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PLANNING SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT

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## HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

### INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the Chico Heritage Association (a local non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historically significant properties) created the City of Chico Historic Resources Inventory. The Inventory was verified that year by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) who stated in a letter sent to City Manager Fred Davis that "the work...meets the highest professional standards (and) forms a sound basis upon which to build a local preservation program." (A copy of this letter is provided below.) The Inventory was later expanded in 1985 when additional funding was secured.

Since that time, the Inventory has been utilized as a cornerstone reference document for the City of Chico for decisions affecting historic resources, including its reference in the Open Space and Environmental Conservation Element of the 1994 General Plan and its use since 1999 in the Chico Municipal Code for implementation of the Landmark Overlay Zoning District.

Also provided below is the Final Report of the Inventory submitted to the SHPO in 1983 by the Chico Heritage Association that provides details of methodology, survey personnel, and cost.

## DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

P.O. BOX 2390  
SACRAMENTO 95811



(916) 445-8006

OCT 21 1983

Mr. Fred Davis, City Manager  
City of Chico  
P.O. Box 3420  
Chico, CA 95927

Dear Mr. Davis:

Our staff has completed its review of the historic resources inventory compiled by the Chico Heritage Association under a matching grant from the State. I thought that you might be interested in our findings.

The final products of this project -- the inventory forms, the maps, and the final report -- were more than satisfactory. The documentation of the individual properties was thorough. The statements of significance were thoughtfully written and convincing. The work, although performed by a local civic group, meets the highest professional standards. The inventory forms a sound basis upon which to build a local preservation program.

We have been impressed by the amount of public interest shown in the project. Our audit findings express this community involvement in monetary terms. To match the State grant of \$13,950, Chico Heritage raised an equivalent of \$29,520 in goods, services, and cash. This "match" was over twice our requirement and represents an unusually large local contribution for a project of this kind. Looked at another way, the City now has a \$43,000 planning study, prepared by its own citizens, for which it paid virtually nothing. Few other cities in the state have been so fortunate!

As you may know, small areas of the City remain to be surveyed. The State will have no grant funds available for this work. I hope, therefore, that the City will be able to offer Chico Heritage sufficient funding to complete this small project.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Don Napoli of our staff at (916) 322-8595.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by  
Dr. Knox Mellon

Dr. Knox Mellon  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Office of Historic Preservation

I-1848H

cc: Chico Heritage Association  
P.O. Box 2078  
Chico, CA 95927

CHICO HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

FINAL REPORT

Prepared By

CHICO HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

P. O.Box 2078

Chico CA 95927

Contact: Giovanna R. Jackson

This publication was partially funded under the National Historic Preservation Act  
of 1966 through the California Office of Historic Preservation.

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The Chico Historic Resource Survey, this Final Report and other publications resulting from the Historic Survey were funded in part by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation service, Department of the Interior. The contents of the Historic Survey and the other products do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Department of the Interior.

The prevailing image of Chico is of a relatively small, comfortable and established community with broad tree-lined streets, laced by cool shaded streams, surrounded on the north, west and south by luxuriant orchards, and nestled at the base of the Sierra Nevada foothills. In this sense, Chico's rural image depends on the close affinity its residents feel with the immediately surrounding countryside, the relatively small comprehensible scale of the community, and the physical integration of the natural environment into the urban fabric. Introduction to Chico General Plan

## I. OVERVIEW

### Historical Sketch

Chico's setting lies in the agricultural flatlands of the Sacramento Valley with proximity to the waterways of the Sacramento River and to the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada, a major route to the Nevada and Idaho mines. The city's site was recognized for its excellent settlement potential as early as the 1840's. John Bidwell, explorer and aide to General John Sutter, had mapped the area around Chico Creek in 1843 creating the map which Mexican governor Micheltoarena used as a basis for the local land grants. The origins of the City of Chico can be traced to two 1844 Mexican land grants made by Micheltoarena. The first, the Farwell Grant, was assigned to Edward A. Farwell. Micheltoarena assigned the second, the Arroyo del Chico Grant, to William Dickey. Each grant comprised more than 22,000 acres. Taken together, they reached from the east bank of the Sacramento River, extending along three to five miles on either side of Big Chico Creek and continuing east into the Sierra Nevada foothills to what is now the northern boundary of Bidwell Park. Dickey settled on the north side of Chico Creek naming it Arroyo Chico and establishing Rancho del Arroyo Chico at the present site of Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park. Rancho de Farwell was about five miles to the west.

John Bidwell bought Dickey's grant and in 1849 built his first residence, a wooden structure, destroyed by fire three years later. He then erected a two-story adobe. With his establishment of the first flour grist mill in northern California in 1853 opposite his adobe residence, farm buildings and general store, Bidwell marked a change to the area's agricultural emphasis on grain crops following its early concentration predominantly on cattle raising.

Bidwell retained his residence and land on the north side of Big Chico Creek (formerly Arroyo Chico). In 1860 he commissioned County Surveyor J. S. Henning to create a plan for a townsite of fifty blocks laid out between Big and Little Chico Creeks. Henning centered the town grid on the Shasta-Tehama Road, the stage route to northern California. The present social and economic center of Chico remains the town core that Henning and Bidwell designated. Over the past 123 years, Chico grew from that small farm community of less than 500 to a present metropolitan population of close to 40,000. Its development was influenced by major factors: a farsighted man and wife, a school, and an industry.

John and Annie E. Kennedy Bidwell, with Henning's technical help, molded their town in a way that few professional planners could equal. Bidwell's wide streets, now tree-lined, give a feeling of spaciousness and flexibility to what is actually a relatively small community. The order and regularity of the plan evidence Bidwell's desire to model Chico on the established towns of the east and midwest. The Bidwell gifts of land to local churches, schools and the city helped establish the present look and atmosphere of Chico. He gave each denomination a block within the city on which to build a church. By 1870 there were seven established churches, most of them centered around the downtown area. Only one congregation has remained on its original block--the Catholic parish of St. John the Baptist. One early

church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1867 for another faith, has been in continual use, despite several moves since that date.

Bidwell gave land to schools. Woodman's Academy, established on Block 81, which its proprietors bought for \$1 in 1862, was Chico's most prominent and longlasting 19th century private school. The Salem Street School, built in 1866, was Chico's first permanent public schoolhouse, serving for 100 years until the school-age population had moved from the "Old Chico" area to the newer residential areas on the far east and north sides. The Oakdale School building was erected on the south bank of Little Chico Creek, which was not Bidwell land. This school functioned from 1874 to the late 1940's. The site is now used for a continuation school.

The California and Oregon Railroad arrived in 1870, providing quicker access to the rest of the state and the country. With Chico's incorporation as a city, a gable-roofed, frame town hall was built. The Chapman Addition in 1871 and the Oakdale subdivision later in the 70's opened to settlement the area south of Little Chico Creek on either side of the Shasta-Tehama Road, now known as Park Avenue. The Eastern Addition moved the east boundary of the city one block east to Olive Street, where it remained until 1906.

In an effort to secure the county seat for Chico in 1874, Bidwell made his first gift of a park to the city. This was the present City Plaza, which he had intended to be the site of a county courthouse. Although Chico failed in its efforts to become the county seat, the tree-filled Plaza has remained the center of downtown Chico. It is anchored on one corner by the 1911 Municipal Building and on another by the 1916 Old Post Office.

Extant buildings from the 1860's and 1870's are, as one would expect from a young

provincial community, mostly in the styleless category of Vernacular, relying not on applied decoration for their architectural interest, but on the pleasant arrangement of their utilitarian parts. The exceptions are the Greek Revival Allen/Sommer/Gage House of 1862 and the "Downing Cottage" Little Chapman Mansion (late 1850's-1874). Both of these National Register properties use roof and building shapes, massing of parts, and application of structural elements to create their styles. Only Bidwell Mansion, designed by architect Henry William Cleveland and finished in 1868, gives an idea of the architectural possibilities of the day. The Bidwell's home remains the premiere West Coast example of the Italian Villa style.

The principal industry of the area in the 1870's was lumber. In 1874, a flume for rough-cut lumber was built from Butte Meadows to Chico. Sierra Flume and Lumber Company was established the following year. The availability of architectural millwork for residences became apparent in structures from the late 1870's. By 1883, a building such as the Stick-Eastlake style Earll House could be completely milled in Chico. Wooden commercial structures still tended to be utilitarian and most were falsefronted, eventually burning or being replaced with brick buildings. The 19th century interior walls of these structures still exist in most of the downtown area.

The late 1880's saw the start of what, after the Bidwells, has been one of the most influential forces in Chico. In 1889, the North Branch of the State Normal School opened on 10 acres donated by Bidwell on the south bank of Big Chico Creek and the north side of First Street. From a beginning class of 70 students, the Normal School has expanded to become California State University, Chico, which enrolls



about 14,000 students on its 117 acre campus. The growth of the college has been a key factor in Chico's continuous economic stability. But the University's expansion has had a clearly negative impact on Chico's oldest residential area. Entire blocks of houses have been demolished for university expansion. As a result, almost the entire area south of the campus, where residences date to the 1870's, has become student rental property. Buildings so used reflect the deterioration consequent with hard use, neglect and "remuddling."

The year the Normal School opened was also the year that Bidwell subdivided the area north of his residence, Chico Vecino. This development extended from Rancheria Lane (now Sacramento Avenue) to Lindo Channel. Chico Vecino, perhaps due to its distance from the center of town and its large size of over 200 blocks, was settled rather slowly.

The 1890's saw a slowdown of new construction, due no doubt to the financial panic of 1893. After the turn of the century, Chico began to expand again, sparked by the building of the large Diamond Match Company plant south of Little Chico Creek. Diamond attempted to create a model company town, Barber, around the plant. Rice, one of the area's most important agricultural underpinnings, was introduced about the same time. The eastward growth of Chico at this time created residential neighborhoods devoted to Bungalow and Colonial Revival style houses. These developments indicate the area's receptivity to current architectural trends.

In 1905 Annie E. K. Bidwell gave the City of Chico what has become its most well-known resource. The 2,250 acre Bidwell Park centers on Big Chico Creek and extends 10 miles north to the border of the Arroyo del Chico land grant in the foothills. The park officially became part of Chico upon Mrs. Bidwell's death in 1918, and the City

Park Commission was established to oversee it.

Chico has remained an economically and culturally vital community since its founding due to the interaction of the vision and generosity of John and Annie Bidwell, the vitality of the lumber and agricultural industries, and the continual growth of the State Normal School.

#### Historic Preservation in Chico

The preservation of Chico's distinctive character has been a concern of the City, the Downtown Chico Business Association and Chico citizens for several years. In large part what distinguishes Chico from other valley towns is its blend of historical and natural resources which combine to create a stable, public-spirited community. The Chico General Plan for 1976-1994 recognized that character and the need to preserve it. Using the funding of a Community Development Block Grant, several planning reports were prepared: the South Campus Neighborhood Development Plan, the Neighborhood Strategy for Chapmantown, and the Chico Core Area Study. In a first step towards a preservation plan, a CETA employee working alone completed a superficial "Historic Site Inventory" in 1979.

Two events brought the preservation interests of the community to the surface. One of these was the confrontation between the University administration and the community over a proposed two-story parking structure at the edge of the south-of-campus neighborhood. The second event was the proposal by the Crocker Bank to demolish the remodeled 1901 Nottleman Building for additional parking. Both issues galvanized a latent preservation-oriented constituency and pointed out the need for an official preservation plan. A community ad hoc group of would-be preservationists encouraged the City to develop a preservation ordinance.

During the drafting of the proposed ordinance, it became apparent that a complete survey of at least the oldest part of the community was needed before the ordinance could be properly focused. The CETA inventory was incomplete and undocumented. The Chico Heritage Association was formed in May 1981 to implement the proposed survey. The Chico Historic Building Survey began under the auspices of Chico Heritage in the spring of 1981 as a pilot project with two CSUC students. Three buildings were researched to figure out a workable format for what was hoped would become a community project. In June of that year Chico Heritage sought City Council support for the California Historic Resources Inventory matching grant proposal which volunteers had written. Due to budget constraints, the City was unable to sponsor the grant but encouraged the fledgling group to sponsor it themselves. The City Planner and a member of the City Council were made available to the group and with the official encouragement of the City of Chico, the grant proposal was submitted to the State by Chico Heritage Association in July 1981.

## II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As stated in the Introduction to the Field Manual used for the Chico Historic Building Survey, the purpose of the survey is

....to discover the structures, areas and objects that are unique to Chico and help define it as an historic community..(and to) aid future historic research, social analysis, and city and state planning. The object of the survey is to document those buildings and districts that still exist that are most important historically and aesthetically to the community.

Chico is a continuously growing community. One of the constantly recurring preservation-related problems of growth is the threat of demolition, inappropriate remodeling, and incompatible additions to areas of historic concentration. The best examples of 19th and early 20th century commercial architecture in the downtown area were emasculated during the flurry of 1950's remodeling influenced by the square-edged, detailless International style.

The heavy concentration of student rental property in the South of Campus Neighborhood has led to the deterioration of Chico's oldest residential area. There is a constant threat of further expansion by the University into that same area as exemplified by plans to demolish a half-block of post-Victorian structures in order to add more parking to an existing University parking lot. Since that block forms part of the surviving north edge of the Old Chico/South- of-Campus Neighborhood, the proposed demolition is opposed by the majority of the community, as expressed by a referendum.

Rather than try to deal with preservation issues case by case, it is expected that the Survey results and its tandem preservation ordinance will provide overall direction and guidelines for protection of the most fragile historic areas. Recognizing and documenting Chico's rich heritage is the first step in its preservation. The community involvement in the Survey thus far has laid a broad basis of knowledge and commitment. Just knowing that the Survey is being done has made those not directly involved in it more aware of the cultural resources of their city. Results have been seen already in the interest shown by realtors and "rehabbers" who now regularly request Survey data on their structures or neighborhoods.

#### Contractual Agreement

It was agreed that Chico Heritage Association, an independent, non-profit community interest group, would compile an inventory of pre-1942 resources within the City of Chico between October 1, 1981 and June 30, 1983, with matching funds from the Federal Grant Funds under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The inventory would include districts, buildings, structures, and objects of historical, architectural and cultural significance. The long time allotment was to take into account the preliminary work done before the actual grant was approved in April 1982. This is the final report for this first segment of a proposed continuing Survey.

### III. METHODS

The methodology of the Survey has undergone constant modification since its first beginnings in spring 1981. By the end of the Survey, about 100 community and student volunteers had participated in various aspects of preparing this phase of the inventory.

#### Personnel

The grant funds were used to pay a 3/4 time salary for the Survey Director, Giovanna R. Jackson, on whom the primary responsibility for the Survey rested. A librarian with graduate work in architectural history and active involvement in organizing the Chico Heritage Association, Ms. Jackson was qualified to organize and conduct the project. Marianne O'Malley was employed as a research assistant for seven weeks in spring 1983 to perform title searches. Her help was invaluable in the last weeks of the Survey.

While all other personnel were volunteers, they brought to the Survey a variety of skills: Quentin Griffiths, Professor of History at CSUC, was instrumental in obtaining two University grants for the Survey, recruiting and supervising students, and overseeing the start of the project. Michele Shover, Professor and Chair of Political Science at CSUC, recruited, advised, and supervised students through fall 1982. Her research experience, gained from working on her own home, a National Register property, was used in writing the research section of the Field Manual. Her constant good advice through the whole project was invaluable. Emily Newton, Professor of American Studies, recruited CSUC students in spring 1983, and helped write and edit the final inventory forms. Professor Yoshio Kusaba, architectural historian at CSUC, wrote about twenty of the architectural descriptions. All other work was done by a combination of CSUC student and community volunteer labor. The exception to this is the production of the Final Report, which was professionally done.

## Organization of the Survey

Because of the cumulative nature of survey work, both in terms of accumulation of historical data and in terms of understanding the process, the Survey underwent several modifications from its original theoretical plan.

All pre-1942 areas of town were surveyed by the windshield method several times, then by bicycle and on foot. The master lists of about 600 structures were revised several times to include previous historic lists, e.g., the 1979 "Historic Site Inventory," a walking tour booklet, and a community historian's suggestions. In addition, it was necessary to revise the list to ensure good coverage of the various categories of historic and cultural resources in relation to the amount of volunteer labor available. As the Survey progressed, clues to other previously overlooked but important structures were followed. The criteria used for selecting which resources should be included were based on coverage of those categories listed in the Historic Preservation Element Guideline:

- Architectural history
- Cultural history
- Development history
- Community design
- Natural features
- Historic districts

Within those categories, the following criteria were applied:

Was a person significant to Chico's history associated with it?

Was it associated with a major historic event?

Does it hold an association with the past for the members of the community?

Is it a good example of a particular way of life?

Is it a pre-1870 structure, which would place it in the earliest period of the area's history?

Is it a unique example of a particular style of architecture: one of few built or one of few remaining?

Is it a good example of a particular architectural style?

Is it the work of a well-known architect?

Is it the work of a good local architect, builder, or craftsman?

Is it an architectural curiosity?

Is it an important element in the character of the city?

Is it an important element in its neighborhood?

Does it contribute to the architectural integrity and continuity of its street?

Is the building, object, or site threatened by public or private action?

### Volunteers

Volunteers were recruited both from the University, where they could obtain independent study credit through various departments, and from the community. At the beginning of each semester recruitment posters were hung around the campus listing the name, office number and phone of faculty members willing to oversee the work of student volunteers. Various faculty members were reminded of the value of local research and encouraged to mention the Survey in class or to allow work on it as a research paper option. Photography classes for three semesters produced most of the photographs and sets of exhibit photos. Public Relations students were used each semester to lessen some of the Survey Director's publicity burden.

Community volunteers were recruited by a variety of means: posters at various times throughout the Survey period, newspaper articles and advertisements, public service announcements and news spots on both radio and TV. The Survey Director also gave slide presentations for various groups eliciting community awareness and interest but no volunteer labor. Ultimately, individual contact through networks of historic groups and friends seemed to work the best.

A community workshop was held in the Fall, 1981 to which about twenty people came. For various reasons, only one of them stayed with the project long enough to contribute. Training was done on an individual or small group basis thereafter. A Field Manual was first distributed to volunteers in the Fall of 1981, providing one section on architectural information and another on research methods and tools. The Manual was completely revised in January 1983 by Ms. Jackson to include new research tools and to communicate the knowledge accumulated over the past year about research methods (copy enclosed). A series of worksheets, including a research form and a sample Historic Resources Inventory Form, were included to aid in the organization of data. The need for a solid base of information documenting every inventoried structure was continually stressed. The Survey Director learned that it was necessary to have the training sessions as accessible and non-threatening as possible. To accomplish this, training in Chico was more individualized and less structured than in some communities. Each volunteer contributed at least 20 hours, working fairly independently but in close contact with the Survey Director. The early volunteers mainly performed research, with the Survey Director rewriting and editing the final results. As the end of the project approached and the volume of reports began to mushroom, the volunteers were given photocopies of the directions from the Survey Workbook on "Descriptions" and "Significance," which produced very creditable results.

#### Cost

The Survey was funded by a State Office of Historic Preservation matching grant, two California State University, Chico Foundation grants, Chico Heritage Association cash expenditures, and in-kind donations.



State grant	\$13,950.00
CSUC grant	1,000.00
CHA expenditures	<u>556.00</u>
	\$15,506.00

In-kind services	<u>22,709.00</u>
	\$38,265.00

Cash expenditures:	
Survey Director	\$13,950.00
Photo supp./processing	426.69
Clerical	599.00
Printing	147.20
Supplies	93.50
Misc.(phone,office equip. etc.)	<u>289.51</u>
	\$15,506.00

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board was composed of seven representatives bringing to the task various types of expertise. They met irregularly at first and then on a bimonthly basis during the final phase of the Survey. They reviewed the finished inventory forms and accepted the recommendations of the Survey Director on evaluation of individual structures. The main interest of the committee is in the uses of the Survey rather than the individual structures. The committee will meet in the Fall to help organize the presentation of the Survey to the City Council and to make suggestions as to its use.

Advisory Board members:

David Guzzetti, City Council liaison

Dave Kilbourne, Director, Downtown chico Business Association

Mark Kowta, CSUC Professor, Anthoroplogist

Yoshio Kusaba, CSUC Professor, Architectural Historian

Tom Lando, City Planner

Gene McFarren, local architect, active in preservation concerns

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#### IV. FINAL RESULTS

It became apparent fairly early in the survey that the extent of coverage would be determined entirely by the number of volunteers and the time they would be able to donate. Consequently, it was decided to concentrate on the historic core of the residential and commercial areas, thereby creating a geographic rather than a chronological basis. The area between Big and Little Chico Creeks provided a good example of the progressive development of the city. This area was comprehensively covered. The Survey was oriented towards noting community landmarks rather than support structures, so that key structures could be identified and groupings noted. There is an obvious concentration of important structures in certain areas, which will facilitate the designation of historic districts. As time permitted, the Survey expanded into the Chico Vecino area along the Esplanade, and into the area south of Little Chico Creek. Those areas have only just begun to be surveyed. The will be done as part of the continuation of the Survey in fall 1983.

The vast majority (105) of the buildings surveyed fell into the residential category. The commercial category, with 13 buildings, is represented only by those structures which have retained their integrity or exhibit a distinctiveness that readily identifies them. Due to the remodeling of the late 1940's and early 1950's, little of distinction escaped stuccoing. The cultural/religious category covers pre-1940 churches, lodges and theaters, and includes 16 structures. There are few industrial buildings or structures in Chico; therefore there are only 5 in that category. The rest of the items inventoried fall into the categories of institutional/public buildings (7), design elements (3), natural resources (4), and sites (2). One district of 40 late 1920's residences is included.

It is now reasonably possible to date structures by style and by area, although Vernacular style residences remain long into the 20th century. One sees a gradual progression eastward stylistically as the city boundaries were extended. Several local architects, namely A. J. Bryan and Cole & Bouchard, who were identified prior to the Survey by one or two structures, now have a creditable amount of work attributed to them which will allow further research to be done. The most important data to emerge from the Survey is the verification by solid research of an impressive amount of information, not only about the structures, but about the people who lived and worked in them.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is little doubt that the present Survey will be used in future city planning. The City Council has requested a budget proposal to finish the Survey by extending its focus to the areas north of Big Chico Creek and south of Little Chico Creek. The present Survey will be presented to the City in the fall of 1983 with the preservation ordinance currently being developed. At that time, comprehensive coverage of the Survey in the newspaper, with possibly a special insert section devoted to it, is anticipated. A weekly column based on the Survey files has been proposed. The concentration of noted structures in certain areas will enable walking tours to be planned. Now being discussed are plans for printed self-guided tours of these areas. The list of potential National Register properties will be made available for those seeking tax incentives. Copies of the final forms will be mailed to each property owner in the Survey to encourage interest and awareness.

The Survey files are already being referred to and used by realtors, property owners and researchers. Their use will increase with publicity generated next fall. It is hoped that more persons in the community will volunteer to work on the next phase.

VI. CONCLUSION

The most obvious success of the Survey is in the education of the community as to the value of Chico's cultural resources. The extensive media coverage ensured that almost everyone in the Chico area at least heard of the Survey. There is a lot of interest and enthusiasm for the Survey, evidenced in the expanding use of the Survey files. As the Survey becomes more readily available through news columns, walking tours, etc., we anticipate that the community will become better educated to the importance of preserving our cultural resources. We hope this will be expressed through increased interest by volunteers to document those resources remaining to be added to the Survey.

The major disappointment with the project was the insufficient supply of volunteer help to cover more of the community, although the continuing, steady, though small stream of volunteers was gratifying and useful. Rather than starting off on a large scale and then burning out, the Survey seemed to pick up momentum as the deadline approached. This pattern was especially useful when it was necessary to have a pool of help from which to draw in order to finish all the final detail work. With the knowledge gained from our experience, the approach to future surveying will be somewhat different. Greater reliance will be made on efficient teamwork than on individual research.

The response of the Chico community thus far to its Survey of Historic Resources ensures a continuing interest. Future use of the Survey is sure to be important in historical education and in shaping public policies.

# # #