



This 1955 oblique aerial photograph of Northridge, California, records the transformation of the San Fernando Valley from an agricultural region to dense suburbia. Close-packed single-family residences fill the foreground, south of the east-west Roscoe Boulevard (below the labeled Southern Pacific Railroad tracks). At the top of the photo, the east-west Nordhoff Street, extends right-to-left from the righthand edge of the photo to the upper left corner, crossing Louise Avenue (labeled) on the right, then Encino Avenue and White Oak. The next major north-south cross street is Zelzah Avenue, marked by a dark section of citrus groves at Nordhoff and Zelzah—now the southeast corner of the California State University, Northridge campus. The groves continue along Nordhoff beyond Lindley Avenue. The last north-south street along Nordhoff, parallel with Lindley in the upper left corner of the photo is Reseda Boulevard, a major street that crossed the entire Valley from pre-automobile times.

*Whitehorse Air Photo Collection, 1955, plate 37. Oviatt Map Library Collection, CSUN.*

# THE HISTORIAN'S EYE

Familiar places look different from the air, and time alters old landmarks. This aerial view of Northridge taken in 1955 includes the southern end of what is now the campus of California State University, Northridge, which opened in 1958 as San Fernando Valley State College. It now has an enrollment of 38,310 students and is the site of the Historical Society of Southern California's annual conference on February 9, 2019. In 1955, though, the San Fernando Valley was just in the process of transitioning from a productive agricultural region into a major suburban bedroom community of Los Angeles. The southeast corner of campus, at Nordhoff and Zelzah, as the aerial view attests, was a lush citrus grove where the campus's faculty center (Orange Grove Bistro) would later be planted and, at Nordhoff and Lindley, the Soroya (Valley Performing Arts Center) would later rise. When it was constructed, the faculty center retained part of the surrounding orange grove (and thus its current name). Market-quality citrus trees have a fifty-year life span and when that time came, a token orange grove was planted to replace the old one. But now the university has plans for a hospitality and conference center on that portion of campus. On the west side of campus, ranging up what is now Darby Avenue, there were once walnut orchards, that gave way long ago to apartment houses. A residential property on the corner of Darby and Nordhoff retained a couple of old trees. That site is now a construction site where a huge pit has been dug for underground parking for another apartment complex. Progress! (or at least change) as the last arboreal vestiges are removed. Historians can only consult old maps, photographs, property deed and tax records, and old-timers' memories to construct a record of what was once there.