

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Forestiere Underground Gardens

AND/OR COMMON

Forestiere Gardens

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

(N.E. 1/4 of N.E. 1/4 of N.E. 1/4 in section 15,
Township 13 Range 19 E. Mount Duablo Base and
5021 West Shaw Avenue, Fresno, California 93711 NOT FOR PUBLICATION Meridian)

CITY, TOWN

Fresno

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF Fresno

17th

STATE

California

CODE

COUNTY

Fresno

CODE

019

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Rosario Forestiere

Joseph Forestiere

STREET & NUMBER

629 West Robinwood Lane

CITY, TOWN

Fresno

VICINITY OF

STATE

California

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Fresno County Recorders Office, Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

2281 Tulare Street, Room 302

CITY, TOWN

Fresno

STATE

California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

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

DATE

1975

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Published by Pioneer Publishing Co.,

CITY, TOWN

Fresno

STATE

California

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

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

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

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1946	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Unique Conceptual Process
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1906-1946

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Baldasare Forestiere

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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Statement of significance, continued

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give permanence to his earthen sculptings, he used the ancient Roman arch, column and dome. Hardpan, mortar and cement were used not only for structural purposes, but for textural variety and beautification. Being his own architect, he did not require a blueprint. He chose instead to follow his own creative instincts and aesthetic impulses. "No plans were made. Every detail in the development of the underground gardens has originated in the brain of Forestiere and has never been set on paper. Gradually he has evolved a comprehensive scheme that will connect up into one of the most involved and yet delightful labyrinths of modern ages" (Fresno Bee, 3/23/23).

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

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

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Major Bibliographical References continued

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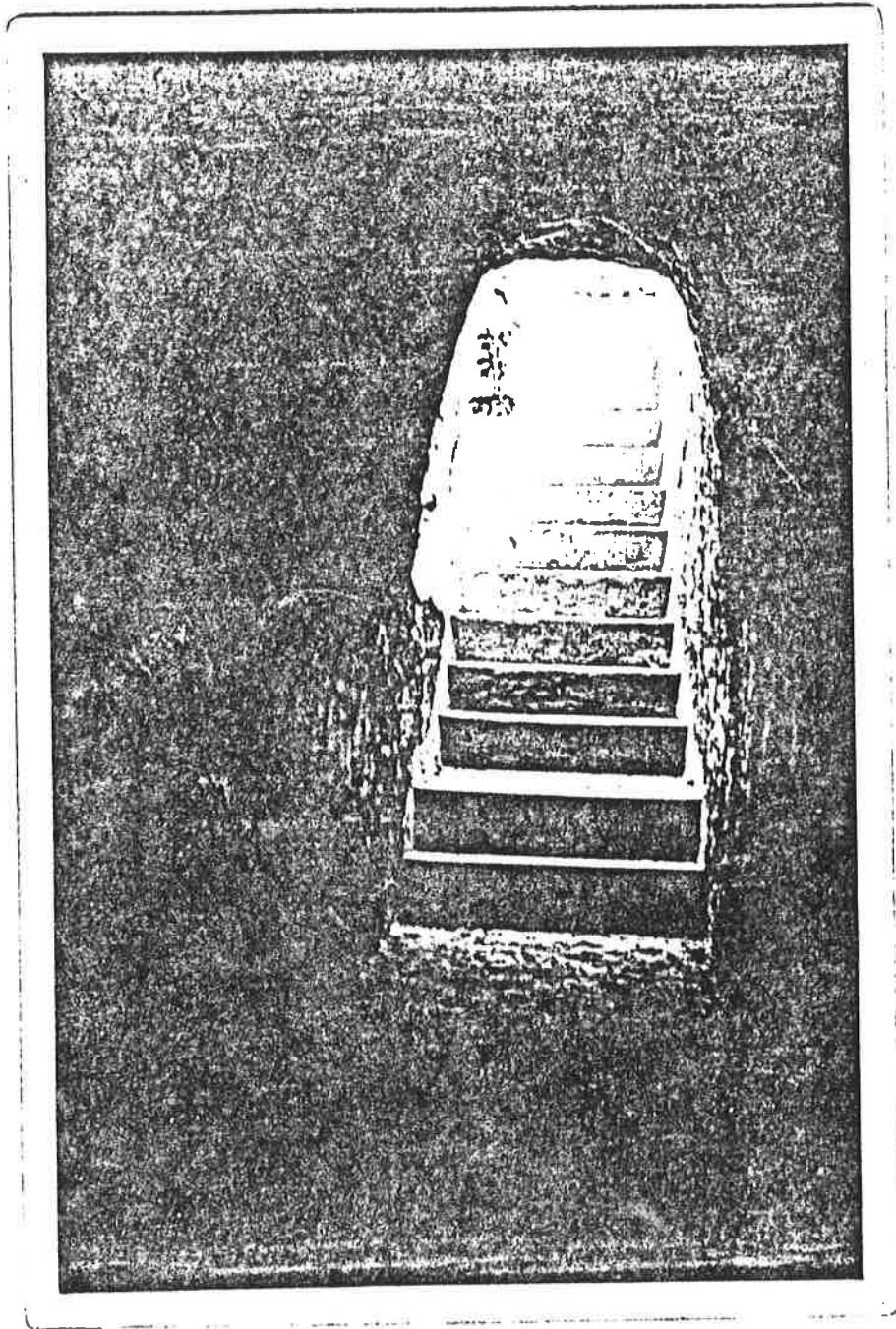
Resource Persons:

Wampler, Jan, Master of Architecture degree, Harvard Graduate School of Design.,
Associate Professor Architect and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technol-
ogy, Boston, Massachusetts, and a practicing architect.

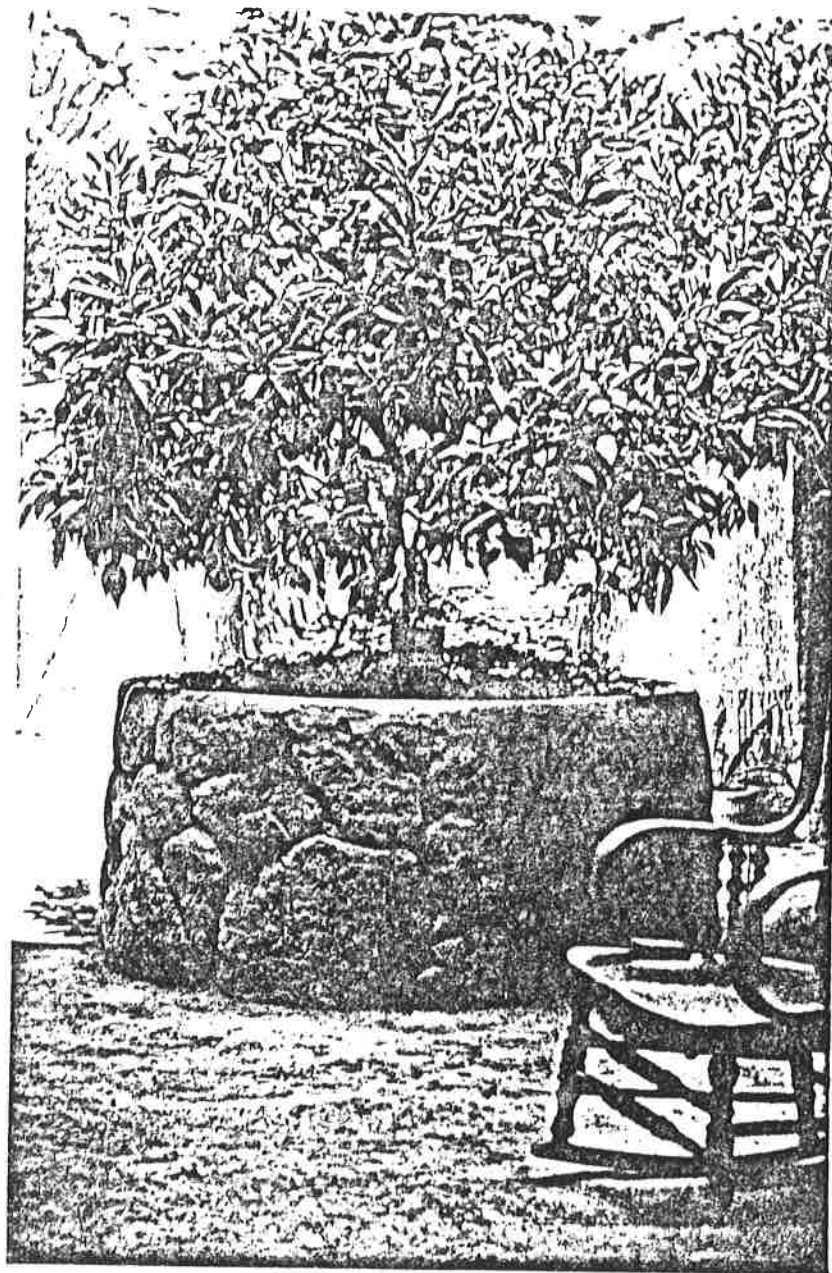
Cranz, Galen, Ph. D., Assistant Professor of Sociology in Architecture, College
of Environmental Design, Department of Architecture, University of California,
Berkeley, California.



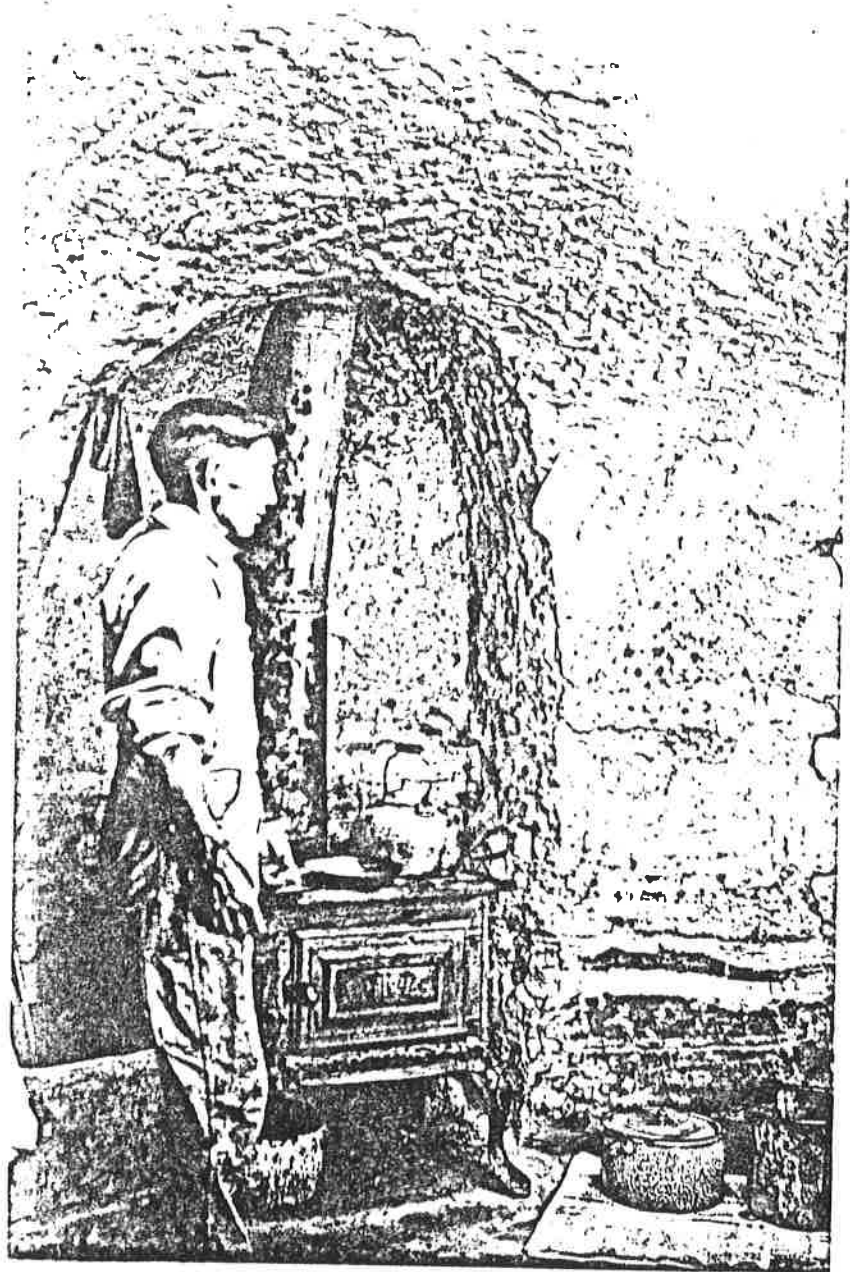
8. UNDERGROUND PASSAGEWAYS IN FORESTIERE'S CAVES.
In the farthest background is the small room contain-
ing the Italian's well. The arches in the foreground lead
to the "Big Triangle". (Photograph by W.M. Strother)



23. STAIRWAY LEADING FROM FORESTIERE'S CAVERNS
This stairway is cut in the earth and covered with cement.
It leads from near the "Little Triangle" to the ground
surface at what is to be the edge of a lake.
(Photograph by W.M. Strother)



6. WASHINGTON NAVEL ORANGE TREE GROWING UNDERGROUND.
This is the tree seen just inside the entrance in illustrations 4 and 5. Oranges can be seen in the middle of the foliage and on the lower left. (Photograph by W.M. Strother)

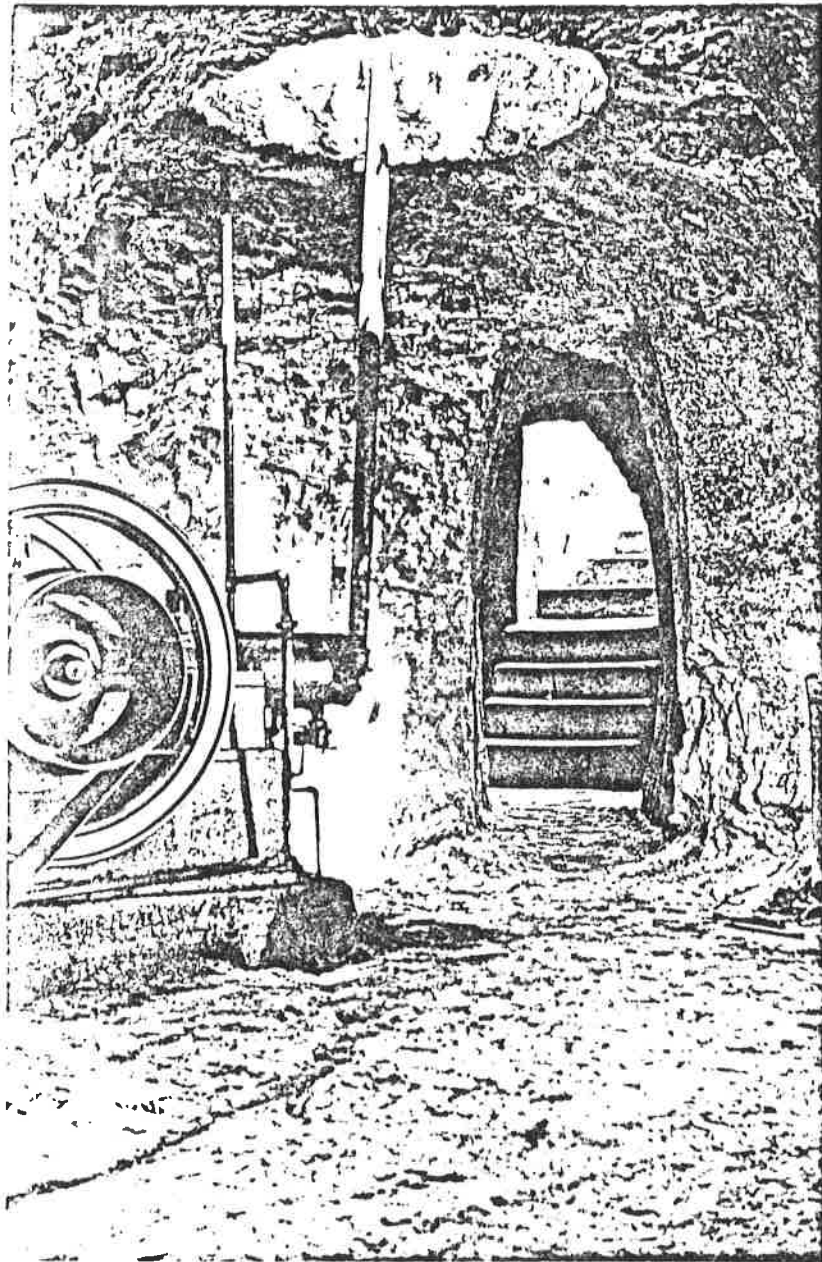


15. IN FORESTIERE'S KITCHIN.
This room is ten feet in diameter and is cemented over.
The Japanese cook, G. Matsuda, burns peach pits instead
of wood in the cook stove. The pits are secured from peaches
grown on the place when they are cut for drying. The kitchen,
dining-room, and in fact all of the completed rooms, are kept
in perfect order. (Photograph by W.M. Strother)

*Mr. Matsuda was a friend of
Baldasare's, he would sometimes cook
when he came to visit.*



19. VIEW OF AUTOMOBILE INCLINE UNDER CONSTRUCTION
The masonry is of lumps of hardpan. Orange trees are growing in niches in the walls on the sides of the driveway. The incline is to be paved and drained to carry rain water to the trees. At the far end the incline leads underground. (Photograph by W.M. Strother)



24. UNDERGROUND ENGINE ROOM

This gas engine pumps irrigation water from a well whose top is still further down. The stairway leads to the ground near the rear of Foerestiere's house.

(Photograph by W.M. Strother)

