page & Hillman Company. However, his principal business—according to a biographical essay—was in real estate, which he conducted in both Peorias.<sup>15</sup>

Frances Brown acquired water rights to Section 27 at the same time as Greenhut. According to deeds filed with the Maricopa County Recorder's Office, she and Deloss were the first to sell lots in the newly created townsite. Beginning with January of 1890, three years after the *Arizona Silver Belt* related the laying out of the new community, the Browns sold four lots in Blocks 26 and 27 of the Peoria townsite to four buyers from Peoria, Illinois. These transactions occurred ten months before receiving the homestead patent and seven years before the formal recording of the plat with Maricopa County.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Blown Up With a Bomb," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, 11 December 1888, 4; "The Gibson Investigation," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 April 1891, 1; "A Damnable Plot," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 12 February 1891, 5; "Whiskey Trust Arrests," *The World*, 29 February 1892, 1; "How Gibson Escaped," *Lincoln Evening News*, 25 June 1892, 6..

<sup>14</sup> "Whiskey Trust Records Gone," *The World*, 21 February 1893, 1; "The Whiskey Trust Split," 23 May 1893, 1; "Whiskey Trust Goes Bankrupt," *Leavenworth Times*, 30 January 1895, 1; "Whiskey Trust Case," *Manitoba Morning Free Press*, 4 February 1895, 3; "Whiskey Trust Receivership Ends," *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 September 1897, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Newton Bateman and Paul Selby, eds. *Encyclopedia of Illinois and a History of Peoria County* (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1902), 2: 486. *Book of Assigned Mortgages* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office, 1886), 1:4-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Book of Deeds* (1890), 17:261-265; *Serial Patent* (1890), AZAZAA 013085; "Plat of Peoria," *Book of Maps* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office, 1897), 2:57.

The smallest of the four contributors to the townsite, Harrison Steele's homestead was an eighty-acre parcel—the west half of the northwest quarter of Section 26. Steele was a physician from Peoria, Illinois, and employed with the Toledo, Peoria and Western Railroad Company. Records are unclear as to what Steele originally intended for his homestead; he may have bought it purely for speculative reasons, which was common with Desert Land entries, or perhaps planned to subdivide for residential use given its location on a transportation corridor. Regardless, the northern half of the homestead was included in the townsite and, evidently, Steele never resided on the property. Subsequent to the Chatsworth Horror—an 1887 train wreck that cost the lives of over seventy people—Steele was appointed chief surgeon for the railroad company, a position he retained until his death in 1902.<sup>17</sup>

The remainder of Section 26 was homesteaded by four individuals. Anna Horan, a Midwesterner of Irish descent who resided in Phoenix, acquired eighty acres in the east half of the northwest quarter. Emma McMillan, the wife of James McMillan, homesteaded the northeast quarter. Her husband was involved in grain distribution in Peoria, Illinois, as were the other two homesteaders in the section, Joseph Elder and C. C. Miles. Founded earlier in the century, Peoria, Illinois was a burgeoning transportation hub—a huge distribution center with millions of bushels of grain passing through the city every year. It was also a major producer of distilled spirits, with eleven distilleries producing over 77,000 gallons per day. While not all of the homesteaders in early Peoria, Arizona, were beneficiaries of this prosperity, affluent denizens of the Illinois city were unquestionably represented in the development of the area.<sup>18</sup>

Likely due to the lack of transaction recording, the circumstances behind the subdivision of lands to create the first townsite are theoretical. When recorded in 1897, the townsite consisted of 75 percent of its original layout (see figure3). Absent from the plat are: Blocks 3 through 7, 12 through 14, and the northern portions of 15 through 17, including at least half of Washington Park. This portion of the plat was located on the Greenhut homestead, which he deeded to Chauncey and Marie Clarke on March 17, 1897, one week before the plat was recorded with the county.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "What Caused the Wreck," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 August 1887, 2; "Personal," *The Railway Surgeon* (December 1902) 9: 206.

<sup>18</sup> James Montgomery Rice, *Peoria City and County, Illinois: A Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress, and Achievement* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Company, 1912), 2: 535, 539, 541, 570-573, and 674; "Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1892), 30:245; *Serial Patent* (1890), AZAZAA 013081; *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Trade and Commerce of the City of Peoria for the Year Ending December 31<sup>st</sup> 1882* (Peoria: Transcript Publishing Company, 1883), 67.

<sup>19</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1897), 42:84.

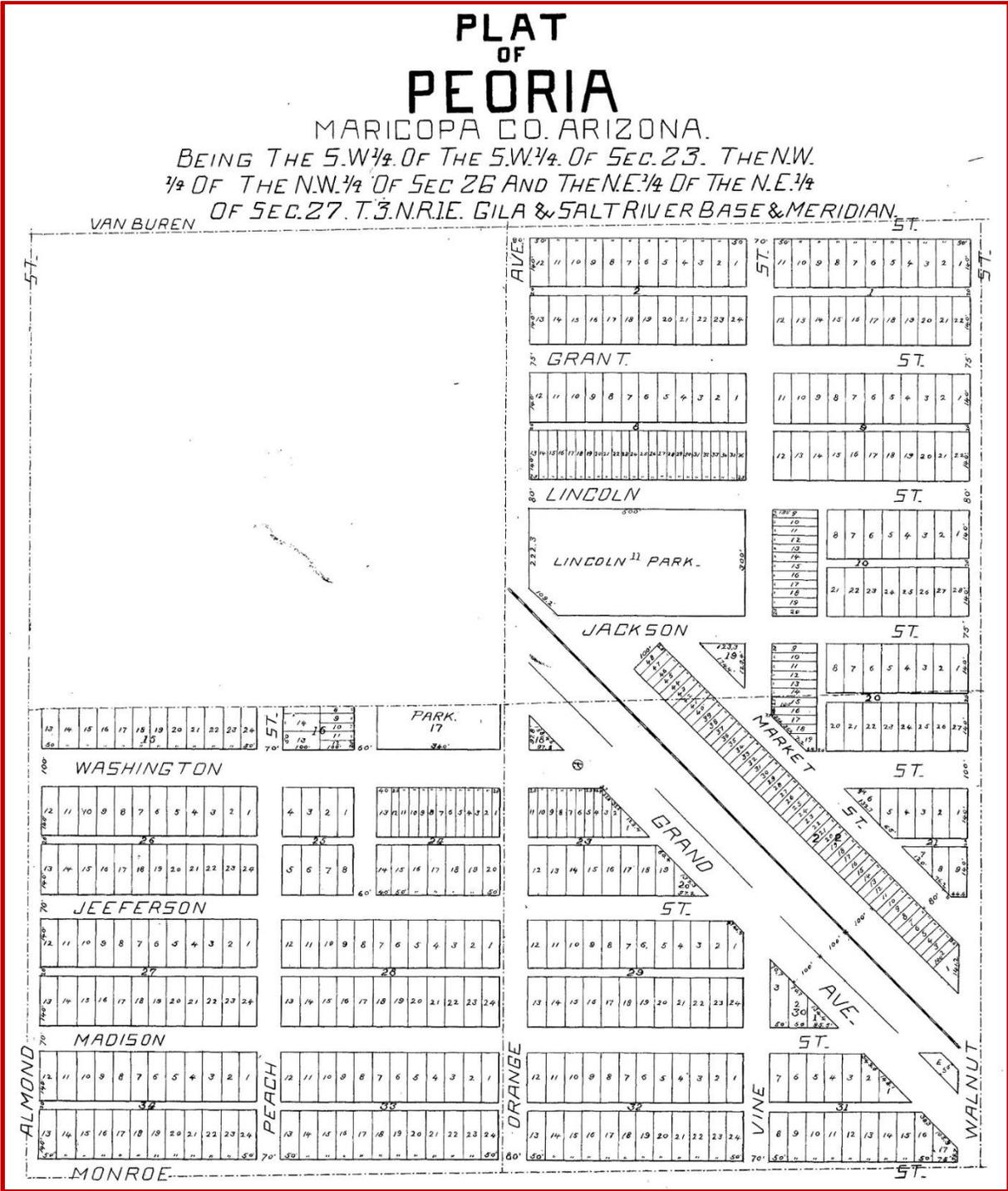


Figure 3. The plat of the Peoria townsite. Joseph B. Greenhut owned the property in the upper left blank area, which he traded to Chauncey Clarke. Edited by Vincent Murray.

According to the *Arizona Republican* of August 10, 1897, the forty-acre parcel had been set aside for the town, but beyond the post office, store, and a few houses and hay barns, very little progress had been made in establishing the town. While Greenhut had

erected a house on his homestead facing Grand Avenue, his actual plans for homestead remain a matter of conjecture.<sup>20</sup>

Chauncey Clarke was also in the liquor business and a member of the Whiskey Trust. He and his brother Charles were the owners of the Clarke Brothers distilleries in Peoria, Illinois, well-known producers of *Clarke's Rye*--their signature libation. Clarke and another brother were also partners in mining operations in western Arizona and through the exchange of mining interests, Chauncey acquired Greenhut's Section 22 homestead.<sup>21</sup>

In the deed providing James McMillan with the west half of George F. Davis's Section 23 homestead in 1892, there was no mention of forty acres in the southwest quarter becoming part of the original townsite. Nor has a record been located of McMillan dedicating that portion for townsite use, though he acquired the water rights in 1891. McMillan also acquired water rights to the north half of Steele's homestead, the southeast forty acres of the townsite, but no record has been located showing that he ever owned the property.<sup>22</sup>

James McMillan was one of the earliest of the homesteaders from Peoria, Illinois to arrive in the Salt River Valley. With an 1886 power of attorney issued for Deloss Brown, he probably came to represent the latter's interests. McMillan was the community's first postmaster, using his home as its first post office, and his involvement in the maintenance of the valley canals led to his appointment as superintendent of the Arizona Canal Company's system in 1892. The following year, McMillan moved to Gila Bend to work on the Peoria Canal Company, the second development effort to receive its name from the prosperous Illinois city.<sup>23</sup>

In 1895, McMillan deeded the east half and northwest quarter of the southwest quarter to William Dunlap Fulwiler, secretary of the Arizona Canal Company who was also active with the Arizona Improvement Company. The remainder of the southwest quarter

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<sup>20</sup> *Arizona Republican*, 10 August 1897, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *1870 United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009); "Whiskey Trust's Grief," *Iowa State Register*, 1 December 1895, 4; Big Mining Deal," *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, 6 June 1898, 7.

<sup>22</sup> "Water Right Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1891), 31:485-489.

<sup>23</sup> *Book of Powers of Attorney* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office, 1886), 1:194; *Record of Appointment of Postmasters* (Washington: National Archives, Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group Number 28, 1888), 58:28; *1880 United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010); "Local Brevities," *Arizona Republican*, 11 October 1890, 4 and "North Side Canals," 5 March 1891, 4; *Phoenix Directory for the Year 1892* (Phoenix: The Benschel Directory Company, 1892), 92; *Book of Deeds* (1893), 35:223-225 and "Water Right Deed," (1891), 25:604-607.

remained part of the Peoria townsite; therefore, it is possible that McMillan was active in some facet of planning the townsite.<sup>24</sup>

Part of the problem with the records resided with the various incorporated entities created to dispense townsite lots. Though the Browns initiated lot sales in 1890, they were not alone in the town development efforts. Brown was involved in the New England Land Company and Glendale Land Company, two entities active in the development of the northwest Salt River Valley, especially Glendale. Both companies were quasi-subidiaries of the Arizona Improvement Company, as was the Salt River Valley Townsite Company.<sup>25</sup>

The Salt River Valley Townsite Company was under the management of George W. Kretzinger of Chicago. Kretzinger was also an attorney for the Santa Fe, Prescott, and Phoenix Railway Company, whose tracks bisected the townsite, and son-in-law of the president of the Arizona Improvement Company. Kretzinger joined the Browns in filing the townsite plat and, though the records are unclear as to how they acquired the properties, his townsite development company likely had controlling interests in the eastern eighty acres of the town.<sup>26</sup>

### The Amended Peoria Townsite

The lot sales in the original townsite were slow to almost non-existent. In 1908, Mabel Hood acquired the northeast quarter of the townsite (forty acres) of the townsite from the Salt River Valley Townsite Company. Mabel's husband William homesteaded land near Greenway and 91<sup>st</sup> Avenue, receiving a patent in 1895. However, the Hoods were more active in farming and ranching closer to the townsite. After acquiring the northeast quarter, Mabel petitioned the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors to vacate the streets and alleyways, reducing the townsite to one half square mile.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of the remainder of the original townsite was under the control of the extended family of Deloss and Frances Brown. Subsequent to Hood's townsite reduction, in 1909 the Brown family recorded an amended plat, removing Blocks 1, 2, 8 through 11, 19, and the north half of 20 from the townsite. The new plat also halved Block 22 with Washington Street, using the northern portion to create Block 35. While

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<sup>24</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1895), 37:243.

<sup>25</sup> *Book of Articles of Incorporation* (1890), 1:262-266.

<sup>26</sup> "Plat of Peoria," *Book of Maps* (1897), 2:57; *Book of Articles of Incorporation* (1891), 1:416-422.

<sup>27</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1908), 81:133; *Serial Patent* (1895), AZAZAA 013212; "North Side: Peoria," *Arizona Republic*, 20 September 1899, 6; *Board of Supervisor Minutes* (1908), 8:481.

dedicating the street and alley right-of-ways to the public, the Brown family, which own 285 of the remaining 312 lots, reserved exclusive rights for all utilities and a streetcar line, whether it be powered by “...horse, electric motor, steam, or endless rope power.”<sup>28</sup> This latter action may have been optimistically performed in anticipation of an extension of the Phoenix railway to the Peoria townsite. The following year, the Glendale Orangewood streetcar line was completed, linking Glendale to Phoenix by way of the Orangewood agricultural district (now part of north Phoenix). The Brown family was also financially involved in that venture.<sup>29</sup>

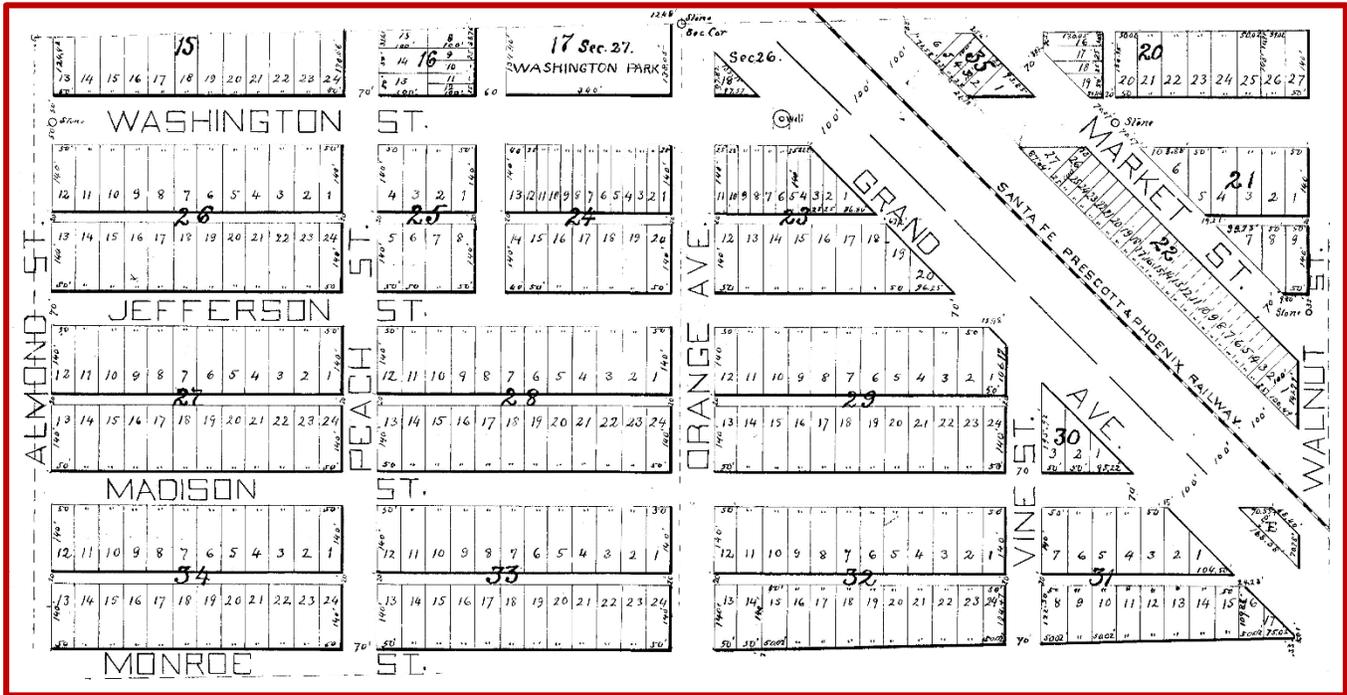


Figure 4. The amended townsite. Edited by Vincent Murray.

### Altaloma

In 1912, Frances Brown subdivided the remainder of her homestead in Section 27, along with William O. Wedel and Presbyterian Pastor Charles L. Corwin who had previously acquired lots within the section. They chose Altaloma, a compound of two Spanish words that roughly translates as “high knoll,” as the name of the new subdivision. Altaloma contained 159 lots of various sizes ranging from .4 to forty acres. While its streets were nameless, some appeared to

<sup>28</sup> “Amended Plat of Peoria,” *Book of Maps* (1909), 3:62.

<sup>29</sup> “Agreement,” *Book of Agreements* (1910), 4:154-156.

be extensions from the original townsite. The following year, Frances deeded her interests in all of the small residential lots to William Turnbull, her son-in-law.<sup>30</sup>

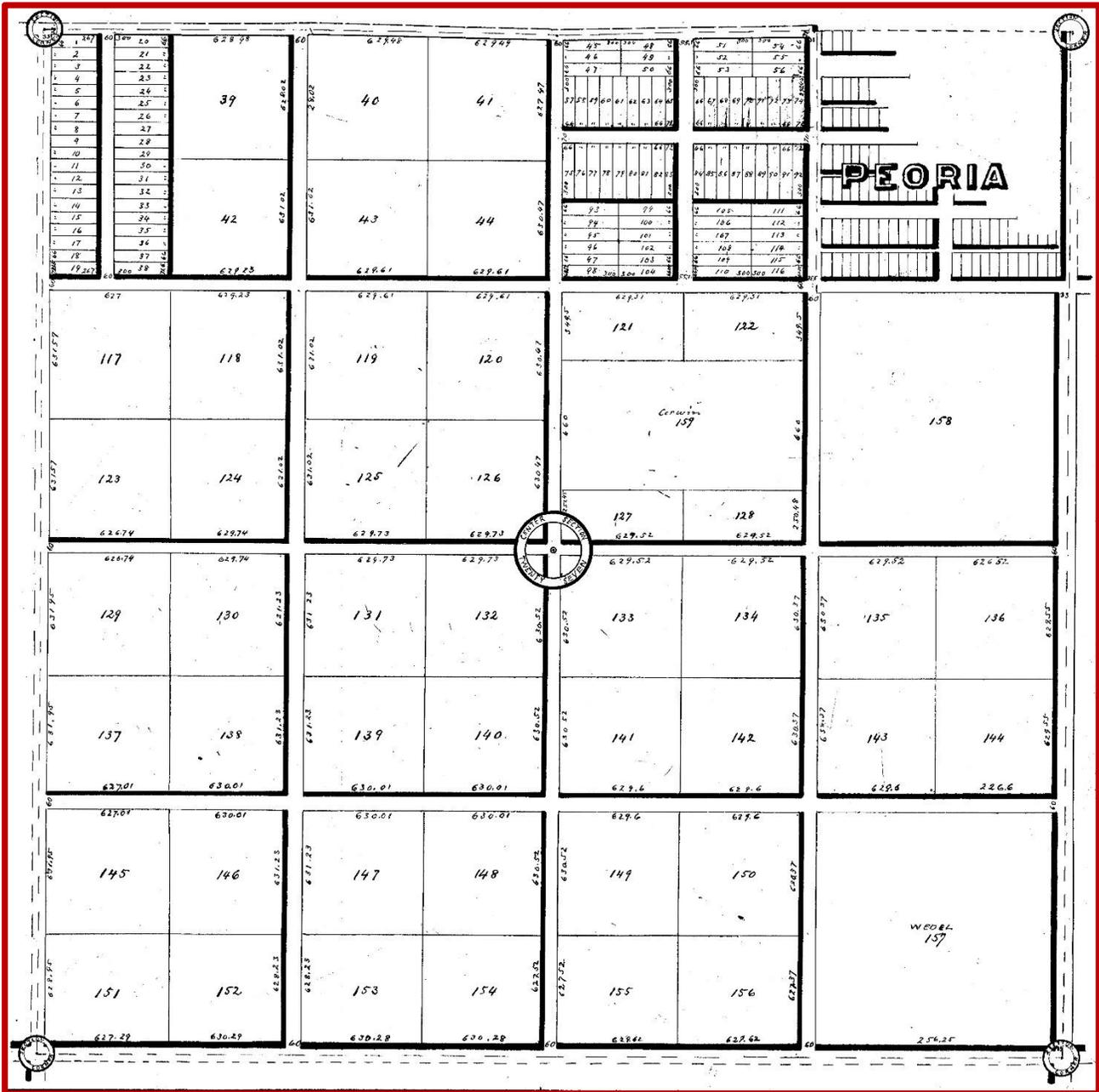


Figure 5. Altaloma. The southwest quarter of the original Peoria townsite is located in the upper right hand corner. Edited by Vincent Murray.

Brown Realty, headed by Eugene Brown, the son of Frances and Deloss, then began a campaign to sell Altaloma lots. The company began in March with announcements in the newspaper

<sup>30</sup> "Plat of Altaloma," *Book of Maps* (1912), 5:19; "Real Estate Transfers," *Arizona Republican*, 3 March 1913, 10.

about the availability and affordability of lots within the subdivision. In April, the company escorted a group of fifty or more prospective buyers by train to inspect the area. Apparently, a few lots were sold after this special excursion, the buyers likely enticed as by long-term loans that were both tax- and interest-free. One prospective buyer was reported as saying that he had expected to see a “barren waste of country” but instead discovered what appeared to be some of the best alfalfa land in the Salt River Valley. “Acre tracts were being sold for the price of small city lots. For one seeking a home site, not too far from Phoenix, with all of the advantages of quiet city life, the location of Altaloma is ideal.”<sup>31</sup>

Similar to the Peoria townsite, Altaloma was not as successful as the Browns had hoped and, in May 1913, the family sold their interests to a real estate syndicate that included E. J. Bennett, A.E. Russell, F.D. Lane, and F.W. Griffin. The transaction included approximately eight hundred acres within the townsite and adjacent subdivision. The family retained some of the property, selling one of the forty-acre lots to Isaac and Daisy Sturges. Perhaps indicative of the subdivision’s lack of success, the Sturges transaction documents—the deed, mortgage, and water rights—use the cadastral survey for lot descriptions and not the recorded plat. Several years later, the Sturgeses and other Altaloma residents also petitioned the county board of supervisors to abandon extensive portions of two of the roads (Mountain View Drive and 89<sup>th</sup> Avenue) traversing the subdivision, since the roads were not needed for development.<sup>32</sup>

Around 1916, the real estate syndicate began referring to the Altaloma subdivision as “Alta Loma” and sometimes as “Loma Alta.” In some then-contemporary advertisements, such as those of the Belt Line Auto Stage, Altaloma was referred to as its own “town” along with Glendale, Marinette, and Peoria. From a local standpoint, however, Altaloma was a part of Peoria and, when a public water system was first developed for the community, it was extended to the adjacent subdivision.<sup>33</sup>

### Peoria Heights

Subsequent to a devastating 1917 fire that destroyed much of the developing commercial core of the community, Peoria entered a period of prosperity. Though the community remained

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<sup>31</sup> “Peaceful Altaloma Tract Thrown Open,” *Arizona Republican*, 13 April 1913, 12.

<sup>32</sup> “Realty Mortgage (Acreage Form),” *Book of Mortgages* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder’s Office, 1914), 92:67-68; “Warranty Deed,” *Book of Deeds* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder’s Office, 1914), 110:72-73; “Water Right Application for Lands in Private Ownership,” *Book of Water Rights* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder’s Office, 1917), 5:88-89; “Biggest Deal: Real Estate,” *Arizona Republican*, 24 May 1913, 9; “Early Development of Peoria District,” *Arizona Republican*, 25 May 1913, 19.

<sup>33</sup> “Realty Values in Phoenix on Upward Trend as Sales Start,” *Arizona Republican*, 13 August 1916, 10; Advertisement, *Arizona Republican*, 6 January 1917, 7; “Peoria: The Northern Gateway to the Salt River Valley,” *Arizona Republican*, 15 February 1917, 6-7.

unincorporated, by 1920, almost six hundred people called Peoria home. Near the end of that year, the village received another subdivision when Chauncey and Marie Clarke and Lester and Arbilla Pew created Peoria Heights from a portion of Section 22 north and east of Grand Avenue. The Clarkes had moved to Rancho Santa Fe, California, years earlier after selling the southeast portion of the former Greenhut homestead to Robert and Matilda Wagoner. In 1911, they also sold the property north and east of Grand Avenue to William and Mabel Hood, but reacquired it through a series of land transactions and at least one lawsuit.<sup>34</sup>

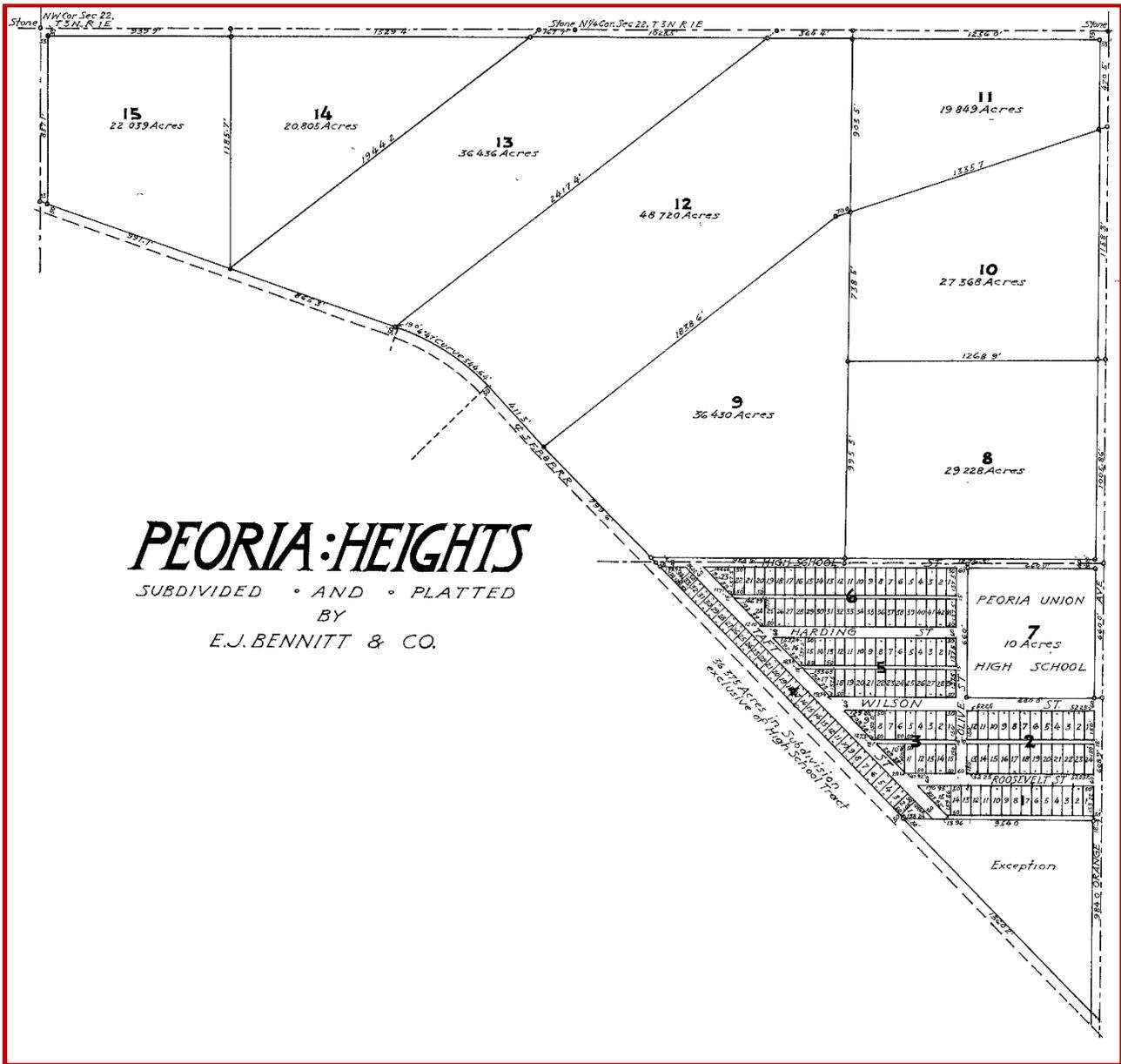


Figure 6. Peoria Heights subdivision. Edited by Vincent Murray.

<sup>34</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1911), 92:423; "Assignment of Agreement of Sale," *Book of Miscellaneous* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office), 21:130; "Clarke v. Standage, et al.," *Book of Deeds* (1934), 285:246.

Peoria Heights was probably named after a village located on a bluff overlooking the Illinois River, adjacent to Peoria, Illinois. The subdivision consisted of fifteen blocks, eight of which were large rural lots of approximately twenty to forty-nine acres and delineated by pre-existing irrigation ditches. The remaining blocks were smaller and divided into residential blocks fifty feet wide and 100 to 153 feet deep except for Block 7, which was dedicated to the new high school. Orange Avenue (83<sup>rd</sup> Avenue) ran north and south along the eastern perimeter of the subdivision connecting it to the Peoria townsite. With the exception of Taft Street, which paralleled Grand Avenue on the west perimeter, the other streets ran east and west, and all but one were named for early twentieth century presidents. A fifth street perpendicular to Orange Avenue and connecting to Grand Avenue was appropriately called High School Street (Varney Road).<sup>35</sup>

Though surveyed and platted by E. J. Bennitt and Company, who were probably assisting with lot sales, Peoria Heights was a dismal failure as a residential subdivision. The high school occupied its designated lot almost immediately as intended, but the small residential lots remained empty. The school district eventually acquired the small lots and consolidated them for use by a grammar school and, later, to expand the high school campus.

### The Varney Tracts

Subsequent to the platting of the Peoria Heights subdivision, there were no recorded efforts at creating subdivisions until 1945 when William and Lena Varney created the first of their two “tracts.” The Varneys did not possess a diverse financial portfolio and it is likely their collective real estate experience was limited in comparison to the Browns and Clarkes. The couple were from farming families and came to the northwest Salt River Valley as part of a larger familial group, typical at the time. The Varneys, and their family, hailed from Cream Ridge Township, a small hamlet approximately five miles east of Chillicothe, Missouri. The family consisted of William’s parents James and Ida Varney and their nine children, along with spouses, grandchildren, and others. The first family members arrived in Arizona around November, 1911. Suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, James moved west for health reasons. William, the eldest son, followed a year or so later after marrying Lena Jane Brassfield.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Peoria Heights,” *Book of Maps* (1920), 10:9.

<sup>36</sup> *1900 United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004); *1910 United States Federal Census* (2006); *Original Certificate of Death* (Phoenix: Arizona State Bureau of Health), 233; “Pie and Pound Party,” *Arizona Republican*, 26 October 1912, 6; “Pioneering Runs In Blood Of Couple, Wed 50 Years,” *Arizona Republic*, 20 November 1962, 15; and “Death & Funerals,” *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, 10 December 1984, 8.

The greater Varney family settled in the west Phoenix and Glendale area<sup>37</sup> where Ida acquired eighty acres of land in 1914, a year after James passed away. In 1917, William received a patent on his homestead at 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Greenway Road but chose to farm closer to Peoria. The couple acquired water rights to sixty acres straddling the section line between Sections 14 and 23 (Cactus Road). Two years later, the couple purchased the property from Phoenix socialite Bessie Cushman and Lysander Cassidy, an attorney from Peoria, Illinois (see figure 7).<sup>38</sup>

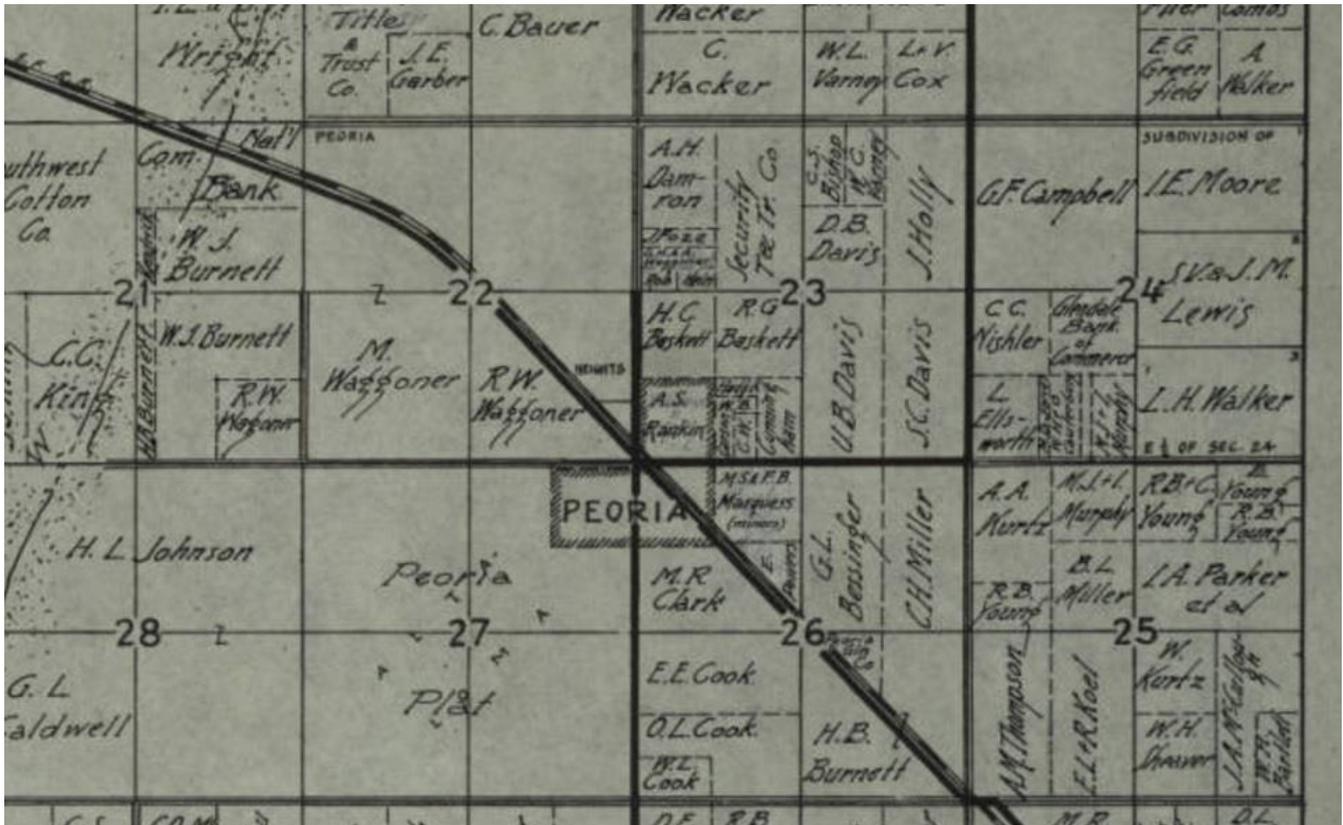


Figure 7. The area around the townsite, ca. 1929. The Varney property is upper right of center. Extracted from the Maricopa County property ownership map for T3N R1E.

William and Lena Varney eventually expanded their holdings in Section 23, acquiring the east half of the northwest quarter of the section from local ranchers Ernest and Elizabeth Cook in 1937. The Cooks had come to Arizona from Nebraska and, in addition to farming and ranching, engaged in real estate sales. The new acreage gave the Varneys almost 160 acres within the

<sup>37</sup> During this time, portions of west Phoenix were often referred to as Glendale as they were closer to that city.

<sup>38</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1914), 108:366, (1919), 143:401 and 144:154; "Water Right Application for Ownership," *Book of Water Rights* (1917), 6:23-24; "Quit Claim Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1927), 204:238.

two sections. Eight years later, the couple hired F. M. Holmquist to survey and subdivide the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter of the section—forty acres.<sup>39</sup>

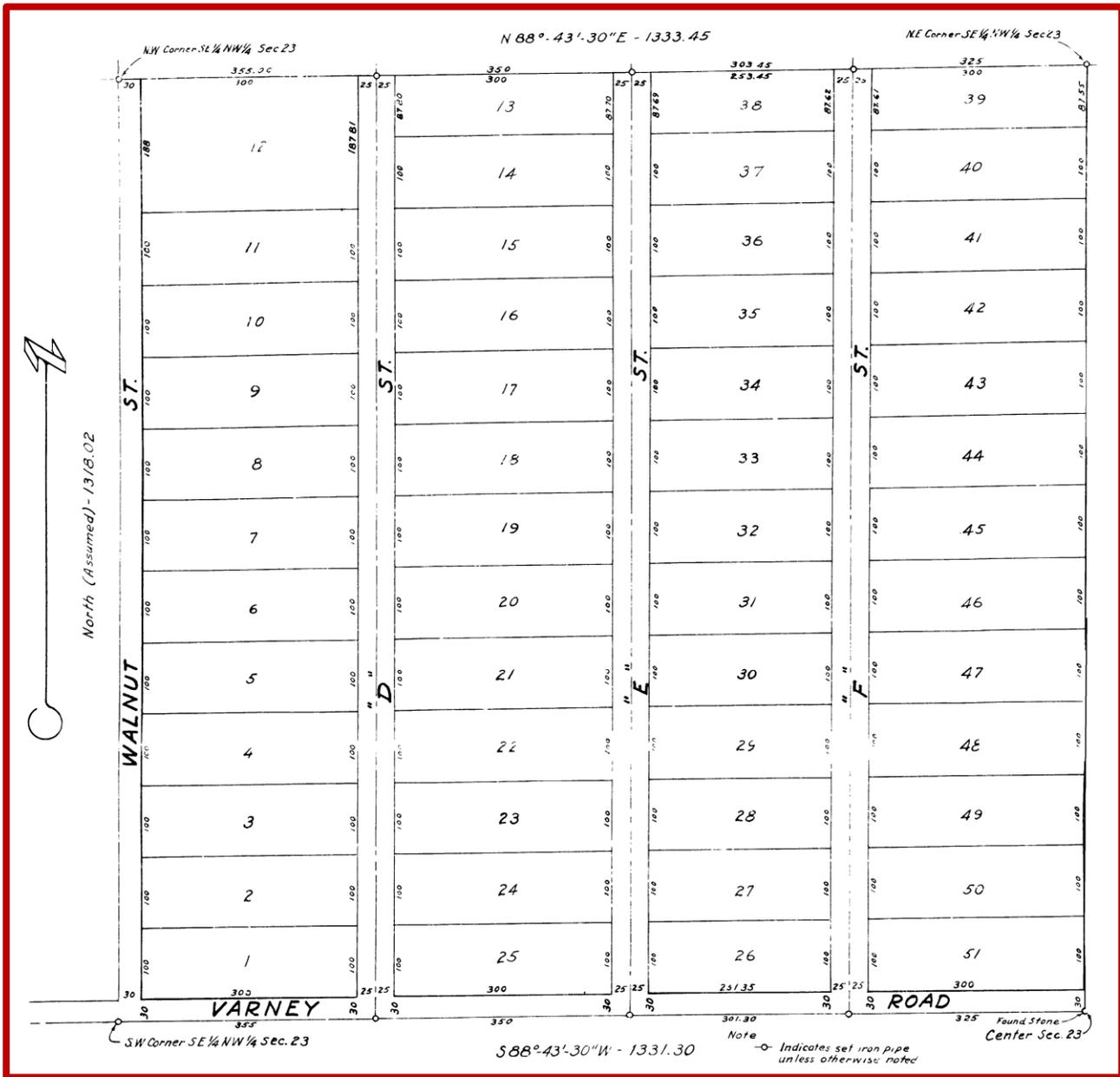


Figure 8. The Varney Tract. Edited by Vincent Murray.

Homequist’s efforts resulted in a plat called the Varney Tract, which was completed during the month of January 1945, and filed with the Maricopa County Recorder’s Office on February 6 (see figure 8). The new tract was bounded on the west by Walnut Street (81<sup>st</sup> Avenue), which extended north from the townsite of Peoria and on the south by Varney Street, which

<sup>39</sup> “Warranty Deed” *Book of Deeds* (1937), 302:523.

extended east from High School Street in Peoria Heights. The north and east borders were not delineated on the plat by streets, but later became Kirby Street and 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The tract consisted of four rows of lots, 250 to 300 feet wide, separated by three, fifty-foot wide streets. The subdivision contained fifty-one lots measuring one hundred feet wide, except along the northern edge where they narrowed to around eighty-seven feet. An exception was lot 12 at the northwestern corner of the plat. It measured 187 feet wide, the equivalent of two lots. Besides Walnut Street, the streets in the subdivision were labeled D Street (80<sup>th</sup> Drive) E Street (80<sup>th</sup> Avenue), and F Street (79<sup>th</sup> Drive), which probably corresponded to a plat that was never filed. Shortly after filing the plat with the county recorder, the Varneys transferred their interests in the subdivision to the Arizona Title Guarantee and Trust Company, retaining Lot 12 for themselves.<sup>41</sup>

John L. Meyer, a local realtor, provided the watering system after the county board of supervisors granted him a franchise. However, sewer connections were not yet an option. Septic tanks, and on some properties, outhouses, were the norm. Peoria was unincorporated and public services were limited, especially so for the Varney Tract, which was separated from the residential area of Peoria by a mile of farmland.<sup>42</sup>

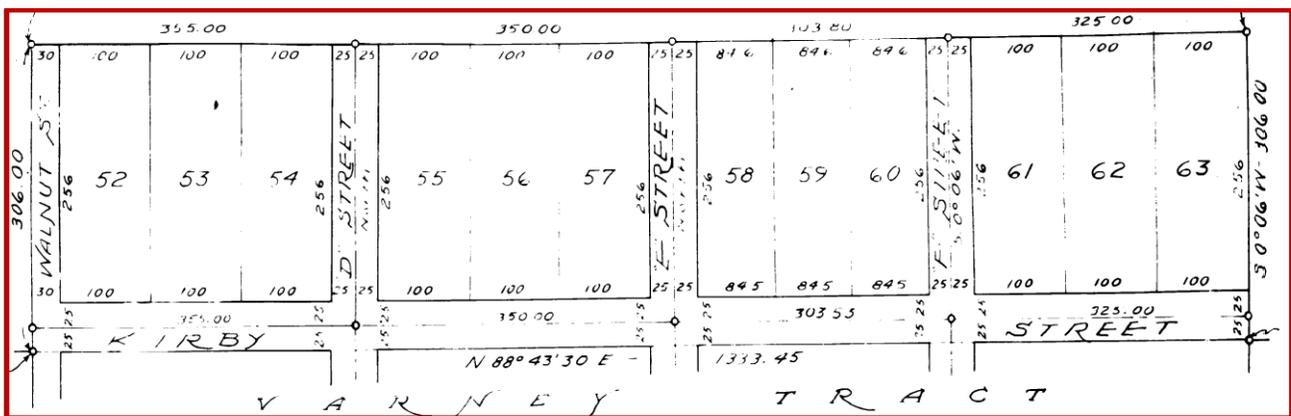


Figure 9. Varney Tract, Plat 2. Edited by Vincent Murray.

In May the following year, the Varneys recorded a second plat, which was called the Varney Tract, Plat 2. It was created from the southern 306 feet of the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 23, directly north of the original plat. Also surveyed by Holmquist,

<sup>40</sup> "Varney Tract," *Book of Maps* (1945), 30:11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*; "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1945), 299:467.

<sup>42</sup> "County Grants Water Franchise," *Arizona Republic*, 13 February 1945, O5; *Board of Supervisor Meeting Minutes* (1945), 29:69-70; *Sharing Devilish High Jinks*, *Arizona Republic*, 29 October 1993, Glendale Community, 2.

Plat 2 added twelve lots, numbered 52 through 63, and measuring one hundred feet wide and 256 feet long. Kirby Street separated the two subdivisions, and the new plat extended the streets from its predecessor. Plat 2 was also deeded to Arizona Title Guarantee and Trust Company that summer.<sup>43</sup>

Within five years, approximately sixty homes were built or under construction in the two subdivisions; this does not mean that the subdivisions were almost full. Within the tracts, many of the individual lots were subdivided creating multiple parcels, as well as higher occupational density. Other lots remained undeveloped, yet at least 50 percent of the subdivisions was developed for residential and, perhaps, small scale agricultural use. William and Lena Varney followed the trend and split Lot 12, selling a parcel to Myrle and Jamie Noack in 1948. They split the lot again in 1954, selling the two remaining lots to Thomas and Mamie Moore.<sup>44</sup>

After the creation of the Varney Tracts, the Varneys continued to farm their land north of Varney Tracts until the late 1950s. Around 1960, they decided to homestead again in Alaska. William worked with his son Dale, who was also homesteading, and cleared the land of buffalo grass and brush and planting vegetables and grain, while Lena settled into a comfortable regimen of canning berries, vegetables, salmon, and moose meat. William and his son Dale received a patent on 160 acres each near the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in 1963.<sup>45</sup>

## Historic Resources

The Varney Tracts are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under the context of community planning and development for their association with the evolution of residential subdivision development in Peoria during the years 1945-1970.<sup>46</sup> While the historic residential properties associated with the history of the Varney Tracts have not been identified within this report, guidance for evaluation of such properties may be found with two previously developed reports for the preservation of historic properties in the city of Peoria.

The first report, *Peoria, Arizona: Historic Resource Survey*, was prepared by Robert Carriker and Melanie Sturgeon in 1997 and focused primarily on historic residential properties within the

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<sup>43</sup> "Warranty Deed," *Book of Deeds* (1946), 527:305-306.

<sup>44</sup> "Warranty Deed" (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder's Office, 1948), Docket 166:419-420, (1954), Docket 1328:493-494, and (1955), Docket 1514:404.

<sup>45</sup> "Warranty Deed" (1958), Docket 2509:160-161; *Serial Patent* (1963), AKA049395; "Pioneering Runs In Blood Of Couple, Wed 50 Years," *Arizona Republic*, 20 November 1962, 15.

<sup>46</sup> This historic context can also be used outside of the boundaries of the Varney Tracts, which would extend the period of significance.

original town boundaries (between 87th and Grand avenues and Washington and Monroe streets). Since the Carriker-Sturgeon report was developed in 1997, the survey's date range ended at 1947, the then-fifty-year age requirement of the National Register. The historic buildings evaluated were primarily designed in the National Folk or bungalow style, with cost given the greatest consideration. Wood framing was ubiquitous, with clapboard or stucco sheathing. Gable fronts were also popular.<sup>47</sup>

In 2006, Jodey Elsner wrote the second report entitled *City of Peoria Historic Property Survey Update*. As the title suggests, Elsner updated and expanded on the 1997 report, offering suggestions for the conservation of the downtown area and adding to the inventory of National Register eligible properties previously ineligible under the 1997 report.<sup>48</sup>

Though this report does not focus on Peoria's historic urban core, the period of significance for the Varney Tracts, 1945 to 1970, overlaps the tail end of the historic period of the two aforementioned reports and it is possible there are similarities in residential building designs found in both locations. Given the time frame for development, National Folk and Ranch style homes are the likeliest residential property styles to be found, though a late model bungalow or Period Revival Style house may exist within the tracts.

### **Registration Requirements**

For buildings and structures to be eligible under Criterion A in the area of significance of "Community Planning and Development," they must retain the essential physical features that made up their character or appearance during the period 1945-1970. To qualify, the integrity requirements for buildings and structures with important historic associations may be less stringent than those nominated for their architectural significance alone; however, they must possess features that convey the location, materials, feeling, and the requisite association.

Under this criterion, setting may be less important to convey the feeling and association, though the buildings and structures must be in their original locations. Properties may also display evidence of historical function, such as outbuildings or, possibly, irrigation structures. The original fabric and texture of buildings and structures must be evident, as should significant features of original design.

If the property has been rehabilitated, the historic materials and significant features must have been preserved; it must be the actual resource and not a re-creation. A building or structure

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Carriker and Melanie Sturgeon, *Peoria, Arizona: Historic Resource Survey* (Phoenix: Arizona State Parks, State Historic Preservation Office, 1997), 36.

<sup>48</sup> Jodey Elsner, *Historic Resource Survey Update: Peoria, Arizona* (City of Peoria, 2006), 1-8.

that has been significantly altered by incompatible additions, the application of materials inconsistent with the historic period in which they were constructed, or the removal of significant architectural details, is excluded from eligibility under this criterion.

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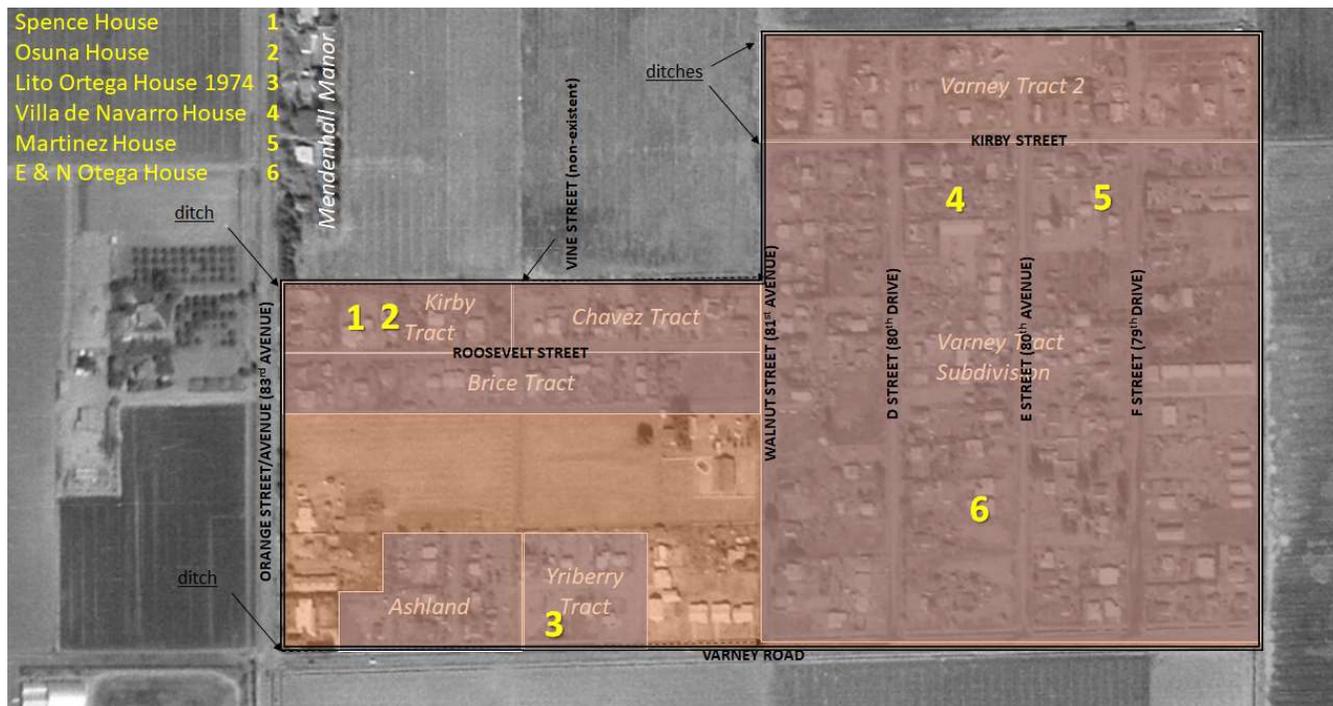
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# THE PEOPLE OF THE VARNEY TRACT

## Introduction

The following report is a supplement to the “Varney Tracts Historic Research Report” and is based on interviews with residents of the area: Jean Spence of (redacted) ; Lito Ortega of (redacted) ; and Ricardo and Socorro Martinez of (redacted) . Their shared information is enhanced by historical research of local newspaper articles and public documents at Maricopa County and the National Archives and Records Administration. Historian Vincent Murray conducted the interviews with assistance from Eva Osuna. The summaries of those interviews are at the end of this report.



Map of the Varney Tract neighborhood, ca. 1969. Irrigation ditches also parallel the north-south streets. The numbered properties are mentioned within this report. Based on an aerial map courtesy of the Flood Control Historic of Maricopa County. Edited by Vincent Murray.

## The People of the Varney Tract

After the platting of the Varney Tract, other small subdivisions were created in the nearby area. John L. Meyer, who owned the franchise for the water system, created the Meyer Tract in the fall of 1947, one year after expanding his water service area to include Varney Tract 2 and other proximate developments. Meyer Tract, located an eighth of a mile north of Peoria Avenue, contained eleven lots—two facing D Street (80<sup>th</sup> Drive) and the rest facing Grant Street.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer was a real estate broker, but subdividing land for residential development could be performed by anyone willing to hire a surveyor, though enlisting a title agency to manage the process was quite helpful. For example, in 1948, Peoria Postmaster Wilcie Stone (1935 to 1973) and her husband Charles, created Edward’s Addition just south of Peoria Heights. Named for Wilcie’s parents, William and Nezzie Edwards, in addition to an unneeded apostrophe in the name, the plat included two blocks, with thirty-one lots, between Orange Avenue (83<sup>rd</sup> Avenue) and the railroad tracks.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Meyer Tract,” *Book of Maps* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder’s Office, 1947), 39:44; *Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Clerk of the Board, 1946), 29:677, and 725-726.

<sup>2</sup> “Edward’s Addition to Peoria, Arizona,” *Book of Maps* (1948), 43:15; “Warranty Deed,” *Docket* (Phoenix: Maricopa County Recorder’s Office, 1948), 247:27 and (1949), 359:339; “Peoria Couple Wed 50 Years,” *Arizona Republic*, 8 September 1947, 4, “Peoria’s Mrs. Postmaster Promotes Things To The Letter,” 25 May 1952, V.3, and “Woman postmaster leaving Peoria job,”

Merchant Charles Robinson and his wife Gertrude created the Ashland subdivision in 1948. Located 155 feet east of Orange Avenue, the subdivision consisted of ten lots—two facing Varney Road and four on each side of Ash Street (82<sup>nd</sup> Drive). Charles Brice, the owner of the Peoria Hardware store, and his wife Violet used the services of the Arizona Title Guarantee & Trust Company to create their subdivision in 1949. Laid out between Walnut Street (81<sup>st</sup> Avenue) on the east and Orange Street (which was also known as Orange Avenue) on the west, the Brice Tract consisted of a row of twenty lots on the south side of Roosevelt Street, except for two on each end facing Walnut and Orange. Vine Street (82<sup>nd</sup> Ave) split the tract in two, and an irrigation ditch ran along an easement on the north side of the subdivision and adjacent to the street.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the subdivisions that preceded it, the Brice Tract came with a restrictive covenant: “None of said property, or any part thereof, shall be leased, let, sold or transferred to, or occupied by, anyone who is, or whose spouse is, or the members of whose family are, of the Negro or African Race.”<sup>4</sup> Based on diligent research of the early purchasers of the lots within the tract, it appears that this covenant remained in place, at least during the early years of the subdivision.

On the same day the company recorded the Brice Tract, Arizona Title Guarantee & Trust also recorded the Kirby Tract. The title company likely named the subdivision for Luthenia Cox Kirby, who bought and sold real estate in the area. Located between Vine Street and Orange Street, and across Roosevelt Street from the Brice Tract, the Kirby Tract was half the size of the former with eight lots, five facing south to Roosevelt Street and three facing west to Orange Street. Similar to the Brice Tract, the Kirby Tract came with an irrigation ditch in an easement along the north line of the subdivision; it also came with the same race restriction covenant.<sup>5</sup>



**Donald and Jean Spence at their fiftieth anniversary in 1999. *Arizona Republic*. Don passed away in 2004.**

One of the first property owners in the Kirby Tract were Robert and Elva Spence. The Spences were from Oklahoma and came to Arizona for Robert’s health. They acquired Lots 4 and 5 from Arizona Title Guarantee & Trust in 1949, though the company did not record the Special Warranty Deed with the county recorder until 1960. After his health further deteriorated, Robert and Elva returned to Oklahoma. Their son Donald and his new wife Emiogene (“Jean”) assumed the mortgage and subsequent to Robert’s death in 1951, Elva deeded the property to the young couple.<sup>6</sup>

According to Jean, she met Donald in 1948 when he was an aircraft mechanic at the Litchfield Naval Air Facility. She was also from Oklahoma, but came to Peoria by way of Arkansas in 1940, when she was eight years old. After they arrived, she lived with her family in the desert and her parents Alda and Meda Boen operated Boen’s Café in town. Jean and Donald married in 1949 and moved to his parents’ house the following year.<sup>7</sup>

16 June 1973, C4; *Records of Appointments of Postmasters* (Washington: National Archives and Record Administration, 1973), 432.

<sup>3</sup> “Ashland,” *Book of Maps* (1948), 44:1 and Brice Tract (1949), 45:38; *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940* (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940), Enumeration District 7-121:1B; “Partial Release of Mortgage,” *Docket* (1949), 362:61 and “Warranty Deed,” (1949), 362:62.

<sup>4</sup> “Declaration of Restrictive Covenants,” *Docket* (1949), 362:63.

<sup>5</sup> “Kirby Tract,” *Book of Maps* (1949), 45:27; “Declaration of Restrictive Covenants,” *Docket* (1949), 362:60.

<sup>6</sup> “Disclaimer Deed,” *Docket* (1951), 842:209, “Warranty Deed,” (1951), 842:241, and “Special Warranty Deed,” (1960), 3493:117.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Jean Smith and Eva Osuna, March 23, 2017.

Next door to the Spences lived Eddie and Aurora “Chubby” Osuna. The Osunas were married in 1945 and purchased Lot 6 in the Kirby Tract four years later. They lived together in the house until divorcing in 1963, when Eddie moved out. Chubby stayed in the home and became well-known in the neighborhood for her cooking. Her daughter Eva still owns the home.<sup>8</sup>

In 1951, Arizona Title Guarantee & Trust recorded the Chavez Tract, which mirrored the Kirby Tract and was also opposite the Brice Tract. The subdivision received its name from Anastacio “Earl” Chavez and his wife Amelia. Earl owned the El Paso chain of stores, one of which was in Peoria in the building now known as the Hood Building. Unlike the Brice and Kirby Tracts, the Chavez Tract did not have race covenants.<sup>9</sup>

Though the Varney Tracts are two separate subdivisions, along with the Brice, Kirby, and Chavez Tracts, they are collectively referred to by residents as the Varney Tract. This greater Varney Tract neighborhood also includes the Ashland subdivision and Yriberry Tract—platted in 1959 by Francois and Emma Yriberry—and some of the informally subdivided properties in the nearby area. It does not, however, include then-contemporary developments such as Edward’s Addition, the Meyer Tract, or Mendenhall Manor, which Phoenix Title and Trust Company recorded in 1951 along Orange Street just south of Cactus Road.<sup>10</sup>



**Aurora “Chubby” Osuna passed away in 2004. According to those that knew her, she was known for her green chile burritos, tamales, and salsa. *Arizona Republic*.**

The cohesion of the Varney Tract neighborhood is due to its prolonged settlement by Mexican Americans and others who came to the area to work on the farms. During the early years of development in the neighborhood, new property owners often lived in canvas Army surplus tents while building their homes. For this reason, according to Eva Osuna, who grew up next to the Spences, locals also call the area “Barrio Hilacha.” The term *barrio* is a Spanish term for “neighborhood” but *hilacha* is a tad obscure—it literally means “loose thread.” However, in this context the translation is closer to “threadbare” or, more succinctly, “rags” coined from the often-tattered canvas tents of early residents. The temporary tent dwelling experience was quite common as exemplified by the Ortega family.<sup>11</sup>

The Ortegas were migrant agricultural workers, an almost ubiquitous trade for the people who lived in the Varney Tract neighborhood. Like their neighbors, they traveled seasonally to various areas in the Southwest to harvest crops. According to Lito Ortega, his father Eulalio immigrated to the United State from 1909 at the age of three. Though a toddler, Eulalio traveled with his parents, Jose and Francisca, and siblings from one employment opportunity to another. The

<sup>8</sup> “Marriage Affidavit,” *Maricopa County Marriage Records* (Phoenix: Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, 1945), 93:27; “Special Warranty Deed,” *Docket* (1952), 926:431; “Divorces Asked,” *Arizona Republic*, 20 February 1963, 41 and “Obituaries,” 13 February 1989, B4. Note: Eddie’s brother Johnny served on the city council and the city renamed Washington Park to Osuna Park in his honor.

<sup>9</sup> “Chavez Tract,” *Book of Maps* (1951), 49:35; “Warranty Deed,” *Docket* (1950), 690:419.

<sup>10</sup> “Mendenhall Manor,” *Book of Maps* (1951), 49:42.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jean Smith and Eva Osuna.

1920 census recorded the family working in the Laveen area and living in a camp in the dry Salt River bed. A decade later, they were living in Scottsdale on McDowell Road, where Eulalio and nineteen-year old Natividad “Nati” Rivera became the parents of Francisco Manuel Ortega in 1934. Three more children followed, two sons Eulalio, Jr. and Fernando, and a daughter named Rosa who gave her older brother the appellation “Lito,” a truncated version of Manuelito—little Manuel.<sup>12</sup>

In 1940, Eulalio, Nati, and their children briefly lived in the Imperial Valley, California, before returning to the Phoenix area to live and work on a ranch run by Japanese American Hiroshi Jack Suda near 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Glendale Avenue. After World War II began, Suda and his family were sent to an internment camp, so the Eulalio moved his family to 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Thomas Road. From there, in 1945, they moved to Peoria. Though Nati wanted a pre-built home, Eulalio wanted to build one. After buying Lot 22 in the Varney Tract subdivision, the Ortega family moved into a tent on the property. Soon, Eulalio, aided by his brothers and eleven-year old son, Lito, built a block home at what is now (redacted) .<sup>13</sup>

The Varney Tract was ideal for farm laborers because of the cotton industry in the area. Along with his family, Lito worked in the fields around Peoria, but then joined the Army. After he returned, he began working in construction. His parents subdivided Lot 22 into four parcels and he acquired one of the lots. He bought a house, moved it to the lot, and eventually lived in it. His brother Fernando and sister Rosa later acquired Lot 22 parcels, as well.<sup>14</sup>



**The Martinezes in 1984. Socorro (left) is dressed for a performance as a member of Los Matachines Danza Guadalupana, a traditional religious dance group. Her mother founded the organization. *Arizona Republic*.**

Santa Maria de Socorro Encarnacion Villa Navarro came to Arizona around 1957 or 1958, by way of Texas. She was born in Chihuahua and was only two when her mother immigrated to the United States in 1950. At the time, her mother Juliana Villa de Navarro was accompanied by three of her children: Jesus Jose, Felipe, and Socorro. The family was part of a larger group of twenty or so families that came to the U.S. for work in the agricultural fields.<sup>15</sup>

In 1958, Juliana and another son, Jacinto, who immigrated to the U.S. six years earlier, bought the east half of Lot 14 in the Varney Tract subdivision. With the help of her friend Loreto Villa, Juliana built a home on the property. Her brothers built two more houses on the lot. Each of the children lived in these houses until they could get out on their own.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1920), Enumeration 36, 18A; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930), Enumeration District 0117, 14A; Interview with Lito Ortega, April 28, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lito Ortega; “Warranty Deed,” *Book of Deeds* (1945), 449:345-346.

<sup>14</sup> “Warranty Deed,” *Docket* (1961), 3564:124 and (1972), 9889:77; “Deed of Gift,” *Docket* (1975), 11441:731.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Socorro and Ricardo Martinez with Eva Osuna, July 26, 2017; *Applications for Nonresident Alien's Border Crossing Identification Cards Made at El Paso, Texas* (Washington: Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1952), 1489.

<sup>16</sup> “Agreement,” *Docket* (1958), 2473:259-261 and “Joint Tenancy Deed,” (1963), 4847:142-143.

Socorro and her husband, Ricardo Martinez, lived in one the houses on her mother's property until they could afford their own home. Ricardo also immigrated to the U. S. from Mexico and came to Arizona by way of Texas. The couple wed in 1976, and in 1981 moved from Juliana's property to a lot across the street. Socorro's sister Maria de los Angeles also acquired a home down the street.<sup>17</sup>

When the subdivisions with the Varney Tract neighborhood were platted, open irrigation laterals were located next to many of the lots allowing for flood irrigation, a typical feature for properties throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area where residential development replaced farming. Properties needing access to the street, required bridges over the open ditches. Though seen as a hazard to some, the benefit of the open ditches was the ability for property owners to perform small scale agriculture, such as planting gardens and small orchards, and raising a variety of farm animals.

According to the Martinezes, the irrigation infrastructure was damaged in conjunction with street and other improvements, and the repair cost was prohibitive. Therefore, city water replaced flood irrigation and many discontinued watering lawns and gardens because of the increased cost. Jean Spence pointed out that properties along Roosevelt Street would have to allow the city an easement for a sidewalk, which they chose not to do. In her case, the irrigation lateral ran behind her property, but it is no longer in use.<sup>18</sup>



**The house that Lito Ortega built**

In 1974, when Lito Ortega bought his current property at (redacted), there was a cotton field across the street and he built a bridge over the ditch on Varney Road. Before buying the property, Lito approached then Peoria Mayor Manuel Leyva about buying a lot in Leyva's newly (1972) created Leyva Estates north of Kirby Tract. Leyva told him that he did not want a "chicken coup" built in his subdivision, a reference to shoddy construction. Instead, Lito bought

<sup>17</sup> "Administrator's Deed," *Docket* (1975), 11292:495 and "Joint Tenancy Deed," (1981), 15560:427.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Socorro and Ricardo Martinez with Eva Osuna and Interview with Jean Smith and Eva Osuna. Note: the infrastructure improvements referred to likely took place in late 1985 through early 1987 according to "5 Communities get grants for improvements," *Arizona Republic*, 10 June 1985, Extra 1 ES-C, and "Streetworks," 28 November 1985, Extra 2, 20 August 1986, Extra 2, 22 October, Extra 2, and 4 February 1987, Extra 2.

Lot 7 in the Yriberry Tract, and built his home there, and proudly boasts that it is as good as any house in Leyva Estates.<sup>19</sup>

Lito grew up with a limited eighth grade education but served his country in the military and learned construction, a skill that removed him from the stoop labor of the field and into a managerial position on large projects. Likewise, with Ricardo Martinez who went to Glendale Community College and worked for the Arizona Department of Transportation for over three decades before retiring. Socorro dropped out of school to work in the fields to financially assist her mother, whose own employment prospects were quite limited. She eventually became a social worker, a nursing assistant at the Peoria Central School, and worked at the day care center next to her mother's house. Jean Spence dropped out of high school to raise a family, but returned to graduate with a sister who was many years her junior. Along with her mother and Chubby Osuna, she gathered signatures for Peoria's incorporation. She later worked at Motorola, Kaiser, and Sperry Honeywell, where she retired after two decades.<sup>20</sup>

Though these individuals only represent a small number of Varney Tract neighborhood residents, they exemplify the type of people who moved into the greater Varney Tract area during the middle of the twentieth century. Research shows that the majority of residents within the area were employed in farm labor. Most were also from Mexico, or the children of parents from Mexico. However, there are several non-Hispanics that migrated from Oklahoma, including Native Americans.

The long-term residents have shared experiences, with early arrivals living in tents while erecting their houses. They used outhouses until septic systems could be installed or connections made to the city sewer system. Some performed stoop labor while working at an early age in the fields with their families, sometimes before and after school. They are the eye witnesses to the roads being paved, sewer lines installed, open ditches covered, and the surrounding farmlands giving way to residential subdivisions. While some residents moved on to other areas of the city, county, and state, and country, many stayed, adapting their properties to an evolving urban environment and their own changing needs; they built additions or additional houses, or subdivided their lots for their maturing children and extended families. Some of those who moved from the neighborhood stayed connected to their former neighbors. As Socorro Martinez notes, there are still people around who have known them since they were young.

## **Interview Summaries**

### Jean Spence with Eva Osuna

The interview was conducted with Eva Osuna at the home of Jean Spence on March 27, 2017. Jean provides details on how she and her husband, Donald, came to Varney Tract in 1949-1950. She talks about his parents, who originally owned the property, and hers who owned Boen's Café in town. She also describes the neighborhood infrastructure and her neighbors including Aurora "Chubby" Osuna. Chubby's daughter Eva talks about her mother and the *Barrio Hilacha*

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Lito Ortega.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; Interview with Ricardo and Socorro Martinez with Eva Osuna; Interview with Jean Spence with Eva Osuna.

name. The two shared stories about living in Peoria during the 1950s and how it evolved after incorporation.

### Lito Ortega

The interview was conducted at the Peoria Library on April 28, 2017. Lito talks about his family's migration to the Varney Tract in 1945. His parents Eulalio and Natividad Ortega were migrant farm laborers. They eventually settled in Tempe and built their home on Lot 22. Later, they subdivided and Lito acquired one lot and moved a house to it. Lito was undereducated, joined the military, and began working in the construction business.

### Socorro and Ricardo Martinez with Eva Osuna

The interview was conducted at the home of Eva Osuna on July 26, 2017. The Martinezes were both born in Mexico and both came to Arizona by way of Texas. Socorro was in Peoria first, her mother bought property in the 1950s and built their house with the help of a friend. They discuss their respective backgrounds and Socorro's mother, and how things have changed in the neighborhood. A discussion on the matachines, a traditional religious dance group, is at the end of the interview.