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Journal

Institute of Urban and Regional Development

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Publication Date

1982-03-01

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Working Paper No. 374

March 1982

Institute of Urban and Regional Development
University of California, Berkeley

OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT
CASE STUDY: PRESCOTT AND SOUTH PRESCOTT, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

by Allan B. Jacobs

PREFACE

It is possible to tell a lot about a city or neighborhood just by looking. Clues that are visible in the physical environment--everything from houses and stores to people to doorbells--can often be pieced together to tell the history and dynamics of an area: when it was built; for whom; the physical, social and economic changes that have taken place; who lives there now; what major issues and problems exist; whether the area is vulnerable to rapid change; and even something about how the area may change in the future. You may not be able to tell everything you would like to know about these questions, but you can tell a great deal.

Increasingly in recent years, quantitative data and qualitative surveys--census reports, traffic studies, opinion polls, and the like--are used to assess existing conditions, growth, and

change in the urban environment. Without challenging the importance or validity of those research techniques we believe it is equally important to cultivate our skills of observation. For in reality, people who live in urban environments, including policy makers, urban planners, designers, and other professionals, take clues from the physical environment every day, whether consciously or subconsciously. Often they act, appropriately or not, on the messages gained. The more consciously systematic the process the better. It is possible, we believe, to develop the process of reading the urban environment into a deliberate, analytical technique. That is the subject of this current inquiry.

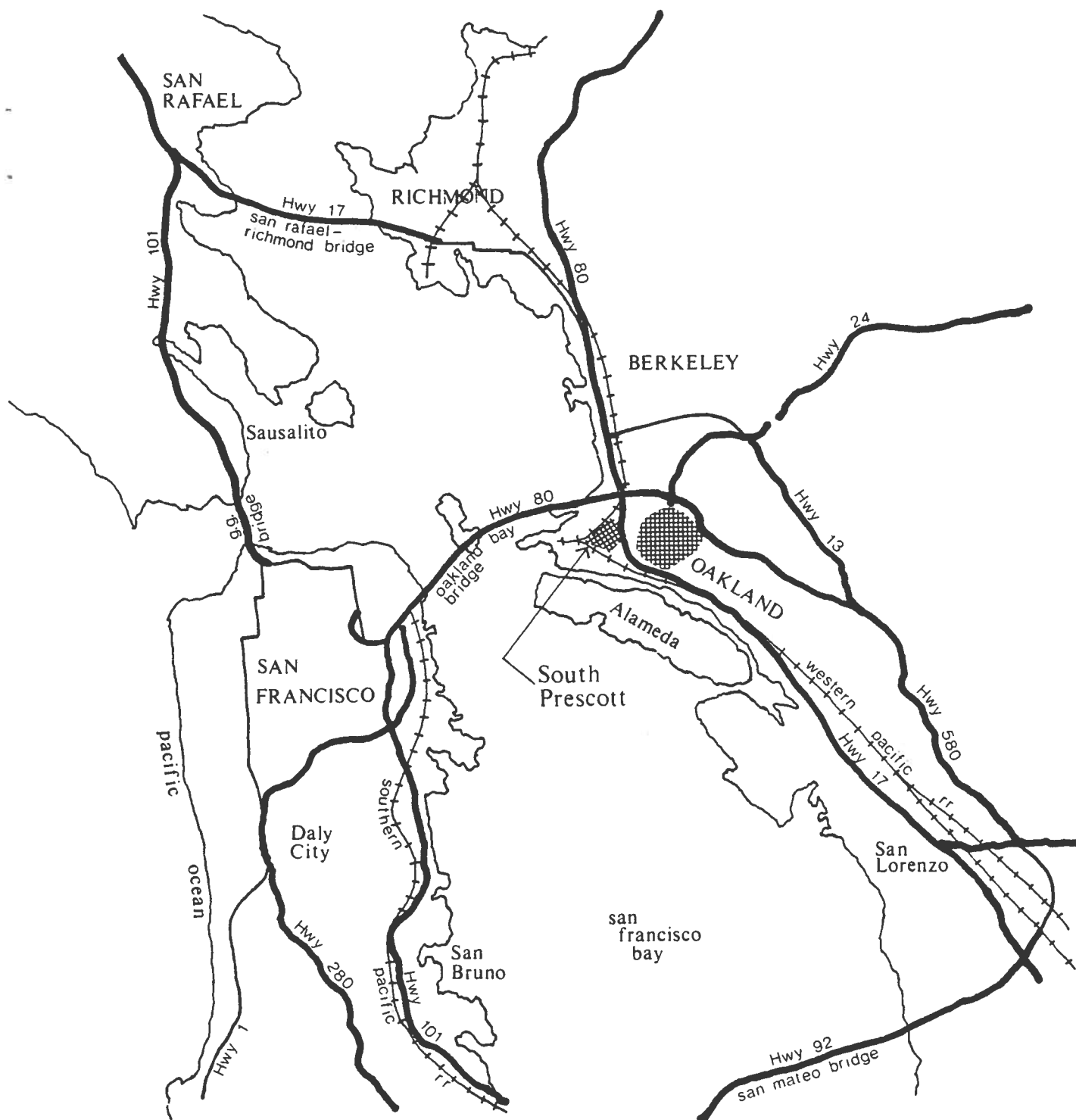
The purpose of this project is to develop and test a technique for observing and diagnosing change in the urban environment. As a first step, some case study "experiments" have been conducted, one of which is reported here. They involve a walking field trip by one to three observers in an urban area that is unfamiliar to them. A staff person in a local planning agency has been asked to choose an area that is urban, can be walked in two to three hours, is well known to people in the department or community, and for which data is available. The observers are given only a street

map on which the area they are to observe has been delineated. Two to three hours are spent in the area observing and interpreting what is seen. Short discussions with people on the street are permitted but these are not to be a major part of the inquiry. If someone says, "hello," or asks a stranger what they are doing, the field observer might well respond and a short exchange can take place; it is permissible to ask an occasional question of a passerby.

At the end of the walk the observers are permitted up to an hour to mull over and summarize what has been seen and to think about what it might mean. A general analysis of the area--its history, changes that have taken place, who lives there now, current issues and trends, and possible future issues--is presented immediately after the walk and mulling over period to people who are supposedly knowledgeable about the area. Usually they are members of the local city planning department staff. Notes of the presentations are taken.

Comparing the conclusions to both the staff members' knowledge of the area and with other available data, the field observers can assess the extent to which they were correct in their

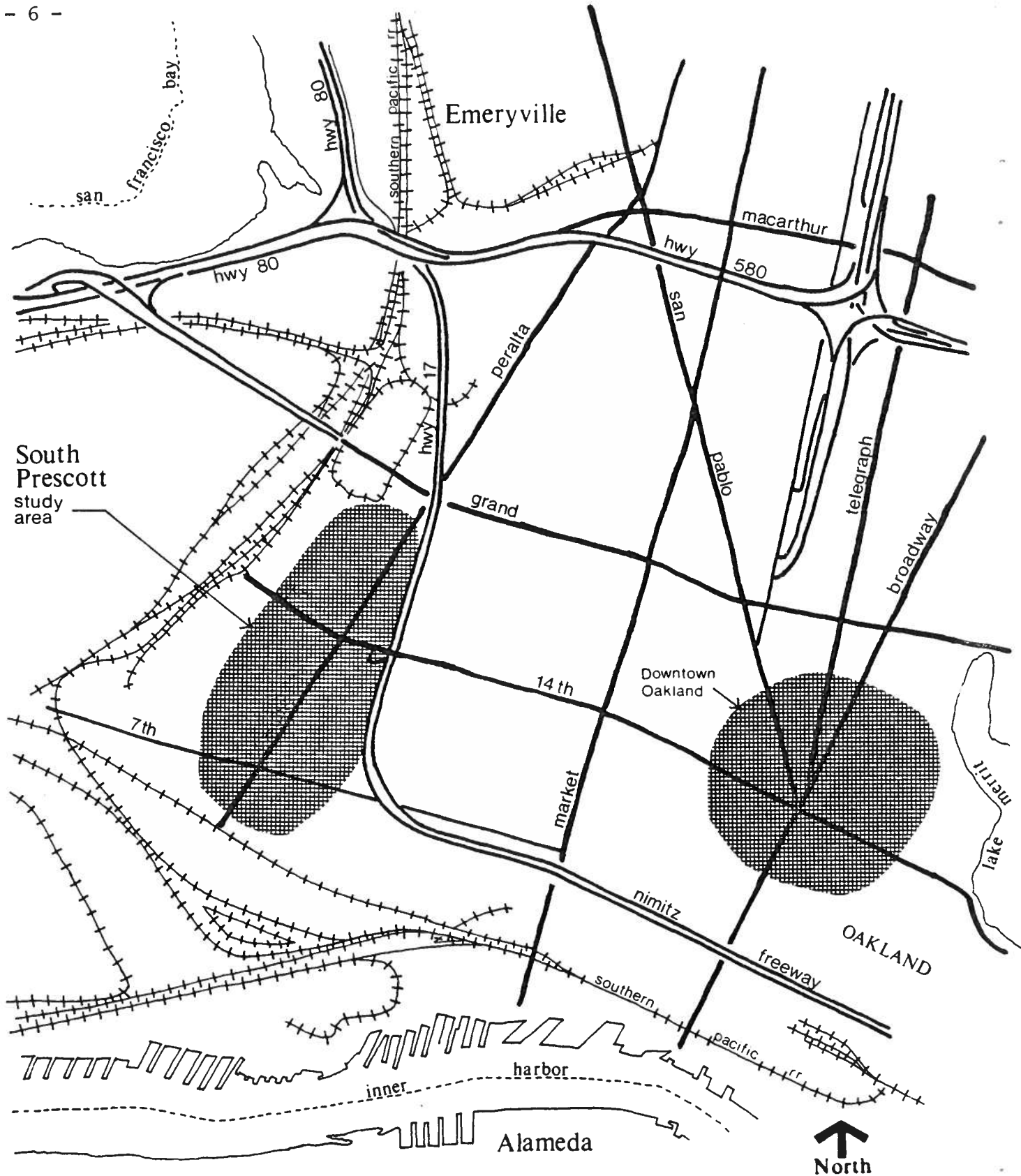
diagnosis. They can also determine which physical clues were most revealing and reliable, how clues were combined to help draw conclusions, the importance of personal knowledge, and some of the limitations and pitfalls of the method. The evaluation of the case studies becomes the basis for developing the observation process into a conscious analytical technique for analyzing change in cities.



SOUTH PRESCOTT - WEST OAKLAND CALIFORNIA

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 miles

SCALE

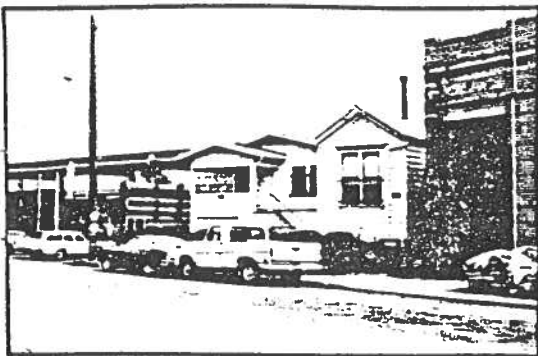


SOUTH PRESCOTT - WEST OAKLAND CALIFORNIA

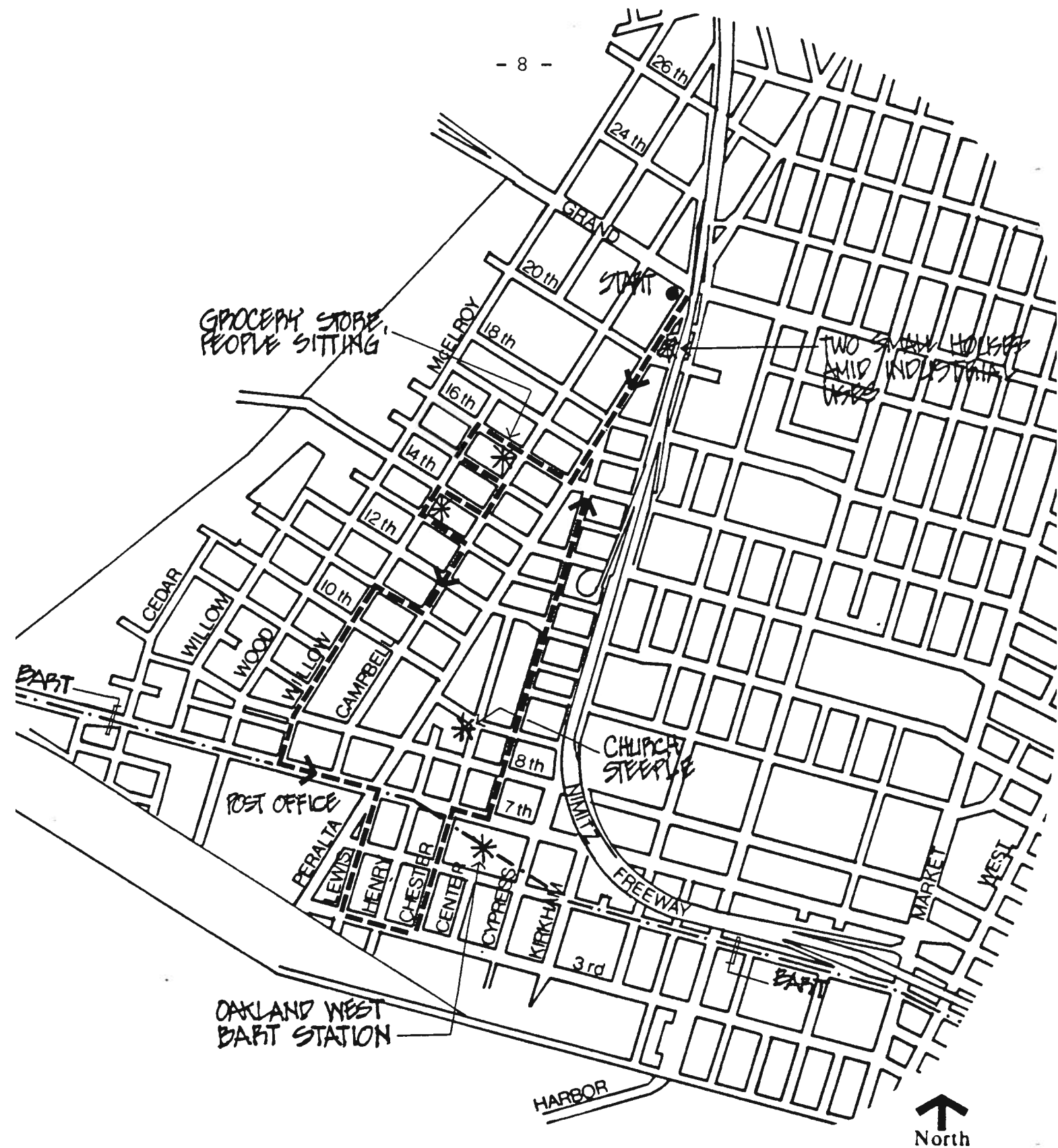
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OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING THE PRESCOTT AREA

Entering the Prescott area of Oakland at Peralta and West Grand, on a warm, sunny morning in early May, 1981, there is, almost immediately, a sense of place. There are strong boundaries and edges; the Nimitz Freeway running overhead on the east, West Grand Avenue running west to the Bay Bridge and east, under the freeway, to God knows where, the railroad beyond the large industrial and warehousing buildings to the west. From this location Prescott appears as an old industrial area, not neat or tidy and landscaped like many contemporary so-called industrial parks, but an old industrial area of perhaps the 1920s with a lot of individually built and occupied structures, with a somewhat down-at-the heels appearance, but showing signs of a lot of activity (trucks, cars parked, lights on inside the buildings, the sounds of work inside, and more). Heavy freeway traffic produces a lot of noise. Matson trucks and containers are a reminder of the port beyond. This must be a major employment area.



On the east side of Peralta there are two modest sized, older houses (older than World War I; seen quickly there is a bit of Victorian sense to them) sandwiched between an industrial building



WALKING ROUTE IN SOUTH PRESCOTT WEST OAKLAND

0 400 800 1200 feet
SCALE

and a pipe storage yard. The houses are well-maintained, maybe painted within the last ten years. The hedges on both are neatly and identically clipped, probably by a single owner, and there are iron grilles at windows and doors. Did the houses come before, after, or at the same time as the industrial development? Probably before, but maybe not by a lot. If that was so then who was the housing for? Not wealthy people.



Looking toward the bay, westward, there is a sense of openness. A raised railroad platform, with canopy, suggests that the Oakland rail station is there. On Center, which intersects at an acute angle with Peralta (and which must be part of a different grid development to the south), there are old, small houses. They are not in good condition. On 17th Street, east of Peralta, the houses are good-sized, two storey, on individual lots, suggesting original middle-class housing. Most are well maintained. Does this suggest owner occupants? Low cyclone fences mark the front property line. There are new walks on part of 17th as there are on Center. A friendly black man wonders what a white person with note paper is doing. He's a bit upset that when the new walks and curbs were put in "they" didn't make a curb cut for his house. The houses on 16th, still

south of Peralta are Victorian, similar to those on 17th, and suggest turn of the century construction.

West of Peralta, on 16th, there is a large, three storey, brick factory. It's semi-vacant. The housing on the other side of the street and beyond the factory is small. There's a "FOR SALE" sign. There was a fire (how long ago?) in one of the small houses and it is vacant. Why wasn't it repaired after the fire?



Black men and women sit outside of the corner market at Campbell and 16th.

What does "modest-sized" housing mean? Measure one or two by pacing the front dimension and estimating the length running back from the street. They come to 600 to 750 square feet. That seems small. Measure again. Same answer. That's really modest.

The housing varies; occupied, not occupied, cared for, not cared for. A mix.

All the people are black.

There is an abandoned park at 16th and Willow.

There is a boarded up house and signs that there was a fire (charred, black materials).



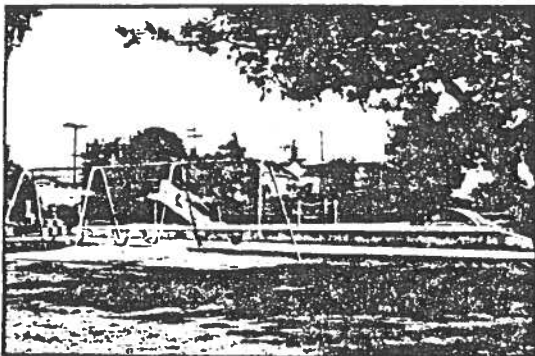
Cranes in the distance indicate, again, that the port is near by.

On 15th, three originally similar houses are now in very different condition; one has had a fire, one is well maintained, one is "medium."

There are new walks at 15th and Campbell, and signs of another fire.

Houses on Campbell, between 15th and 14th, appear to be of the same turn-of-the-century vintage (wood, Victorian details). They are small; some measure not much more than 600 square feet. The shrubs are well cared for. There is an older man at one of the houses. An owner? Are most of the houses owned? Maybe.

Another boarded up house at 14th and Campbell.



The park at Willow and 14th looks new, with recent equipment and landscaping. But an old tree suggests an earlier park. Has it been rehabilitated? With federal Community Development Block Grant funds? Is that the source of funding for the new walks and curbs?

There are indications of home industries: cars being fixed in yards; building materials in yards; signs. Does that suggest anything about incomes and employment over time?

There are some vacant industrial buildings.

Some buildings are out of plumb. Some need new roofs. Every now and then a single house is much larger than the others, but of the same general age. One has been rehabilitated recently at 13th and Campbell (new materials, new work).



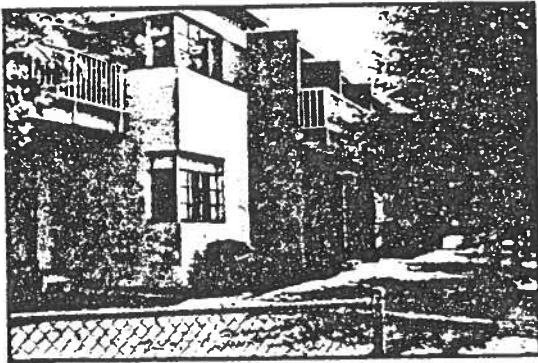
Continuing on Campbell, old men sit in front of houses behind low fences. There are many people on the street. There are toys. Again, there are new walks, with provisions for handicapped people to cross streets with relative ease.



The condition of houses on 11th seem better than the ones just seen. Maintenance is better. Some of the sizes are about 1,000 square feet per unit; larger than the earlier ones to the north. A corner grocery has a very modest inventory. Grapes are no more expensive here than in some San Francisco or Berkeley markets.

At Willow there is a man working on his house.

Throughout this journey, despite buildings that are boarded up or recently burned, despite houses in bad condition, with missing materials, old shingles, make-do repairs, vacancies, and a lot more, there has been a certain "neatness" to everything: not much trash on streets; yards generally cared for; people going about doing their business, even if the business is sitting and talking. A stranger knows he is a stranger, knows he is being observed, but rarely feels threatened, especially if he "minds his business." Where does the "neatness" feeling come from? What might it mean?



Along Willow between 8th and 9th the housing is multi-family on a large tract of land--a full block or more--and is of a single design and maintenance. This is low-income, public housing. The concrete block, the casement windows, the architectural style, the layout suggest late 1950s or early 1960s. So it has been there for a while. There have been "programs" here for a while. Grounds maintenance is a bit threadbare, but, overall, there are no glaring maintenance or vandalism indications. From the street there looks to be no graffiti on walls.

Cars in this part of the area are generally

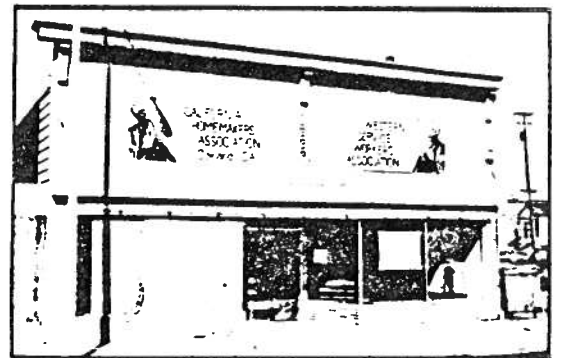
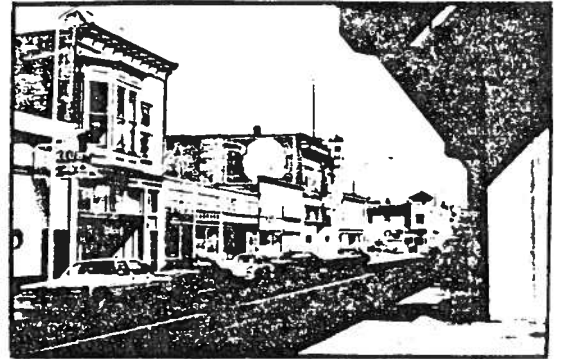
large.

Near 7th there are some very small apartments, measuring no larger than 300 square feet.

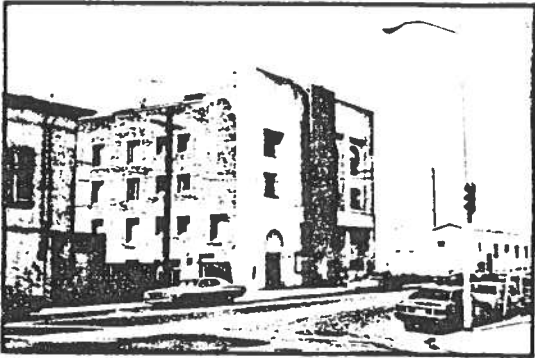
The Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) runs on an overhead structure above 7th street. On the south side of 7th there is a very large post office building. It is relatively new. Architectural style and the as yet unweathered surfaces suggest 1970s.

The north side of 7th is a different picture. Here there are many old commercial buildings set on the sidewalk. Many are boarded up. There are a lot of bars, but signs indicate that there were more, earlier. There was a movie house. It is closed and looks like it has been that way for a long time. There are store-front social services: California Homemakers Association; West Service Workers Association; "Here to Win, Here to Stay."

Might not 7th have been a major local commercial street? Maybe it served a larger area. Were there more stores on the other side of 7th, a side no longer there as a result of BART and post office construction? Perhaps it had not been a middle income shopping street for a long time, perhaps it never was (but all those buildings and



stores were once occupied) and so perhaps it was more vulnerable to easy public (or private) action than another area might have been.



On Peralta, just north of 7th, an old apartment house (maybe hotel) has been rehabilitated. A public program? Probably. People are standing and sitting near the entrance, among them one or two whites. Subsidized public housing, probably for elderly, is suggested.



Crossing 7th and moving south on Lewis a group of three very small houses is for sale for \$60,000. Each unit has from 500 to 700 square feet.

There are new curbs and walks at 5th and Lewis and newly planted trees (small, all of the same type). Some larger houses with 1,000 to 2,000 square feet are mixed with smaller units.

The railroad and industry take over south of 3rd. But there are sculptures and play equipment in the yard behind the industrial-type building at 3rd and Lewis.

Continuing east on 3rd, a look north on Henry Street finds small, well-maintained houses. There are trees and small fences. Homeowners as opposed to renters are suggested.

On the southern, railroad side of 3rd there are four small, well-maintained houses that look as though they might date from not long after the turn of the century. A white couple enters one of the units. What are the houses doing there? Were they associated directly with the railroad?

Chester Street is much like Henry Street. Here there are some Chicanos and some Asian people living. Relatively new to the area? A sign of things to come?

Housing conditions have varied remarkably. Public improvements, mostly in terms of new walks and curbs, but with some unified tree planting, too, are scattered throughout the area. There has been an improved park and some rehabilitated housing. Is there a non-concentrated, publicly sponsored and funded rehabilitation program throughout the whole area? Maybe. In any case there are signs of new life on this side of 7th. New small industries? New people?



Back on 7th there are a lot of sports cars in the BART parking lot. Two white men, in business suits get into cars and drive away. They are not likely to live in Prescott. Like others who park here they are probably commuters who live in more affluent areas. Residents know that. They can't

like it.

Beginning to move back to where this journey started, there is another public housing development between 7th and 8th, near Center. Beyond, on 8th, near Cypress, the houses are older and larger, for two families. They look as if they were built for middle-income families in the early part of the century. The yards are large. There is active gardening of them. Looking under the freeway, to the east, there is what looks to be a very large subsidized housing development. It's more recent than the public housing west of the freeway.

The houses on 9th are well-maintained. They sit behind low fences. The people range in age from young to old, both men and women. The good maintenance suggests home ownership.

The street width and direction change at Chester. Why? A result, in any case, is that the Light Church of Christ becomes the visual focus of 9th. The church tower is slender, and pleasant to see.

There are several houses raised on blocks at 9th and Chester. They seem to have been moved there and look as though they are being stored.

Why? Another sign of a public program? Who thought they were important enough to retain? Another indication of public involvement are signs of a tree-planting program, maybe earlier. The signs are of the uniformly spaced squares cut in sidewalks (even though there is no longer a tree in some of them), and the same kinds of trees, where they exist. Again, houses have front fences. They are generally well maintained on Chester, even if one is out of plumb. The curbs, gutters and walks are recent. A young girl is dropped off from a car. Coming home from school? A white boy in his teens, reasonably well-dressed, walks out of the house further along the street. There is a sense that he may not live there. What is the explanation for that feeling? Here too, there is a feeling that most of the houses are owner-occupied. It's the good maintenance and older people that suggest that conclusion.

The street pattern changes again at 12th. There is a large relatively new apartment structure at Center. Heading back toward Peralta there are a lot of teenagers and young men on the street. High unemployment rates are suggested. The quality of housing is less good moving north. More structures are out of plumb. Roofs need repair. Where work has been done on a roof it is

patch work: one fourth of a new roof and maybe some gutter work where a complete new shingling would be more appropriate. Owners, whether resident or absentee, don't have the money.

Summarizing and Interpreting

From looking at the Prescott area of Oakland for about two and one-half hours, as reported above, it seems possible to come to a number of conclusions about its history, who lives there now, present trends and issues, and even to speculate a little about what the future might bring. Later, we will try to determine whether the observations and conclusions are reasonably reflective of reality.

First, the very strong physical features that border the area--the Nimitz Freeway, the railroad to the north and west, and the industrial uses--suggest a strong sense of place. The area is well defined and it seems likely that its residents, whether they like the area or not, can identify with it easily. We think they might. Within the large area there might be three or more sub-areas that people may identify with or which have different socio-economic characteristics: the areas

south of the BART tracks and 7th street, the area west of Peralta and north of BART, the area east of Peralta. The small area north of 12th and east of Peralta may be another distinct sub-area. But while there may be sub-areas and sub-interests, we think that the area as a whole may be recognized by residents as a community.

Clearly the area is now almost totally black but it may not always have been that way. The architectural styles of so much of the housing (Victorian) suggest that development took place at the turn of the century, maybe earlier. Perhaps some of the development came by ex-San Franciscans who came across the bay after the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Despite a few large houses (particularly at corners) that suggest original landowners, most of the houses are quite small, and so the residents were never upper income people. The houses seem smaller closer to the railroad, suggesting higher incomes with greater distance. The development pattern of housing in relation to the railroad and water beyond suggest that residents and their jobs were originally oriented to local industries, including the railroad and the waterfront. Maybe industry and the housing came together, or perhaps

the industry came a bit later. Some of the industrial buildings look newer than the houses. In the 1920s some industry along streets like Peralta may have replaced residential development. The people would not have been well-to-do.

World War II may have brought an influx of black people. Many older people live there now and may well have been in the neighborhood a long time. The churches appear old and well-established.

BART tore up the once major shopping-entertainment street and it has never recovered. It would take a lot to revive the street and there are no signs of that happening. People do not have a good local shopping area. Across the street, the post office is from the late 60s or early 70s and may have been located there as part of a federal program to provide jobs near a high unemployment area. Even if that were so there appear to be other good reasons for the location: highway access to a large area as well as closeness to rail and water transport.

While the area's industry is active it does not appear to be expanding and may be declining. There is little new industrial construction apparent and there is a lot of vacant space.

Shipping may be an exception. There are a lot of containers stored in the area.

Public transit (beside BART) was not in evidence. The area, close to downtown, might once have been served by streetcars (on 14th, or 7th?).

Presently, one senses a high level of home ownership as suggested by single-family homes, apparent concern for maintenance of homes and yards (within people's means), and many older people who give a sense of having been in the houses a long time. It seems reasonable to speculate, too, that residents reflect older "main line" American cultural values associated with family, work, church, and property. A guess is that they are not politically radical, maybe "knowing" and cynical, but not radical.

This may be a relatively safe area by big-city standards. There are a lot of cyclone fences but they wouldn't keep a burglar away from a house. There are relatively few door and window grates and not too many "Beware of Dog" signs. On the other hand, maybe people just don't have the money for crime deterrents.

The area has probably been losing population for a long time and, despite efforts to the

contrary, the housing has diminished in both quality and amount. People haven't had the money to maintain it. The relative poorness of the area has made it vulnerable (not necessarily in a negative sense) to public programs, early evidence of which may be the two public housing developments.

Despite physical decline of some building, despite fires and vacant structures, there is an overall "neatness" to the area. Outward signs of vandalism are not apparent. If yards aren't manicured, neither are they overgrown. Streets are relatively clean. All of this suggests more than one of the following: people rooted in the community who know and care about it; a homeowner tradition; public programs. What about public programs?

There is evidence of public programs to improve the area that go back for a long time and of current efforts. Early public housing must have replaced earlier housing perceived by some to be in need of demolition. There are signs of early tree-planting programs and of early parks that were planned and built. There seems to have been code enforcement programs over the years.

Given the condition of housing and a relatively poor, black population this is the sort of

area that may once have been scheduled for clearance by city builders in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when they looked at a total city and did things like community renewal plans. This is the sort of area that might have been seen as too far gone for rehabilitation. But other areas may have had higher priority.

People may have "rebelled" against clearance or formal designation of an urban renewal project, even one with only spot clearance. This would have been in the late 1960s or early 1970s. But there is some sort of official program concentrated in this area. There are all those new walks and curbs, and new trees in some places, some recent housing rehabilitation, and some conversions of older buildings to publicly supported housing. Perhaps there is a housing rehabilitation program that makes improvement loans available to owners at low interest rates, but we doubt that it is a mandatory program, otherwise more extensive property improvements would be in greater evidence. Federal Community Development Block Grant funds are probably the source of recent public improvements. We suspect, too, that there are programs that deal with such matters as job development and social services rather than physical improvements. There was a child care

operation on 7th. But we wonder how extensive such programs are. We would have expected to see more evidence of them.

There is likely a strong, active citizen organization in this area, perhaps more than one and perhaps some that are oriented to smaller sub-areas. Community action and involvement would have been seen as necessary to stop unwanted programs, to maintain political pressures for desired improvements, or both. If there has been a lot of involvement to date, or earlier, the people could be "tired" now, in 1981, especially with diminished funding for both physical improvements and for social services. If that is so, then the area is more vulnerable to change than has been the case in recent years.

From appearances there has been very little private investment in new construction for a long time, maybe 30 years. A slow decline of population and condition and amount of housing is possible. Gentrification does not appear to be an issue but residents may well be fearful of it. They would be afraid of any major public project. If change occurs it will come slowly, perhaps from the edges. The area south of 7th would seem most likely.

Based upon a few hours of observation this is the sort of area that public policymakers, city planners among them, might have problems with. The people and the area could use help. To the extent that significant private investment can be helpful it isn't very likely. You can't (and hopefully don't want to) clear the area and even if you did what would be the market for the land? Industrial and port expansion? Maybe. Not much else. Are present expenditures effective? The answers may lie in the nature of the area, its people, and time. It is a pleasant living environment, one with remarkable old houses, many of them small, and a certain spriteliness and neatness despite its problems. The people have been there for a long time, are probably active, and seem to care for it. So why not just wait? Talk to the people, do what you can in a lot of small ways, and just wait for a while. A major issue will be how to handle change, if it comes in the form of new development, in such a way that residents are helped, not hurt by it.

Confirming (and Questioning) the Observations

All of the above is the result of two short walking tours of the Prescott area: the first on May 8, 1981 produced the initial observations and

all of the conclusions. The second, in late September, was over the same route as the first and was for the purpose of noting descriptions (of what was seen) that were left out of the notes that accompanied the first walk, and for the purpose of taking photographs.

Immediately following the initial field observations a meeting was held with a member of the Oakland Planning Department's staff, to report the observations and conclusions and to get his responses. The staff member in question is knowledgeable of the Prescott area, and the larger West Oakland area of which it is a part, having spent considerable time in the neighborhood and becoming familiar with its history. This informed source together with material from two published reports* both confirm and reject the conclusions taken from the field observations, as follows:

- The "Prescott" neighborhood, including "South Prescott," was originally called "Oakland Point" or simply, "The Point," reflecting its

*The two reports: City Planning Department, 701 Division, "West Oakland: a 701 Subarea Report," May 1969, Oakland, California; and City of Oakland Office of Community Development, "Proposal for the Expansion of Oakland's Urban Homesteading Program into West Oakland," September 26, 1980.

configuration as a blunt peninsula surrounded by water and marshlands (filled during the 20th century). The existing street grid corresponds with the original land area.

- ⊕ The first major influx of people was in the 1870s and was associated with the Central Pacific and Northern Railway terminus of the transcontinental railway.
- ⊕ Victorian homes in Prescott are primarily a result of the rail boom that brought full development to the area by about 1885. Nearly one-third of the residents worked for the Central Pacific Railway. (Development, then, was somewhat earlier than was concluded in the field observations.)
- ⊕ Blacks were employed as road crews and as porters on the railroad. So there has been a black presence in the area for a long time. (The field observers did not see this or make the connection.)
- ⊕ A second wave of migration occurred during World War II when thousands of southern blacks moved into West Oakland to work for the railroads and shipyards. (This was recognized in the field as a probability.)

- ⊕ By the late 1940s, with middle class people moving to other areas and remaining residents lacking the income to invest in the community, West Oakland began to deteriorate physically.
- ⊕ Much of the housing southwest of 7th and Peralta was railroad owned. The area to the south of 7th was considered the wrong side of the tracks and was for working class.
- ⊕ Seventh, in the late 19th century, was one of the most important streets in Oakland. It became the center of Black culture and entertainment during the 1920s and 1930s. Commercial uses along the street were of greater than local importance.
- ⊕ In the late 50s the Nimitz Freeway was built through the community, dividing West Oakland into the neighborhoods of Prescott and South Prescott in the West. The freeway was among the first of many developments that resulted in the relocation of residents and the rearranging of the neighborhoods' physical pattern. (No comment was made about this in the field.)

- ⊕ West Oakland became a target area for a series of urban renewal and war on poverty programs in the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1964, it became a concentrated area of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency, and later a Model Cities area. The model housing projects are located east of the Nimitz Freeway.
- ⊕ In the 1960s and 1970s demolition continued, making way for the John B. Williams Freeway (Route I-980) construction project, the construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit tracks and Oakland West station and the new postal distribution facility, all these in addition to the urban renewal projects.
- ⊕ West Oakland lost about 25% of its population as a result of these projects.
- ⊕ The postal building--centrally located in relation to highways and shipping--was largely built on railroad-owned land so it was easy to tear down the existing uses. The land was cheap.
- ⊕ Although the South Prescott and Prescott neighborhoods were never declared a redevelopment area, designated for demolition, the attitude was to let them go. They

were expendable.

- ⊕ Presently, the West Oakland area is characterized by a large black population (86%), a low median income (\$11,034 compared to the City's median income of \$23,400) a high unemployment rate (13.7%), and a large number of families whose income is below the National poverty level (16%).
- ⊕ Citizens of West Oakland have been active in working with the City for neighborhood improvements. Pressure for crime prevention programs, street improvements, junkyard abatement, the clean-up of vacant lots, tree-planting projects, commercial revitalization, industry controls, and/or programs such as urban homesteading that will result in the rehabilitation of vacant and deteriorating houses, apparently has come directly from the people of the district.
- ⊕ In the past 10 years, there has been a major program directed toward the improvement of curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and street tree planting. Most of the money expended has been model cities and Community Development dollars. During 1979 and January 1980, over \$300,000 were spent on environmental

improvements in the South Prescott area including sidewalks and street tree planting. Under the latter, 55 trees were planted.

- ⊕ Trash pick up programs instituted by the City, as well as clean-up efforts by the residents are focused on vacant lots, which are often used as dumping grounds.
- ⊕ During the early 1970s streets got street trees whether the resident wanted them or not. Residents south of 7th requested them in 1979 or 1980.
- ⊕ Community Development and state funds were used to renovate the Ernie Raimondi Park in Prescott.
- ⊕ There has been a program of planning and monetary assistance in the Prescott area since the late 1970s. Some Section 8, Community Development Block Grant money has been spent here for housing, but not very effectively or widespread.
- ⊕ A major transportation complex is proposed in the 7th street area which would link BART, AMTRAK, Greyhound, Trailways, and AC Transit. The proposal brings mixed reactions from residents concerned with both positive

economic effects as well as possible disruptive effects of residential and business environments.

- ⊕ There is some speculative rehabilitation in the area.
- ⊕ Contrary to appearances there is squatting, burning of property and people do break into vacant buildings to steal victorian fixtures.
- ⊕ Trouble spots in the area at Peralta and 12th (the liquor store), Peralta and 14th, and along 7th.
- ⊕ There has been little new residential building for 80 years, or commercial construction for 50 years.
- ⊕ A 1980 map of West Oakland showing location of vacant houses indicates a major concentration of the Prescott and South Prescott areas. Many of these are eventually demolished by the City under its code enforcement program.
- ⊕ Commuters are not popular in the area.

- ⊕ There are some artists in the area.
- ⊕ There is probably no awareness of gentrification of the South Prescott area.

Much of the information above is for the West Oakland area as a whole. We think it applies to the Prescott and South Prescott sub-areas as well.

A CONCLUDING WORD OR TWO

It is very hard to tell in specific measurable terms how well or poorly the field observations, the clues that were used, and the interpretations of the two to three hour walk reflected the history, change, present state, and existing issues of the Prescott areas. It is even less possible to tell whether the few observations about the future are valid. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that the observations and conclusions square generally with reality.

The observations that were "most correct" had to do with the general history and starting up of the area, the incomes and employment of the people over time, racial trends, the importance of major physical features such as the highways, BART, and the railroads as problem sources, foci and

definers of the area, trends regarding the quality and quantity of housing, citizen and public involvement in the area, and the level of private investment over the years.

Some of the detailed historic inferences were not correct, including the timing of development and the early presence of black people in the area. Development started earlier than was concluded in the field and was not associated with people moving from San Francisco. Very little account was taken of the different street patterns. Large houses on corner lots may not have been the houses of original land owners, who might more likely have built in the center blocks. Industry may not have replaced housing in one area, which was vacant marshlands until it was filled after 1900.

The crime issue was missed though the observers were looking for it. The general "neatness" of the area was the misleading clue. the role of the 7th street commercial area over the years was missed. The long, long association of this area with transportation and what that might imply for the future was missed, including the proposed transportation center that could have a major impact on the area. This is the sort of

outside intervention that would be large enough, if it happens, to bring major physical change and with it social and economic changes. Land requirements alone could cause major dislocations of people as well as of commercial activities which are presently so depressed.

This leads to a final observation; that the prognosis says very little about the vulnerability of the area to rapid change and in what forms that change might come. If there is an excuse for the omission it is that the effort here was rapid, less than three hours, and was more intent on reading history, change, and present status than it was on anticipating the future. This kind of case study may be quite reasonable as an initial, first assessment of an area and it is possible to tell a great deal in a limited period. Deliberation and observation over a more extended period would permit, if nothing else, a greater depth of understanding and a more thorough set of connections between what has been, what is, and what is likely to be.