

Draft for Public Review

ALVISO NEIGHBORHOOD OF SAN JOSÉ

Historic Context Statement

Prepared for
City of San José
Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement

July 2023



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ALVISO NEIGHBORHOOD OF SAN JOSÉ

Historic Context Statement

Introduction

The Alviso Historic Context and Survey Project is a part of the Citywide Historic Resources Survey effort authorized by the San José City Council in 2017.¹ In 2021, the City completed a final draft of the San José Historic Context Update, and the community of Alviso was included as a sub-theme recommended for intensive study. The Alviso Historic Context and Survey Project tiers off the citywide historic context as a focused historic context and survey. The project was made possible in part by a grant from the County of Santa Clara’s Historical Heritage Grant Fund.

The goal of the Alviso Historic Context and Survey Project is to document Alviso’s culture and history and to identify buildings, objects, features, places, and landscapes associated with all aspects of that history, particularly the underrepresented communities that historically lived and worked in the town, primarily from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. Alviso was selected as a survey priority because the existing information is out of date and did not document the town’s diverse history and untold stories. Alviso has a rich history to be shared with a wider audience. This context statement and survey project seeks to understand the historic development patterns, events and people of Alviso that have been underrecognized and underrepresented and to develop a broader perspective of the town’s history that focuses more broadly on its cultural history, rather than only on the neighborhood’s physical form and traditional valuations of historic integrity. This historic context statement is intended as a companion to the Alviso Neighborhood Survey Report, also completed as part of this project.

Project Team

The Alviso Historic Context and Survey Project represents a combined effort between the City of San José and ESA’s team of northern California-based architectural historians. City of San José Historic Preservation Officer, Dana Peak Edwards, served as the primary City representative on the project. Dana worked to coordinate community input, set up community presentations, and was the primary City collaborator on the project. Assistance was also provided by Deputy City Manager Angel Rios, Jr., and City Council District 4. From ESA, Amber Grady, M.A., Senior Architectural Historian, served as Project Director; Becky Urbano, M.S., Senior Architectural Historian, served as Project Manager and survey coordinator; Johanna Kahn, M.Ar.H., Senior Architectural Historian, was primary author of the historic context statement; and Kathy

¹ The City of San José uses the conventional spelling of “José” with an acute accent, and this historic context statement uses the same convention. Where “Jose” without an accent is used in this document, it is either the title of a referenced article or publication (e.g., *San Jose Mercury*, *San Jose Evening News*) or from a direct quotation.

Cleveland, M.A., Senior Architectural Historian, provided additional evaluation and quality control support. All of these individuals exceed the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualification Standards for History, Architectural History, and/or Historic Architecture. Community outreach and survey support was provided by Vanessa Armenta, Cultural Resource Specialist.

Schedule

The project was conducted between June 2022 and December 2023. Initial community outreach began in September 2022 with a virtual public kickoff meeting on September 12, 2022. This was followed by an in-person community information gathering session held at the Alviso Public Library on November 10, 2022. Additional community input was gathered through both in-person and virtual oral history interviews conducted in March and April 2023. The administrative draft was submitted for City review in early June 2023, followed by the public draft report in mid-July 2023. Comments were received on the draft report through August 2023, including comments made by the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) and the public at the August 2, 2023, HLC meeting. During September and October 2023, the findings of the Alviso Neighborhood Survey Report (i.e., the known and recommended historic districts as well as the recommended historic status of 12 individual properties) were incorporated into the City of San José’s GIS database to provide interactive access to the content of the historic context and survey report. A final report that incorporated public comments was submitted by November 1, 2023, as required by the County of Santa Clara’s Historical Heritage Grant Fund agreement.

Methodology

Study Area

The study area for this context statement is the entire Alviso neighborhood of San José. The approximate boundaries are State Route 237 on the south, the Guadalupe River on the west, San Francisco Bay on the north, and Los Esteros Road and Disk Drive on the east.

Previous Studies

This context statement builds upon the previous work of the City of San José, scholars, San José State University students, historic preservation professionals. Several of these notable works are summarized below.

Studies of Alviso

Port of Alviso National Register Historic District (1973)

The historic Port of Alviso is the oldest quarter of the community. In 1973, the Port of Alviso Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. At that time, 11 buildings were named as contributing elements. They were described as reflecting the district’s heyday, lasting roughly from 1849 to 1900. The historic district is bounded generally by the Guadalupe River on the south, Alviso Slough on the west, the north side of Elizabeth Street on the north, and Gold Street on the east.

“Alviso: The Crisis of a Barrio” (1973)

In 1971, scholar and Latino civil rights advocate Ernesto Galarza secured a grant from the John Hay Whitney Foundation to fund a six-month study of the political and economic inequalities in Alviso. The findings of Galarza’s Alviso Study Team were published in his 1973 report titled “Alviso: The Crisis of a Barrio.”

California Point of Historical Interest (1995)

In 1995, the Port of Alviso Historic District was listed as a California Point of Historical Interest with a total of 16 contributing buildings. This documentation expanded the 1973 National Register historic district with the inclusion of five additional buildings.

Bayside Cannery Historic American Buildings Survey (1997)

In 1997, the main Bayside Cannery building at 1290 Hope Street was the subject of a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) recordation. That documentation noted the significance of the cannery complex but did not formally evaluate it for eligibility for individual listing at the national, state, or local level.²

Alviso Master Plan: A Specific Plan for the Alviso Community (1998)

Adopted in 1998, the Alviso Master Plan “establishes the location, intensity, and character of land uses [within the 10,730-acre planning area]; the circulation pattern and necessary infrastructure improvement to support development; the location and configuration of parks and community facilities within the [planning] area; and the implementation actions required to realize the Plan’s objectives.”³

Alviso, California Community Assessment and Urban Design Analysis (2009)

In 2009, graduate students in San José State University’s Department of Urban and Regional Planning conducted an intensive study to document existing conditions and the historic context of Alviso. The goal “was to conduct the type of foundational community analysis essential to the practice of professional urban planning.”⁴

Alviso Salt Works Historic American Landscapes Survey (2014)

In 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that the 9,677-acre Alviso Salt Works Historic Landscape was eligible for listing on the National Register as a historic district. It was the subject of a Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) recordation in 2014. The documentation noted the “landscape clearly reflects the zenith of production with huge tracks of salt marsh converted to ponds for salt brine production.”⁵

² HABS No. CA-2686: *Bayside Cannery*.

³ City of San José Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, *Alviso Master Plan: A Specific Plan for the Community*, December 1998, p. 4, <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/16053/636681597543870000>.

⁴ San José State University Urban and Regional Planning Department, *Alviso, California Community Assessment and Urban Design Analysis*, September 2009, p. iv, <https://www.sjsu.edu/urbanplanning/docs/community-planning-reports/AlvisoCommunityAssessmentReport.pdf>.

⁵ HALS No. CA-92: *Alviso Salt Works*, p. 1.

Theses and Dissertations

Alviso has long been the subject of graduate-level theses and doctoral dissertations including:

- Aaron I. Cavin, “The Borders of Citizenship: The Politics of Race and Metropolitan Space in Silicon Valley,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012.
- James Robert Curtis, “Alviso, California: A Study in Cultural-Historical Geography,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1978.
- Paul A. Phillips, “The Port of Unrealized Dreams: Alviso, California to 1900,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 1998.
- Rebecca M. E. Spitzer, “The Maritime Shipping Industry of the Geographic Region Bounded by Aptos and Alviso, California, 1850–1950,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 2015.

Related Historic Context Statements and Historic Resource Studies

Excellent scholarship of a number of subjects related to the history of Alviso were referenced including:

- Glory Anne Laffey, *Historical Overview and Context for the City of San Jose*, prepared for the Planning Department of the City of San Jose, 1992.
- Archives and Architecture, *Draft Update to San Jose Historic Context Statement*, prepared for the City of San José Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, 2021.
- Archives and Architecture, *County of Santa Clara Historic Context Statement*, prepared for the County of Santa Clara Department of Planning and Development, 2004 (revised 2012).
- California Office of Historic Preservation, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, 2015.
- National Park Service, *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*, 2013.
- San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft San Francisco Chinese American Historic Context Statement*, 2021.

Public Outreach

Information Sessions

Between September and November 2022, City and ESA staff hosted two public information sessions with Alviso residents and stakeholders. In an effort to engage with the broadest audience, the first session was held on a virtual platform, and the second session took place in person at the Alviso Branch Library. The objectives were twofold: 1) to explain the purpose of the Alviso Historic Context and Survey Project and 2) to invite the public to share knowledge to enrich the research and presentation documents.

Oral History Interviews

ESA architectural historians approached longtime Alviso residents and descendants of Alviso pioneers to request their participation in one-on-one oral history interviews. Six individuals generously agreed to share their recollections in March 2023, and ESA gratefully acknowledges Savas Alvarez, Jan Jensen, Bart Laine, Lupe Lujan, Richard Santos, and George Trevino for their contributions to this document.

Organization

The organization of this historic context statement is modeled after the themes and sub-themes identified in the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement* (2021 document). Whereas the 2021 document identifies five themes associated with major historic periods of development in San José, this report more specifically defines the history of Alviso within six periods or eras of human occupation. These are: Pre-contact Era (before 1777), Spanish Era (1777–1821), Mexican Era (1822–46), Mid- and Late-19th Century (1847–99), 20th Century, and 21st Century. The history of Alviso before the mid-20th century is fairly well documented elsewhere. Therefore, the information presented in this historic context statement provides a brief overview of that period. The bulk of this document is focused on the mid- and late 20th-century history, about which less has been previously studied and written.

Within these six periods are themes that serve to organize the history of Alviso into coherent patterns or categories for consideration, and these are adapted from the nine sub-themes identified in the 2021 document. The themes in each period are:

- Civic Improvements (related to the Civic and Quasi-Public Context and Related Infrastructure sub-theme in the 2021 document)
- Transportation and Infrastructure (related to the Federal Infrastructure and Services sub-theme in the 2021 document)
- Ethnic and Cultural Communities (related to the Ethnic/Immigrant/Cultural Communities sub-theme in the 2021 document)
- Residential Development (related to the Districts and Neighborhood Communities sub-theme in the 2021 document)
- Industrial and Commercial Development (related to the Commerce and Industrial Development sub-theme in the 2021 document)
- Recreational Development (related to the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space sub-theme in the 2021 document)

This historic context statement concludes with the identification of significant property types and presents a framework to guide future evaluations of historic buildings, structures, sites, and districts.

General Setting

Santa Clara County

Located at the south end of San Francisco Bay, Santa Clara County encompasses 1,312 square miles and has a population of approximately 1.8 million in 2023. There are 15 cities, of which San José is the largest and also the county seat. The region, once known as the “Valley of Heart’s Delight” for its fertile landscape and high agricultural yield, is now often referred to as “Silicon Valley” as the birthplace of technological innovations and its high concentration of businesses in the technology sector. The county is ethnically diverse and rich with cultural, educational, and recreational institutions.⁶

City of San José

The largest city in northern California, San José has a population of over 1 million people (as of 2021) and encompasses 181 square miles (as of 2020) within Santa Clara County.⁷ For decades, San José has been the regional capital of Silicon Valley, and many tech businesses and industries are headquartered there. As a transportation hub, it is served by the Norman Y. Mineta San José International Airport and by multiple regional rail lines including Amtrak, Caltrain, Altamont Corridor Express (ACE), and the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) light rail, and in the near future it will also be served by the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). Several colleges and universities call San José home as well as the 23-branch public library system numerous museums and historical sites, arenas and stadiums, and outdoor recreation areas.

Alviso is San José’s northernmost neighborhood. The once-independent City of Alviso consolidated with San José in 1968, extending San José’s reach to San Francisco Bay and its many resources.

For more information about the general setting of San José, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 4 and 8–10.

⁶ “About the County,” *County of Santa Clara*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://home.sccgov.org/about-county>.

⁷ City of San José Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, 2021, pp. 8–9.

Historical Overview

Pre-contact Era: Historical Overview of Ohlone Settlement

Based on a compilation of ethnographic, historic, and archaeological data, the prolific ethnohistory specialist Randall Milliken describes a group known as the Ohlone, who once occupied the area that is now Santa Clara County.⁸ Traditional anthropological literature portrayed the Ohlone peoples as having a static culture; today, however, it is better understood that many variations of culture and ideology existed within and between villages. Although these static descriptions of separations between native cultures of California make it easier for ethnographers to describe past behaviors, they mask Native adaptability and self-identity. California's Native Americans never saw themselves as members of larger cultural groups, as described by some anthropologists. Instead, they saw themselves as members of specific villages, perhaps related to others by marriage or kinship ties, but viewing the village as the primary identifier of their origins.

The language group spoken by the Ohlone is known as “Costanoan.”⁹ This term is originally derived from a Spanish word designating the coastal peoples of Central California. Today “Costanoan” is used as a linguistic term that refers to a larger language family spoken by distinct sociopolitical groups. These sociopolitical groups spoke at least eight languages from the same Penutian language group, which were different as Spanish is from French. The Ohlone once occupied a large territory, from San Francisco Bay in the north to the Big Sur and Salinas rivers in the south. Alviso is located within the greater *Tamien* tribal area in the Santa Clara Valley.¹⁰

Economically, the Ohlone engaged in hunting and gathering. Their territory encompassed both coastal and open valley environments that contained a wide variety of resources, including grass seeds, acorns, bulbs and tubers, bear, deer, elk, antelope, a variety of bird species, and rabbit and other small mammals. The Ohlone acknowledged private ownership of goods and songs, and village ownership of rights to land and/or natural resources; they appear to have aggressively protected their village territories, requiring monetary payment for access rights in the form of clamshell beads.¹¹

After European contact, Ohlone society was severely disrupted by missionization, disease, and displacement. Today, Ohlone representatives still have a strong presence in the Bay Area and are highly interested in their historic and pre-contact past and maintain their cultural identity.

Spanish Era (1777-1821)

Spanish explorers in the late 1760s and 1770s were the first Europeans to traverse the Santa Clara Valley. José Francisco Ortega, a soldier in the exploring party of Gaspar de Portolá and Juan

⁸ R. Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice: The Disintegration of Tribal Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area 1769–1810* (Menlo Park, CA: Ballena Press, 1995).

⁹ R. S. Levy, “Costanoan,” in California, ed. R. F. Heizer, *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 8, W. G. Sturtevant, gen. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), pp. 485–497.

¹⁰ Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*.

¹¹ Levy, “Costanoan.”

Crespí, made the first recorded crossing of the Guadalupe River in the vicinity of present-day Alviso during November 1769, but no clear record remains of his exact route and his impressions of the area.¹² Juan Bautista de Anza and Pedro Font led the next expedition through the area in early 1776, leaving a substantial record of their travels. The explorers commented on the level land and good pasturage, concluding that the area would be an excellent site for settlement. Anza recorded three native villages in the vicinity of his campsite, each reportedly composed of approximately 70 persons. Anza noted some “paths and trails” heading to the south and concluded that the same tribe of Indians dwelled throughout the entire valley.¹³

After an initial period of exploration, the Spanish focused on the founding of *presidios* (military forts), missions (religious communities established by Franciscan [i.e., Catholic] missionaries), and secular *pueblos* (villages or towns) with the land held by the Crown. Following the favorable reports by Anza and Font, the Spanish moved to occupy the lands in the Santa Clara Valley founding both Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe and Mission Santa Clara de Asís in 1777. The Pueblo of San José de Guadalupe was Alta California’s first civilian settlement, and one of three towns founded to administer and coordinate the missions and presidios of Alta California.¹⁴ By the late 18th century, the *embarcadero* (landing place) of Mission Santa Clara was established at the mouth of the Guadalupe River with direct access to San Francisco Bay and developed as a trading port and a separate community. (This place would later become known as Alviso.) Mission Santa Clara (located approximately 3.75 miles southeast of present-day Alviso) provided for the religious needs of the pueblo and, as one of seven missions located within Ohlone territory, would have been the mission with the greatest impact on the indigenous population living in the Santa Clara Valley.

For additional information about the history of the greater San José area during Spanish rule, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 27–39.

Mexican Era (1822-46)

After the independence of Mexico and the secularization of the missions in the 1830s, the property of Mission Santa Clara was divided into *ranchos* (agricultural properties) and distributed among private citizens. The Embarcadero de Santa Clara was part of the Mexican land grant known as Rancho Rincón de los Esteros, a 6,353-acre area deeded to Juan Ignacio (sometimes spelled Ygnacio) Alviso in 1838. He settled there in 1840, and the settlement was renamed Alviso around that time.¹⁵ The Ohlone and other Native Californians gradually left the now-secular missions, with many going to work as wage laborers on the ranchos, in mines, and in domestic positions. There was a partial return to aboriginal religious practices and subsistence strategies, but for the most part, the Ohlone culture was greatly diminished.¹⁶ Today, descendants of the

¹² Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Hasse, *Historical Atlas of California* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), pp. 16–17.

¹³ H.E. Bolton, *Anza's California Expeditions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1930).

¹⁴ George Hendry and Jacob Bowman, *The Spanish and Mexican Adobe and Other Buildings in the Nine San Francisco Counties, 1776 to about 1850*, 1940, p. 750, on file at the California Historical Resources Information System, Northwest Information Center, Rohnert Park.

¹⁵ Mildred B. Hoover, Hero E. Rensch, and Ethel G. Rensch, *Historic Spots in California*, Third Edition (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 428.

¹⁶ Levy, “Costanoan.”

Ohlone still live in the area and many are active in restoring their traditions and advocating for Native American issues.

Present-day North First Street was first developed ca. 1840 as the San José–Alviso Road, and it connected the Pueblo of San José with the Port of Alviso.¹⁷ For an extensive history of this important road, see the *North First Street Historic Context Statement* (external link).

For additional information about the history of the greater San José area during Mexican rule, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 39–48.

Mid-and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

Early Formation of Alviso

Beginning in 1849, shortly after the start of the Gold Rush, the *Weekly Alta California* published glowing advertisements for the soon-to-be-surveyed waterfront town of Alviso (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**):

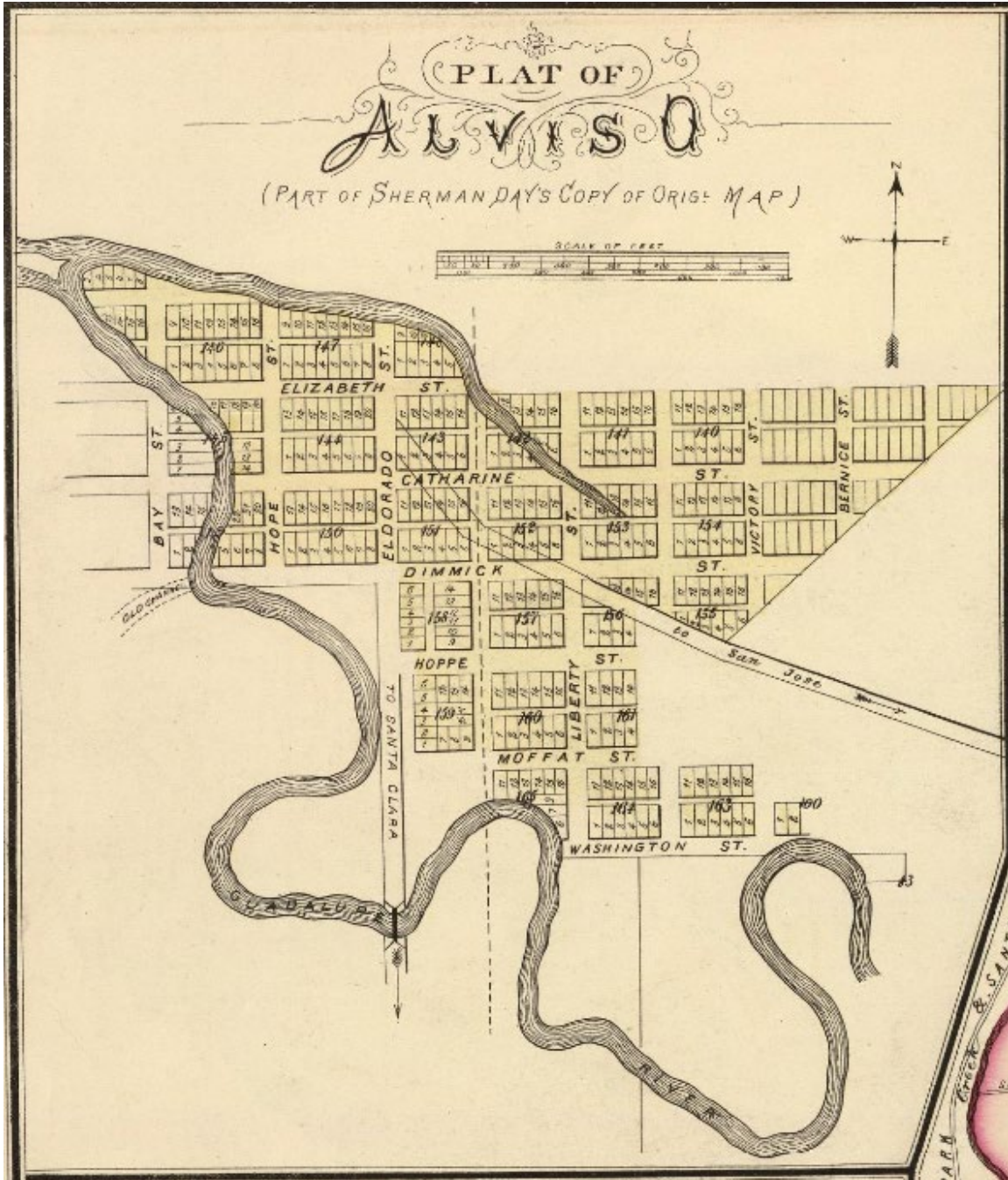
*The town of Alviso, situated at the head of the Bay of San Francisco, will shortly be offered to the public in lots suitable for building purposes. The locality of this place possesses advantages of a nature so positive and apparent that a brief description must satisfy every one of the certainty of its becoming, ere long, a town of the highest importance. At the head of the great Bay of San Francisco, in the Guadalupe River—a stream running directly through the center of the town, and navigable at all seasons of the year to vessels drawing 12 feet of water—the depot and business headquarters of the two finest valleys in California—the Santa Clara and the Pueblo—where everything required for their already numerous population, must be received; convenient of access to the gold mines, and directly on the route between them and San Francisco; with a climate unequalled even in Upper California; with pure water; free from inundations at all seasons; leagues of woodland within a convenient distance, with mills which even now furnish lumber at one-third the price in San Francisco. The town of Alviso must grow into importance. The wants of the extensive country around, constantly increasing, require a commercial town at this point—the only one where such a town can be located.*¹⁸

Alviso was described as the picture of perfection. Its geographic location, abundant natural resources, and potential as a major port city made it an ideal destination for industrialists, traders, and farmers alike. However, this and other descriptions were somewhat misleading. Within four months, the new townsite, which was described as “free from inundations at all seasons” (i.e., immune to flooding) had completely flooded. This made transportation and communication between San José—the new state capital—and its port of embarkation nearly impossible “for some time to come.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Marjorie Dobkin and Basin Research Associates, *North First Street Historic Context*, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁸ “Alviso,” *Weekly Alta California*, August 30, 1849, p. 2.

¹⁹ “San Jose,” *Daily Alta California*, December 24, 1849, p. 2.



This is a reproduction of a portion of the original plat map prepared by Sherman Day in 1869, and that, in turn, was a copy of an earlier map prepared by Chester Lyman in 1850. Note that present-day North Taylor Street was originally Dimmick Street. Present-day North First Street is labeled here as "to San Jose." Nothing east of Liberty Street was ever developed as shown here.

SOURCE: Thompson & West, *Historical Atlas Map of Santa Clara County*, 1876, p. 20 (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 1
Map of Alviso, 1869



SOURCE: Alviso, California Mission Sketches by Henry Miller, 1856, BANC PIC 1905.00006—B, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 2
Sketch of Alviso, 1856

A degree of prestige was bestowed on Alviso when California’s first governor, Peter H. Burnett, lived there from 1850 to 1854.²⁰ For more information about Governor Burnett’s controversial political career, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, page 23.

The town of Alviso was incorporated as a California city on March 26, 1852.²¹ The first elected officers included trustees J. F. Burrows, a Mr. Bodfish, B. B. Rand, John Gallagher, and T. J. West; justices of the peace Robert Hutchinson and Harry Wade; treasurer Jackson Snyder; marshal A. T. H. Gallagher; and assessor Charles Fair.²²

Railroads Bring About the Decline of the Port of Alviso

Initially, Alviso prospered as the only port in Santa Clara County and as a gateway to the capital city of San José. The city was widely publicized, the land was fertile, the infrastructure was robust, and it was a crucial location within the regional shipping and transportation networks. But its critical role was curtailed when the San Francisco-San José Railroad was completed in 1864, bypassing Alviso altogether. The agriculture industry continued to thrive, and the increasing volume of goods shipped from and stored at the Port of Alviso necessitated the construction in 1878 of a narrow-gauge line of the South Pacific Coast Railroad parallel to El Dorado Street. This connected Alviso to the main railroad line in San José, but the Alviso economy gradually declined.²³

Brief Revitalization as New Chicago

One thing that did not change was the widely held belief that Alviso had extraordinary potential as a regional center of industry and commerce, and this made the city “a land ripe for speculation

²⁰ Burnett was governor from late 1849 to early 1851.

²¹ J. P. Munro-Fraser, *History of Santa Clara County, California* (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen & Co., 1881), p. 249.

²² “Law Report,” *Daily Alta California*, May 8, 1852, p. 2.

²³ Paul A. Phillips, “The Port of Unrealized Dreams: Alviso, California to 1900,” Master’s Thesis, San José State University, 1998, p. 38.

and promotion.”²⁴ In 1890, developer P. H. Wheeler Land—attracted by the city’s low land values and plentiful space—settled on Alviso as the new home of a defunct watch factory in southern California. The factory, rebranded as the San José Watch Company, was to be the anchor of a much larger development that Wheeler named “New Chicago” and modeled after the namesake metropolis.²⁵ Located northeast of Liberty and North First streets, New Chicago was laid out in a grid with Chicago-related street names including Michigan, Wabash, Dearborn, State, La Salle, and Van Buren (**Figure 3**).

Wheeler’s plan attracted wealthy investors and real estate brokers. He predicted that New Chicago would be the location of “Spreckels’ next sugar refinery,”²⁶ and “The cathedral bell of the city clock will chime the hour when the great armies of workmen shall file in twos and threes into the great factories, yet unbuilt.”²⁷ The plan called for replacing the existing narrow-gauge railroad with a standard-gauge railroad as well as straightening and dredging Alviso Slough to create a deep-water channel.²⁸ To this end, the River, Harbor, Canal Dredging and Land Company offered 20,000 shares of company stock for sale to investors and members of the public to fund the proposed dredge. Several public meetings and an advertising blitz during the spring of 1890 tempted would-be property owners and investors, and within a few months, more than 3,500 lots in New Chicago and approximately 17,000 shares of stock had been sold.²⁹

A few houses were built in New Chicago, several miles of streets were paved with gravel, and a wood bridge was built over Steamboat Slough to provide access from the old City center to New Chicago. But the promised dredging never materialized, and the dredging company’s agents vanished with their stolen profits.³⁰

The silver lining was that Wheeler’s promise to relocate the watch factory was fulfilled. In 1891, the building was dismantled, relocated to Alviso, and reconstructed on State Street in the New Chicago area (**Figure 4** and **Figure 5**). The wood-frame building was designed by architect Jacob Lenzen & Son. At three stories in height and totaling approximately 10,000 square feet, the San José Watch Company factory was probably the largest building in Alviso.³¹ Costs to relocate, reconstruct, and operate the watch company quickly expended all financial resources, including Wheeler’s profits from selling land in New Chicago. After operating for one day and reportedly producing one pocket watch, the factory closed permanently.³²

²⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁶ Quoted in Phillips, “The Port of Unrealized Dreams,” pp. 40–41.

²⁷ Quoted in Phillips, “The Port of Unrealized Dreams,” p. 41.

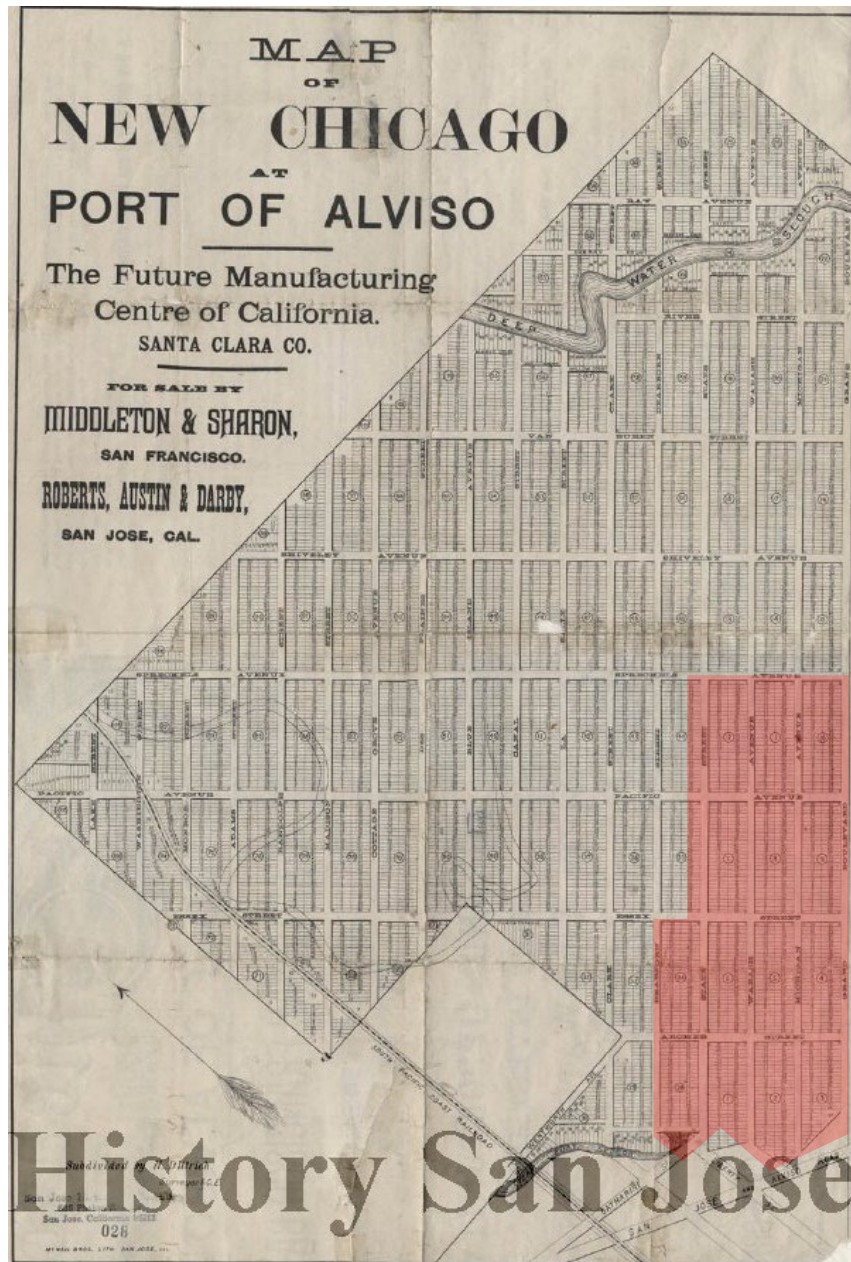
²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 43–44.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

³¹ “What Time Is It? A Question San Jose Watches Will Answer,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 27, 1891, p. 3.

³² Phillips, “The Port of Unrealized Dreams,” p. 44.



While the New Chicago survey included 104 blocks, only the area shaded red was ultimately developed.

SOURCE: History San José, History San José Ephemera Collection (external link); edited by ESA

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 3
Map of New Chicago, 1890



This view faces east on Catherine Street. The San José Watch Company was located on State Street in the New Chicago area and occupied the building in the center distance.

SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 4
Street Scene in Alviso, ca. 1890s



SOURCE: American Horologe Company website (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 5
Undated Photograph of the San José Watch Factory

The fantasy of New Chicago evaporated almost as quickly as it was conjured. Author James R. Curtis described what a visitor to New Chicago would have seen:

A traveler to Alviso in the middle 1890s would probably stare with curiosity at the landscape remnants of New Chicago. Spanning Steamboat Slough was a new wooden bridge, scarcely used, and leading to apparently nothing but an open field. Once across the bridge, and upon closer inspection, he would discover the

faint trace of lines subdividing the expanse of open land into vacant lots. The streets which cut paths through the area in a grid pattern were graded and graveled, but potholed and fast becoming overrun with weeds. Pausing at the widest street, he might glance up to find a bent and tattered sign which cryptically identified the street as “Grand Blvd.” Laughing out loud he would probably think it was all a joke, an illusion. But if rhetoric was reality, he would have seen a bustling, prosperous city.³³

20th Century

Numerous changes occurred within Alviso over the course of the 20th century. For a time, it was home to one of the nation’s largest canneries (discussed below under Industrial and Commercial Development). Beginning in the 1940s, Alviso’s population saw a proliferation of Mexican laborers who were contracted to work under the Bracero Program (discussed below under Ethnic and Cultural Communities). After the program ended in 1964, the Mexican-American population remained in Alviso and remains the largest ethnic group in 2023. In 1968, Alvisans voted to consolidate with the City of San José, and the consequences of this decision are still felt by many Alvisans today (discussed below under Civic Improvements). The advent of the Alviso Family Health Center in 1969 shone a national spotlight on Alviso and brought attention to grassroots organizations (discussed below under Civic Improvements).

Civic Improvements

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

Public Institutions

U.S. Post Office

The community of Alviso had one of the first post offices in Santa Clara County. The postal service began on August 17, 1859, and the first postmaster was Robert Carr.³⁴ He was succeeded by John Berry in 1864.³⁵ David R. Tilden filled the post prior to his death in 1875, and it is believed that the post office was located inside the Tilden General Store, which operated from 1865 to 1912 in a building that stood at 996 Elizabeth Street.³⁶ (It was known as the Laine Store from 1940 to 1960. In 2017, the building collapsed and the ruins were subsequently removed.)

Captain Miles Hollister served as Alviso postmaster from 1889 to 1914.³⁷ He was also an agent of the New Chicago Town Site, and in 1889 (and possibly later), both the New Chicago Town Site office and the Alviso Post Office were located inside a building that also served as a general

³³ Ibid., pp. 44–45.

³⁴ “Port Alviso: The Great Strawberry and Asparagus Center,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1.

³⁵ William H. Knight, ed., *Hand-book Almanac for the Pacific States: An Official Register and Business Directory of the States and Territories of California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and Arizona; and the Colonies of British Columbia and Vancouver Island, for the Year 1864* (San Francisco: H.H. Bancroft and Co., 1864), p. 228, accessed April 6, 2023, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Hand_book_Almanac_for_the_Pacific_States/waskAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

³⁶ City of San José, Application for California Point of Historical Interest: Port of Alviso, 1995, p.47.

³⁷ “Last Postmark—After 51 Years, No More Mail,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 5, 1940, p. 21.

merchandise store (**Figure 6**).³⁸ It was located at the northeast corner of Catherine and El Dorado streets on a site that, in 2023, is developed with a contemporary, multi-family building.



The store was located on the northeast corner of Catherine and El Dorado streets. Note the words “Post Office” below the “New Chicago Town Site” sign.

SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection
(external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 6
Miles Hollister’s Store, ca. 1889

Public Education

Alviso School

The Alviso School District was in existence by 1867 when “it proposed to build a new school house.”³⁹ Archival research didn’t confirm whether or not this was the same as the Alviso School that was located at the northwest corner of Liberty and Hoppe streets (**Figure 7**). It was destroyed by fire in July 1897, mere weeks after the Alviso School Board fired the school’s principal for “unprofessional conduct,” and arson was suspected.⁴⁰ Until a new schoolhouse could be constructed, children were taught in makeshift classrooms around town.⁴¹

³⁸ “Photo Record: Accession Number 1993-106,” History San José, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://historysanjose.pastperfectonline.com/photo/D7C16CF3-2D67-4A89-9AC4-535044690159>.

³⁹ “Pacific Slope Intelligence: California,” *Daily Alta California*, August 26, 1867, p. 1.

⁴⁰ “Alviso School War,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 16, 1897, p. 5.

⁴¹ Ed Hering, “Landmark Doomed to Wreckers Sledge,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 5, 1970, p. 15.



SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 7
Alviso School, ca. 1895

20th Century

Civic improvements in Alviso were constructed during two distinct periods: when Alviso was an incorporated city (before 1968) and after Alviso consolidated with the City of San José (1968–present).

Consolidation Conflict

Prior to January 1968, Alviso was an independent chartered city. During the 20th century, the City of San José made four attempts to annex or consolidate land within the City of Alviso. An important distinction is that annexation is the act of taking land from one municipality and adding it to another, whereas consolidation is the act of combining two previously independent municipalities.

Port of San José Annexation: 1912

The first attempt occurred in 1912 when three nearby communities—the City of San José, the City of Santa Clara, and the unincorporated town of Sunnyvale—raced to obtain the rights to build the county’s first deep-water port.⁴² The City of San José’s Port of San José Committee touted the many benefits of establishing its own port at Alviso because the Santa Clara Valley was a regional center of industry and agriculture, and San José was the county seat.

Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were invited to survey potential locations for port facilities,⁴³ and the city sought and received federal approval for its plan.⁴⁴ Citizens of San José were assured that the cost of constructing a deep-water canal would not

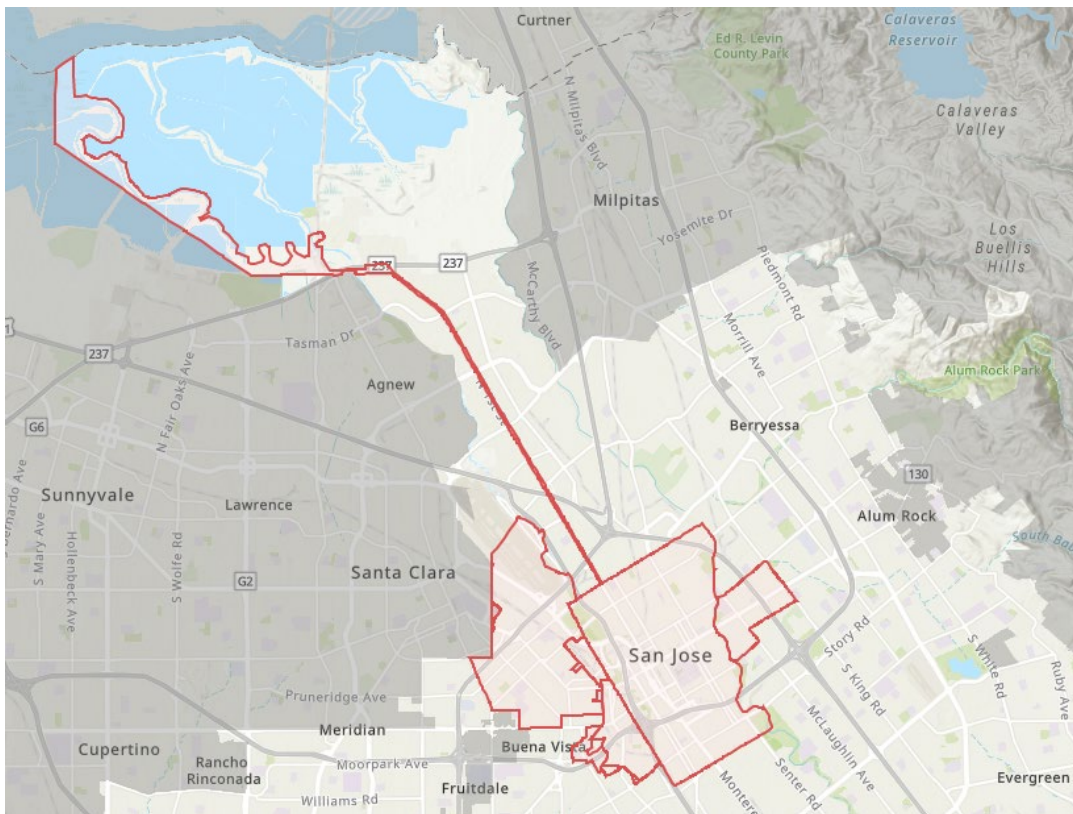
⁴² “Three-Cornered Race of Cities to the Bay,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 27, 1912, p. 1.

⁴³ “Army Engineers Coming Today to Discuss Port for San Jose,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 16, 1912, p. 1.

⁴⁴ “The Port of San Jose,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 1, 1915, p. 6.

exceed \$100,000.⁴⁵ Concurrently, the City of Santa Clara wooed Alviso in hopes of consolidating the entire city, and Sunnyvale filed articles of incorporation so that it could develop its own port near the mouth of the Guadalupe River.⁴⁶

Of the three proposals, the City of San José’s garnered the most public support, and it proposed to annex a 100-foot-wide, 11-mile-long right-of-way along North First Street from its northern border to the mouth of the Guadalupe River in Alviso (**Figure 8**). A vote for this so-called “strip annexation” was put to the people of San José and to the one person who lived in the annexation area. The citizens of Alviso were not allowed to vote on the issue.⁴⁷ The vote to annex this narrow strip of Alviso passed 4,225 to 76,⁴⁸ making it the third annexation in San José’s history after the Gardner District and East San José in 1911. For more information about the earliest efforts by the City of San José to annex newly developing residential areas outside the city limits, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 73–75.



The 1930 San José city limits are outlined in red. This includes the 1912 strip annexation to Alviso. The 2023 city limits are indicated by the lightest area.

SOURCE: City of San José, Annexations Map (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 8
1930 Map of San José City Limits

⁴⁵ “San Francisco Endorses Port Idea,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 20, 1912, p. 8.

⁴⁶ “Three-Cornered Race of Cities to the Bay,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 27, 1912, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Election for Annexation Carries,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 28, 1912, p. 1.

While San José had gained access to the river via a narrow right-of-way, Alviso was not prevented from accessing the river and maintained jurisdiction of the banks of the river and sloughs through the town.

A Series of Unsuccessful Attempts to Consolidate with San José: 1958–62

Following the Great Depression and two world wars, Alviso, like many small cities in America, struggled to grow and improve. To make matters worse, Alviso’s relatively small population and slow economy formed a narrow tax base, and basic municipal services exceeded the city’s budget; major flood events occurred on a regular basis, routinely straining the city’s and county’s emergency resources; and Alviso’s largest employer, the Bayside Canning Company, shuttered its doors in 1936. On these grounds, Alviso’s neighbors saw a city in decline, and the City of San José saw the immense potential of an underdeveloped territory on San Francisco Bay. Beginning in 1958, the City of San José campaigned for a wholesale consolidation of Alviso, arguing that Alviso was in dire straits and could no longer support itself. In reality, Alviso persisted despite its struggles and with fewer resources than other nearby communities, just as it had for decades.

If Alvisans supported a vote to consolidate, the City of San José promised more funding—and access to federal funds—for improved services, effective flood control measures, and recruiting developers to transform Alviso into an industrial hub.⁴⁹ In 1958, a group of seven Alvisans—which accounted for a very small percentage of the population—submitted an inquiry to the San José City Council to initiate the consolidation process,⁵⁰ and archival research indicates that the process did not reach a formal vote for nearly two and a half years. In February 1961 and April 1962, Alvisans voted against consolidation with San José.⁵¹⁻⁵² Journalists later speculated that Alvisans had little faith that San José would deliver on its promises.⁵³ The message was clear: the majority of Alvisans would rather remain an independent city than become a neighborhood of San José.

Consolidation and the Aftermath: 1968

After a decade of opposition, the City of San José was more determined than ever to consolidate with Alviso and had three main objectives: “to maintain control of development within [Alviso’s] sphere of influence, to assume the efficient development and expansion of the [San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility built in 1956], and to protect the industrial reserves to the South.”⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵

⁴⁹ “Alviso Merger Has Merit,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 19, 1958, p. 11.

⁵⁰ “Merger Attempt Doomed?,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 17, 1958, p. 19.

⁵¹ “Alviso Is Still Alviso; No Merger,” *San Jose Mercury*, February 22, 1961, p. 1.

⁵² “Alviso Again Nixes S.J. Consolidation,” *San Jose Mercury*, April 11, 1962, p. 61.

⁵³ Ed Hering, “Alviso Annex Backers Have a ‘Built-in’ Safeguard,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 29, 1967, p. 1A.

⁵⁴ “Alviso Study Conclusions and Recommendations,” August 1, 1973, p. 2, in the “San José: Alviso – Development and Construction” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁵⁵ By the early 1960s, “master plans for future development in various cities in the area around the south tip of [San Francisco Bay]...set aside [huge areas] for industries by Milpitas, Alviso, Mountain View, San Jose, [Santa Clara] and Sunnyvale.” These so-called “industrial reserves” were primarily located north of the Bayshore Freeway (U.S. 101). See “S.C. Battle: Homes, Pears?,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 31, 1962, p. 4.

By the mid-1960s, a greater number of Alvisans seemed open to the idea of consolidation than in previous years. In July 1967, the City of San José entered into a legally binding contract with the Alviso Improvement Corporation, a non-profit organization of 17 local property owners in favor of a merger, to garner public support for consolidation (**Figure 9**). The corporation assured wary Alvisans that “the agreement is set up to provide a basis for litigation in the unlikely event San José’s government should ever go back on its promises of what amounts to about \$500,000 in capital improvements and other benefits.”⁵⁶ No such agreement was in place during the earlier consolidation attempts.



From left to right: Johnny McReynolds, Bill Zanker, Richard P. Santos, John Castro, Evan Zanker, and Frank O’Neill. The billboard reads, “Consolidation Is Progress, Vote Yes Jan. 9th.”

SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, December 29, 1967, p. 1A

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 9
Members of the Alviso Improvement Corporation, 1967

In the event of a winning vote, the corporation promised to cede Alviso lands to the City of San José. In exchange, the San José City Council preemptively passed a resolution to provide an array of capital improvements and services in Alviso including sealing dirt streets, installing street lights, and furnishing a new fire station, community center, and municipal swimming pool.⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸ Some improvements, such as municipal police service and lowering water rates, would be provided immediately upon consolidation while others, such as expending at least \$300,000 on flood control measures, were promised “without unreasonable delay.”⁵⁹ To sweeten the deal, those employed by the City of Alviso (i.e., people who would be out of a job upon consolidation)

⁵⁶ Ed Hering, “Alviso Annex Backers Have a ‘Built-in’ Safeguard,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 29, 1967, p. 1A.

⁵⁷ “Resolution Pledges Alviso Aid,” *San Jose Evening News*, July 18, 1967, p. 9.

⁵⁸ “S.J. Council Delegation Split on Question of Consolidation,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 7, 1968, p. 29.

⁵⁹ “San Jose Whips Up ‘Dowry’ in Bid to Woo, Win Alviso,” *San Jose News*, July 14, 1967, p. 72.

were guaranteed civil service jobs in San José, existing buildings in Alviso would not be required to meet San José building codes unless they presented health or safety hazards, and Alviso taxpayers would not be responsible for San José's past bonded debt.⁶⁰

Within four months of campaigning, the Alviso Improvement Corporation collected more than 200 signatures on a petition for Alvisans to vote again on consolidation with San José.⁶¹ One of the most momentous days in Alviso's history was January 9, 1968, when its citizens narrowly voted in favor of consolidation with San José (189 in favor and 180 opposed).⁶² The guarantees made by San José foretold the imminent transformation of the city-turned-neighborhood of Alviso, but a large number of Alvisans were displeased and fought the election results for years to come.

Within 13 months of consolidation, the City of San José declared that it had "'bent over backward' to fulfill its promises to Alviso and please opponents of the consolidation." It also claimed to have provided "a variety of new services in Alviso which the city of San Jose 'was not obligated to provide,'" such as litter collection, parking violation forgiveness,⁶³ and a volunteer project to paint dozens of residences that was a collaboration with the Santa Clara County Economic Opportunity Commission.⁶⁴ Within 18 months, the City of San José reported that it had already fulfilled several of its pledges, namely "seal coating virtually all of [Alviso's unpaved] streets—about 80 blocks—and leveling and oiling wide shoulders [to make space for pedestrians]" and receiving bids to install a new water main that connected to the Hetch Hetchy regional water system.⁶⁵ Other obligations fulfilled by San José included converting a former school building into a community center (extant and located at 1568 Liberty Street), converting the old Alviso City Hall building into a San José Branch Library (extant and located at 1060 North Taylor Street),⁶⁶ and converting a former residence into the first San José Fire Station in Alviso (extant and located at 1590 Gold Street).⁶⁷

Despite the completion of some actionable items in the months and years following consolidation, many Alvisans publicly decried San José's realized and promised investments as insufficient or ineffective.⁶⁸ Others refused to accept the results of the 1968 vote that ended Alviso's independence, claiming that illegal practices were used by San José officials and that a number of the votes cast were fraudulent. The dissenters organized under the name Alviso Ad Hoc Committee and appealed several times. The vote was upheld by the State Court of Appeal in November 1969 (although some votes were ruled to have been illegal),^{69,70} voided by the State

⁶⁰ "S.J. Spells Out Goodies for Alviso—if Merged," *San Jose Mercury*, July 14, 1967, p. 21.

⁶¹ "Alviso Moves for Merger Vote," *San Jose Evening News*, November 1, 1967, p. 8.

⁶² "Alviso Will Merge with San Jose," *San Jose Evening News*, January 10, 1968, p. 1.

⁶³ "Alviso Isn't Paradise – but Outlook Is Rosy," no publication title, February 19, 1969, pp. 1, 15, in the "San José: Alviso 1960–1969" vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁶⁴ Ed Hering, "Thanks to Volunteers, Alviso Getting a Fresh Coat of Paint," *San Jose Mercury*, May 20, 1968, n.p.; "Alviso Gets Painted Today," June 22, 1968, n.p.; both articles in the "San José: Alviso 1960–1969" vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁶⁵ "San José Spends \$250,000 for Better Alviso Streets, Water," *San Jose Mercury*, July 28, 1969, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Ed Hering, "New Library, Fire House Perk Up Alviso Landscape," *San Jose Mercury*, May 1, 1969, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ John Spalding, "Alviso: Community Says It's Being Had," *San Jose Mercury*, September 16, 1979, pp. 1B, 3B.

⁶⁹ "Court Oks Annexation of Alviso," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 27, 1969, p. 8.

⁷⁰ "Hearing Opens on Alviso Annexation Vote Fraud Charge," *Palo Alto Times*, February 21, 1968, p. 10.

Supreme Court in 1970 after an appeal by the ACLU,^{71,72} and re-upheld by the Santa Clara County Superior Court in 1971.⁷³ In April 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the committee's appeal, effectively upholding the 1971 decision.⁷⁴ During this period of litigation (1969–74), San José claimed that it was unable to expend any city funds to accomplish its laundry list of projects in Alviso “because if the election had been ruled invalid, council members ‘would have been held personally liable for misuse of public funds.’”⁷⁵

In 1978, the Comité de Mejoras de Alviso (Alviso Improvement Committee) and the San José-based Community Legal Services filed a complaint with the federal Office of Revenue Sharing alleging that the provision of city services in Alviso, which were subsidized in part by federal funding, was inequitable and evidence of racial discrimination against the largely Hispanic community. After investigating the claim, federal officials “found that San José had discriminated in provision of street paving, sidewalks, flood control and library hours.” A schedule was set for required improvement of services, and if San José did not comply, there was a threat of withdrawn federal funding.⁷⁶ The following year, Alviso formally petitioned to secede from the City of San José:

*The complaints raised were the same ones that have irritated Alvisans for so long they recite them like a litany: the floods that come every winter and the new homes that have never come; the improvements to existing homes that cannot be made because of stringent flood regulations requiring almost everything to be built seven feet off the ground; the proposed deep-water channel into the Bay that has never been dredged; the sale of 4,000 acres of Alviso to the federal government for a wildlife preserve; the pockmarked streets with no sidewalks; the street repairs that don't last, and the obvious growth in the past 11 years of everyplace in the county but Alviso.*⁷⁷

Secession never took place, and generations of Alvisans have since seen slow progress, stagnant or worsening conditions, and few concrete improvements in their neighborhood. In 1993, a front-page article in the *San Jose Mercury* titled “Covenant & Betrayal: San Jose's Broken Promises Left Alviso High and Dry” provides a detailed account of the unfavorable conditions in Alviso 25 years after consolidation,⁷⁸ and few changes have occurred since then. Today, many Alvisans continue to feel ignored and overlooked by San José.

⁷¹ “Alviso Put Adrift by Court Ruling,” *Oakland Tribune*, September 18, 1970, p. 27.

⁷² “High Court to Rule on Alviso Status,” *Palo Alto Times*, March 5, 1970, p. 10.

⁷³ “Annexation of Alviso Held Legal,” *Palo Alto Times*, October 1, 1971, p. 3.

⁷⁴ “New Appeal on Alviso Annexation,” *Palo Alto Times*, Jan. 17, 1974, p. 3.

⁷⁵ John Spalding, “Alviso: Community Says It's Being Had,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 16, 1979, pp. 1B, 3B.

⁷⁶ “Spanish Community Challenges City's Failure to Provide Services; Revenue Sharing Funds Could Be Withdrawn,” *The Clearinghouse Review* vol. 12, no. 7 (November 1978), p. 429.

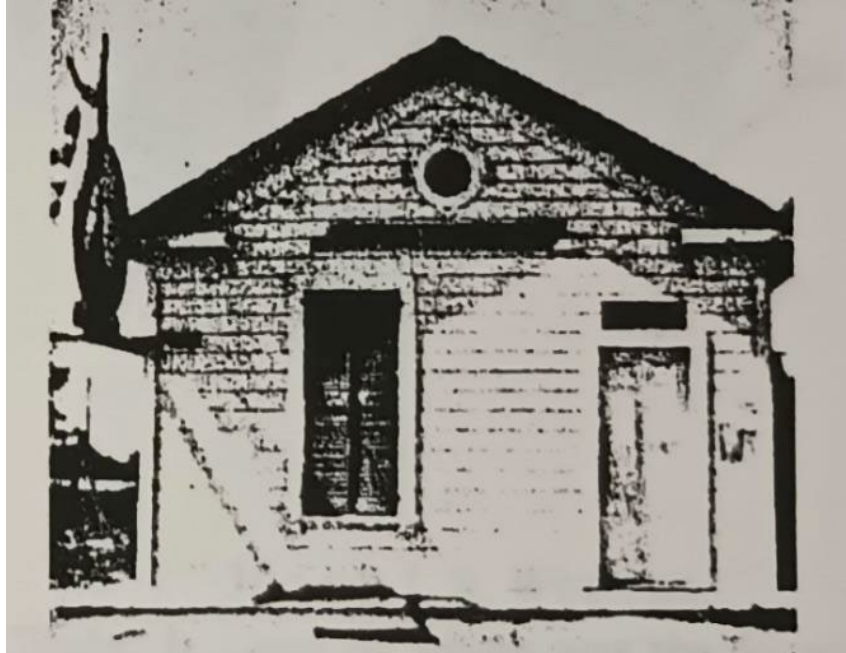
⁷⁷ Bill Javetski, “Leaving S.J. Seems Great Idea,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 16, 1979, p. 1B.

⁷⁸ Nick Anderson and Mike Cassidy, “Covenant & Betrayal: San Jose's Broken Promises Left Alviso High and Dry,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 28, 1993, p. 1A.

Public Institutions

City Hall and Library

A 19th-century building identified on the 1908 Sanborn map as a post office is also shown on the 1930 Sanborn map as “City Hall”. The address of the building housing the original city hall was 42 Taylor Street, and it was destroyed by fire sometime before 1935 (**Figure 10**).⁷⁹



SOURCE: “Alviso History – Wade and Ortle” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library

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Figure 10
Undated Photograph of Alviso’s First City Hall

In 1932, the community began talks of constructing a dedicated city hall rather than continuing to rent and repurpose existing buildings. Town leaders proposed that a hall “made of wood” could be built “for several hundred dollars” using State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) funding.⁸⁰ SERA was created in 1933 as a provision of the Unemployment Bond Relief Act to provide employment to out of work individuals of all professions.

A new city hall was built in 1935 at 1060 North Taylor Street, immediately to the west of the earlier city hall site, on a parcel donated to the city by John M. Ackerman (**Figure 11**).⁸¹ The new building contained spaces for city council meetings and a small courtroom, and “the entire hall is large enough to hold small community parties and classes.”⁸² The extant rear addition was

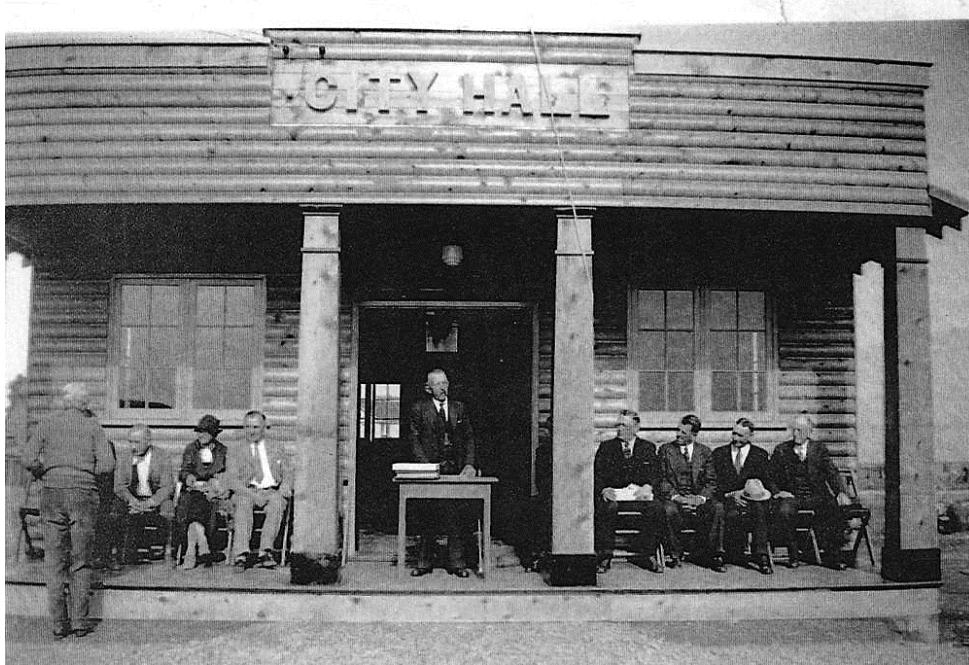
⁷⁹ Alice Hornbaker, “Alice Huxham Holds Court, Runs Efficient Household,” *San Jose Mercury-News*, December 23, 1951, p. 5S.

⁸⁰ “Residents Speed Completion of First Town Hall,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 19, 1934, p. 18.

⁸¹ “Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse,” 2000, “San José: Alviso – Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁸² Alice Hornbaker, “Alice Huxham Holds Court, Runs Efficient Household,” *San Jose Mercury-News*, December 23, 1951, p. 5S.

constructed in 1943 and used as a firehouse for several decades.⁸³ After the Alviso School on Liberty Street closed in 1956, the city offices and meeting rooms were relocated to the more spacious school building, and they remained there until Alviso consolidated with San José in 1968.⁸⁴



SOURCE: Historypin (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 11
Dedication of the Second Alviso City Hall, February 1935

Following the consolidation of Alviso in 1968, the City of San José converted the old city hall into the Alviso Branch of the San José Public Library and moved firefighting operations to a firehouse in a former residential building at 1590 Gold Street (**Figure 12**).⁸⁵ A major flood in February and March 1983 destroyed the library's collection, and it was temporarily closed until March 1984.⁸⁶

The old city hall functioned as the public library until September 1999 when the joint Alviso Branch Library and Community Center was constructed at 5050 North First Street (**Figure 13**).⁸⁷ The new facility was funded by the Branch Library Development Program.⁸⁸

⁸³ "Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse," 2000, "San José: Alviso – Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse" vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁸⁴ Ed Hering, "Landmark Doomed to Wreckers Sledge," *San Jose Mercury*, January 5, 1970, p. 15.

⁸⁵ Ed Hering, "New Library, Fire House Perk Up Alviso Landscape," *San Jose Mercury*, May 1, 1969, p. 12.

⁸⁶ "Timeline of San José Public Library History," *San José Public Library*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.sjpl.org/history>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ "San José Public Library – Alviso Branch Library," *LibraryThing*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.librarything.com/venue/11948/San-Jos%C3%A9-Public-Library-Alviso-Branch-Library>.



SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, May 1, 1969, p. 12

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 12
Dedication of the New Alviso Branch Library, April 1969



SOURCE: San José Public Library (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 13
Alviso Branch Library and Community Center

Fire Department

As noted above, the City of Alviso’s first firehouse was constructed in 1943 as an addition to the 1935 city hall located at 1060 North Taylor Street (**Figure 14**). The Alviso Fire Department was headquartered there until Alviso consolidated with San José in 1968.⁸⁹



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 14
Old Alviso Firehouse Behind the Old City Hall

The following year, the City of San José moved firefighting operations to a repurposed residential building at 1590 Gold Street that had been relocated from San José (**Figure 15** and **Figure 16**).⁹⁰ The former residence was converted to San José Fire Station No. 25 at a cost of \$30,000 and comprised the main firehouse, a garage, and a community room at the rear of the building.⁹¹ The San José Fire Department would remain at the Gold Street location until 2007 when it relocated to a new facility at 5125 Wilson Way in Alviso.⁹² The former Fire Station No. 25 was later reconverted to a residence, and the building is extant.

⁸⁹ “Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse,” 2000, “San José: Alviso – Old Alviso Town Hall/Firehouse” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

⁹⁰ Ed Hering, “New Library, Fire House Perk Up Alviso Landscape,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 1, 1969, p. 12.

⁹¹ “Fire House for Alviso,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 3, 1969, p. 4.

⁹² “Architect Hired for Fire Station – Facility Expected to Have Two Engines, Six Bedrooms,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 29, 2009, p. 6B.



SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, September 3, 1969, p. 4

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 15
San José Fire Station No. 25 at 1590 Gold Street, 1969



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 16
Former San José Fire Station No. 25 at 1590 Gold Street

U.S. Post Office

Captain Miles Hollister served as Alviso postmaster from 1889 to 1914,⁹³ and his daughter, Belle Davee, succeeded him as postmistress from 1914 to 1940. During that time, the post office operated from inside her residence.⁹⁴ After 1940, the position of postmaster was given to Stanley Perkins.⁹⁵ He re-established a post office in the Laine Building, purchasing used equipment from El Cerrito to outfit the space.⁹⁶ Perkins eventually moved the post office to his store at 1160 North Taylor Street. The date of this move is uncertain but appears to be sometime between 1949

⁹³ “Last Postmark—After 51 Years, No More Mail,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 5, 1940, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Feb. 23 Closing Date for Alviso Postmaster Bids,” *San Jose Mercury*, February 11, 1940.

and 1963.⁹⁷ Perkins retired as postmaster in 1977, passing the post to George N. Carson of Redwood City.⁹⁸

By 1982, the U.S. States Postal Service began to look for a new location for the Alviso Post Office.⁹⁹ The timing was auspicious because a year later in 1983, a massive flood inundated Alviso, including the Perkins Store and the Alviso Post Office (**Figure 17** and **Figure 18**).



SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 17
Perkins Store and Post Office During the 1983 Flood



Note the mail cart with ruined materials in the foreground.

SOURCE: History San José, Peninsula Times Tribune Photographs Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 18
Perkins Store and Post Office After the 1938 Flood

⁹⁷ An addition corresponding to the known location of the post office at 1160 North Taylor Street is visible in the 1963 aerial images of Alviso. However, information provided by the Perkins family claims that the move occurred ca. 1949, just after construction of Perkins' Store.

⁹⁸ "Morgan Hill, Alviso Get Postmasters," *San Jose Evening News*, January 28, 1977, p. 50.

⁹⁹ "Alviso, CA, Proposed New Main Post Office," *San Jose Mercury*, February 20, 1982, p. 80.

The current post office at 1525 Gold Street was constructed ca. 1993 (**Figure 19**).¹⁰⁰ In 2023, Alviso continues to have no residential main delivery. All Alvisans are provided subsidized post offices boxes and must travel to the post office to collect their mail.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 19
Alviso Post Office

Public Education

Alviso School

Alviso entered into the 20th century with the completion of a major civic project. Three years after the old schoolhouse was destroyed by fire in 1897, the second iteration of the Alviso School was constructed in 1900 in the same location as the earlier school (i.e., at the northwest corner of Liberty and Hoppe streets) (**Figure 20**). The two-story, wood-frame building contained five classrooms and a towering belfry, and for decades it was considered to be “the most prominent building in Alviso.”¹⁰¹ A small ancillary classroom building was added to the school around 1930.¹⁰² The outbuilding still exists at 1568 Liberty Street and is currently vacant. (For more information about the ancillary building which later served as the Alviso CSO Office, see Community-Led Improvements below.)

After being replaced by the new George Mayne Elementary School (described below), the Alviso School closed permanently in 1956. The building was repurposed as city offices and city council chambers until 1968, and it was in a second-floor classroom that votes were counted on

¹⁰⁰ These dates are based on comparisons of aerial photograph between 1993 and 1999. “1160 North Taylor Street, San José,” *Historic Aerials*, accessed May 19, 2023, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>.

¹⁰¹ Jack Russell, “Alviso: City on the Mud,” *San Mateo Times*, July 11, 1964, p. 13A.

¹⁰² Comparison of 1928 aerial photograph and 1930 Sanborn maps.

January 9, 1968, that ultimately led to the consolidation of Alviso with the City of San José.¹⁰³ The building was demolished in 1970,¹⁰⁴ and two palm trees mark the former location of the main entrance on Liberty Street.



In the left foreground is an ancillary school building (extant and located at 1568 Liberty Street).

SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 20
Alviso School, ca. 1945

Japanese School

The first Japanese migrant farmers arrived in Alviso ca. 1901.¹⁰⁵ Many brought their families, and dozens of Japanese children from Alviso and the neighboring community of Agnews were “welcomed at the [integrated Alviso public] school, and are regarded as very desirable pupils in every way.”¹⁰⁶

In 1908 or earlier, the first Japanese school in Alviso was established in a dwelling on Taylor Street between Gold and El Dorado streets.¹⁰⁷ Around 1910, the first dedicated Alviso Japanese School was opened at the southeast corner of Liberty Street and present-day Liberty Court, replacing the earlier school (**Figure 21**).¹⁰⁸ This was a “supplementary school [at least initially], where the Japanese children go each day, at the close of the public-school session, to learn to read

¹⁰³ Ed Hering, “Landmark Doomed to Wreckers Sledge,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 5, 1970, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 445, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Immigrants_in_industries/x2gTAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁰⁷ 1908 Sanborn map.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and write English and to acquire the outlines of the history of Japan.”¹⁰⁹ Japanese children attended school in Alviso until 1942, when the federal government relocated all people of Japanese descent to detention camps for the duration of World War II. The Japanese School was demolished ca. 1960.



The labels indicate that the kindergarten class is on the left, the preschool class is in the center, and the grammar school class is on the right.

SOURCE: "Japanese in Alviso" vertical file, Alviso Branch Library Community Room

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 21
Alviso Japanese School, 1910

George Mayne Elementary School

In 1954, residents in the Alviso Elementary School District voted to approve a \$147,000 bond measure to replace the aging Alviso School.¹¹⁰ In 1956, a new eight-classroom school opened at 5030 North First Street and was named after Alviso rancher George Mayne who donated the land for the school campus (**Figure 22**).¹¹¹ Mayne was also the oldest member of the school's board of trustees at the time.¹¹² The school as designed by the architectural firm of Kress, Goudie & Kress and constructed by builder George A. Lauer.¹¹³

In 1958, Mayne Elementary was one of two schools in Santa Clara County to receive a state loan of \$273,000 to enlarge the school campus.¹¹⁴ A review of historic aerial photographs shows that four new classroom buildings were constructed by 1960.

The adjacent municipal swimming pool, Alviso Park, and Alviso Branch Library are outside the Mayne Elementary School campus.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States*, p. 451.

¹¹⁰ "School Bonds Win," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 1, 1954, p. 23.

¹¹¹ "History," George Mayne Elementary, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://mayne.schoolloop.com/history>.

¹¹² "School Bonds Win," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 1, 1954, p. 23.

¹¹³ "Alviso Dedicates its new School Building Today," *San Jose Mercury*, June 6, 1956, p. 20.

¹¹⁴ "2 Schools Get Loans," *San Jose Mercury*, March 7, 1958, p. 16.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 22
George Mayne Elementary School

Public Utilities

KQW Broadcasting Station

The San José-based KQW radio station was licensed in 1921 to Charles Herrold. He was a broadcasting pioneer who had made experimental radio transmissions under the call letters FN since 1909 from the eponymous Herrold College of Engineering and Wireless inside the bygone Garden City Bank at 50 West San Fernando Street in San José. Many radio historians consider Herrold’s early transmissions to be the world’s first radio broadcasting station,¹¹⁵ and the downtown San José site is designated as California Historical Landmark No. 952.¹¹⁶

While the KQW recording studio remained in San José, a new broadcasting station was constructed in Alviso in 1939 (**Figure 23**). It was located on a 60-acre property on Los Esteros Road near Mallard Slough (the present-day location of the GreenWaste Zanker Resource Recovery Facility at 675 Los Esteros Road).¹¹⁷ The facility was dedicated on October 31, 1939, and included a Streamline Moderne-style transmitter building and two 243-foot-tall radio transmission towers that delivered the broadcast to locations as far away as Paso Robles (140 miles to the south).¹¹⁸⁻¹¹⁹ All components were built on deep piles with reinforced concrete foundations to withstand environmental factors including salt water and the inevitability of earthquakes.¹²⁰

KQW was purchased by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1949, and the station’s call letters were changed to KCBS.¹²¹ In July 1950, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) permitted KCBS to move its San José studio to San Francisco and the transmission station from

¹¹⁵ Gordon B. Greb, “The Golden Anniversary of Broadcasting,” *Journal of Broadcasting*, 1959, pp. 3 – 13, <https://www.charlesherrold.org/NewCDHPix/GREBJOB1958.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ “Santa Clara,” *California Office of Historic Preservation*, accessed May 5, 2023, https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21522.

¹¹⁷ Advertisement for KQW, *San Jose Evening News*, October 31, 1939, p. 13.

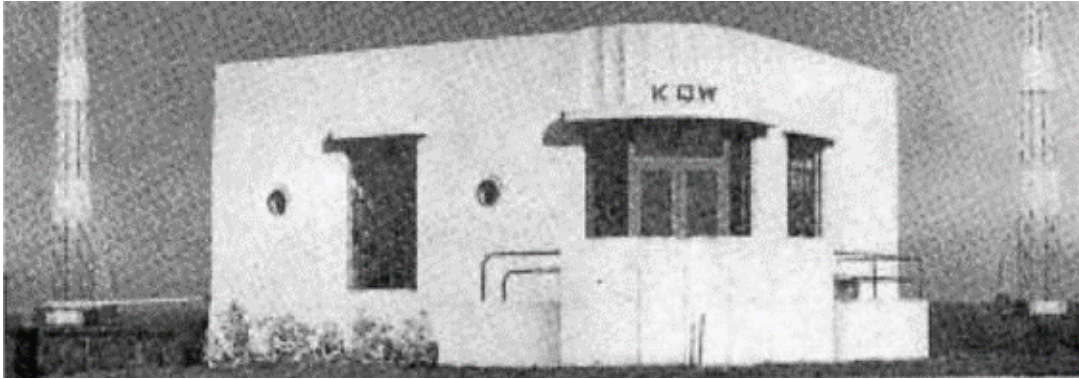
¹¹⁸ “Equipment Is of Latest Type,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 31, 1939, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ “Station KQW Dedicates New Transmitter,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 31, 1939, p. 21.

¹²⁰ “KQW Is On the Air – Over New \$60,000 Station,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 31, 1939, p. 4.

¹²¹ For more information about the rich history of radio in the San Francisco Bay Area, see John Schneider, “The History of KQW/KCBS,” *The Radio Historian*, 1998, <http://www.theradiohistorian.org/kqw.htm>.

Alviso to Novato.¹²² The Alviso station was soon abandoned,¹²³ and it was demolished at an unknown date after 1951.



SOURCE: The Radio Historian (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 23
KQW Broadcasting Station, 1940

Community-Led Improvements

Alviso Family Health Center

Origins

A group of Mexican-American community leaders called the Alviso Citizens Committee to Insure Opportunity Now! (ACCION!) formed in the mid-1960s to oppose consolidation with San José and advocate for needed improvements in the city.¹²⁴ For example, in 1966, the group raised the issue of the lack of a baseball diamond, and within weeks, local donors provided the space (inside the Alviso Speedway), labor, construction materials, and uniforms for local little league teams.¹²⁵ They organized a one-time litter removal event that evolved into a citywide garbage pick-up ordinance,¹²⁶ and they fought for safer traffic controls within city limits.¹²⁷ The complete lack of medical services in Alviso meant that residents, many of whom lived below the poverty line, had to travel at least 11 miles to the nearest hospital (Valley Medical Center in San José),¹²⁸ and ACCION! focused its efforts on resolving this issue.

ACCION! consulted with the San José Chapter of the Community Services Organization (CSO), and it took the reins in the campaign for a new health clinic in Alviso.¹²⁹ Founded in 1947 by a group of Latino organizers in Los Angeles, CSO is a national civil rights organization that has historically supported migrant communities and undocumented individuals, organized voter

¹²² “Last Link Severed,” *San Jose Evening News*, July 26, 1950, Editorial page (no page number).

¹²³ “KCBS Wants to Abandon Alviso Transmitter,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 25, 1949, p. 6.

¹²⁴ For more information about the involvement of ACCION! in the anti-consolidation movement, see Aaron I. Cavin, “The Borders of Citizenship: The Politics of Race and Metropolitan Space in Silicon Valley,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012, accessed May 5, 2023, http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/2027.42/93852/1/cavin_1.pdf.

¹²⁵ “Alviso’s Little League Is Getting Own Diamond,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 6, 1966, p. 4.

¹²⁶ “Cleanup Week Month Long,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 17, 1966, p. 15.

¹²⁷ “Corner Signal Under Study,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 8, 1966, p. 11.

¹²⁸ Joanne Grant, “Alviso’s Health Center a Phenomenal Success,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 26, 1970, p. 18.

¹²⁹ “Alviso Family Health Center Inc.,” undated booklet, in the “San José: Alviso – Family Health Center” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.

registration drives, spearheaded legislative campaigns, encouraged political activism, and fought discrimination.¹³⁰ After a successful initial period of community organizing and political victories in Los Angeles, the CSO expanded with new chapters throughout California including in San José. The San José Chapter of the CSO was established in 1952, and one of its founding members was Cesar Chavez.¹³¹ By 1963, the CSO had 34 chapters across California and the American Southwest with more than 10,000 dues-paying members. That year, the CSO assisted more than 50,000 Mexican immigrants to obtain U.S. citizenship and registered 500,000 new voters.¹³²

The Alviso Chapter of the CSO was founded in November 1966, and its office was in the former school building located at 1568 Liberty Street (**Figure 24**). That year, the CSO partnered with the social justice organization Migrant Ministry to operate a temporary night health clinic from the Alviso CSO office building, and it quickly reached capacity.^{133,134} To better serve the public, the Alviso CSO Heath Foundation was incorporated a year later on November 21, 1967.¹³⁵ In the early years, when the Alviso Family Health Center was first established, the Alviso CSO office building served as the headquarters for both the health clinic and the Alviso Chapter of the CSO.^{136,137}



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

- ¹³⁰ “The Community Service Organization (CSO),” *University of Southern California*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://scalar.usc.edu/hc/jewish-histories-boyle-heights/the-community-service-organization-cso>.
- ¹³¹ For more information about the life and legacy of Cesar Chavez including his work for the CSO, see National Park Service Pacific West Region, *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment*, March 2012, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?documentID=55866>.
- ¹³² “The Community Service Organization,” University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), *Jewish Histories in Multiethnic Boyle Heights, A Digital Exhibit*, accessed May 4, 2023, <https://scalar.usc.edu/hc/jewish-histories-boyle-heights/the-community-service-organization-cso>.
- ¹³³ “Celebrating 50 Years: California’s First Community Health Center,” *Gardner Health Services*, June 29, 2018, <https://gardnerhealthservices.org/californias-first-community-health-center/>.
- ¹³⁴ “Alviso Family Health Center Inc.,” undated booklet, in the “San José: Alviso – Family Health Center” vertical file, California Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, San José Public Library.
- ¹³⁵ Articles of Incorporation of Alviso CSO Heath Foundation, Inc. November 21, 1967, in the collection of Savas Alvarez.
- ¹³⁶ Help Wanted Ads, *The Palo Alto Times*, December 28, 1968, p. 13.
- ¹³⁷ Ed Hering, “A Model of Cooperative Effort,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 30, 1968, p. 49.

Figure 24
Former CSO Office, 1568 Liberty Street

Funding

The following year, the Alviso Chapter of the CSO received a \$10,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to establish a permanent clinic. At that time, the old Pepper Tree Inn at 2112 South First Street in San José—whose owners claimed that it was the nation’s first motel—was slated for demolition.¹³⁸ The one-story building was donated to the CSO and relocated in two sections to the southeast corner of Hoppe and Gold streets in Alviso (**Figure 25**).¹³⁹ Architecture students enrolled at San José State College designed the project, which included remodeling the building and new parking facilities and landscaping.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the City of Alviso granted a long-term lease of the parcel for \$1 per year.¹⁴¹ According to one longtime employee of the health center, “When the clinic started, people would come on the weekends and started [building] it from the ground [up]. We had people that worked in construction and then they would come and start building the clinic, and we had people from the city that would come help us plan it. Engineers would come and help the community of Alviso. The women would cook for them, and we would have a big party out there [...] every weekend.”¹⁴² One undated photograph shows the American, Mexican, and California flags hoisted on flagpoles in front of the building on Gold Street (**Figure 26**).



SOURCE: *El Excentrico Magazine*, April 1971, posted on the La Raza Historical Society of Santa Clara Valley Facebook page (external link)

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Figure 25
Alviso Family Health Center, ca. 1971

¹³⁸ Ben Hawkins, “Business Happenings,” *San Jose Evening News*, June 25, 1975, p. 65.

¹³⁹ Charlotte Beyers, “A Health Center That Grew and Grew,” *California Today*, November 19, 1972, p. 46.

¹⁴⁰ “College to Aid Health Project,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 3, 1967, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ Ed Hering, “Tiny Alviso Gets Big Medical Center,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 29, 1967, p. 53.

¹⁴² Marianela Toscana quoted in Jumay Hipolito, “Celebrating 50 Years: A Bright Light in Alviso,” *Gardner Health Services*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://stage.gardnerhealthservices.org/news/celebrating-50-years-a-bright-light-in-alviso/>.



SOURCE: Posted on the Alviso Family Health Center History Facebook page (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 26
Undated Photograph of the Alviso Family Health Center

The concept of the Alviso clinic was novel at the time and drew significant political interest. When the Alviso Chapter of the CSO applied for a grant from the U.S Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), representatives of the group were flown to Washington, D.C., for several days of consultation. The delegates were Everardo Resendez, Faustino Espinoza, and Antonio Aguilar as well as local EOC and medical advisors. At that meeting, the group was told that “the effort to bring complete health services to low-income Alviso area residents [was] unique in the nation because it evolved totally as a voluntary program.”¹⁴³ The CSO was awarded an OEO grant in June 1967 for \$447,630 to outfit the clinic as a first-rate medical center and turn it “into the ‘best looking’ building in the community.”^{144,145} With this grant, the Alviso Family Health Center became the nation’s first grassroots organization to receive funding directly from the federal government rather than administered through an intermediary agency.¹⁴⁶ It was overseen by a 12-member CSO board of directors and supported by an advisory board that included physicians.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Ed Hering, “City Awaits Word on Big Health Center Grant,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 15, 1967, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Hering, “Tiny Alviso Gets Big Medical Center,” June 29, 1967.

¹⁴⁵ Hering, “City Awaits Word on Big Health Center Grant,” p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Hering, “Tiny Alviso Gets Big Medical Center,” June 29, 1967.

¹⁴⁷ Hering, “A Model of Cooperative Effort,” June 30, 1968.

The OEO grant enabled completion of clinic construction, purchase of new furnishings and equipment, and provided the initial funds for operations. Because the CSO was able to leverage over 12,000 hours of volunteer labor, the vast majority of the grant went towards daily operations. When it opened, the health center had two doctor's offices, two dental laboratories, four medical examination rooms, and an emergency room. It was staffed by two full-time and one part-time physicians, one full time and one part time dentist, and a dental hygienist, and was equipped with its own X-ray machine.¹⁴⁸ It became the 17th operational facility within the OEO health center pilot project, joining four others in California in East Palo Alto, King City, San Francisco, and in the Watts district of Los Angeles.¹⁴⁹

Growing Pains

When the permanent clinic opened in January 1969, two doctors treated fewer than 150 patients monthly. Within a few years, the medical-dental clinic became “Alviso’s civic, social and cultural activities center [and] a monument to the determination of a devoted community.”¹⁵⁰ By November 1970, there were five doctors who treated an average of 2,200 patients per month—including many from outside Alviso—and the clinic was described as a “phenomenal success and still growing.”¹⁵¹ Soon there were 110 full-time staff including doctors, dentists, nurses, administrators, and trainees, many of whom were Alviso residents.¹⁵²

The success was not without its drama, however. Between 1967 and 1970 a small group of CSO members split from the original, San José CSO aligned board of directors and formed a separate CSO board of directors whose sole focus was the Health Center. The split was driven by a desire to separate the interests of the national CSO organization (represented by San José where the CSO had its national headquarters) from the direct operation of the Alviso Health Clinic. It was this new group that was recognized by federal grant administrators and to whom additional grants were provided. Eventually “CSO” was removed from the group’s name.¹⁵³ Legal battles ensued which caused disruptions to the clinic’s operations throughout 1970 but did not halt the center’s almost immediate need for growth. While the conflict was resolved, the clinic purchased an 18,000 square-foot lot next to the center for expansion.¹⁵⁴

Expansion

In 1972, construction commenced on a new two-story building with frontage on Hoppe Street (**Figure 27**).¹⁵⁵ The new building contained 15 examination rooms, a pharmacy, medical and radiology labs, and related spaces. A grand opening celebration and Catholic blessing took place on November 18, 1972.¹⁵⁶ The same year, the clinic was awarded a \$75,000 grant from U.S. Economic Development Administration to design and implement a local business development

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Craig Evans, “Alviso Health Center ‘Home’ for Thousands,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 1, 1971, p. 15.

¹⁵¹ Joanne Grant, “Alviso’s Health Center a Phenomenal Success,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 26, 1970, p. 18.

¹⁵² “\$528,000 Alviso Health Center Loan,” no publication title, November 21, 1974, in the “Alviso Family Health Center” binder, Community Room, Alviso Branch Library.

¹⁵³ “Alvisans Loose Legal Battle,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 24, 1971, p.B3.

¹⁵⁴ Joanne Grant, “Alviso Health Center Victim in Power Fight,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 4, 1970.

¹⁵⁵ “Health Center Work to Start,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 23, 1972, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ “Celebration Set for Health Center,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 18, 1972, p. 19.

program. The funding covered administrative costs to manage and provide technical assistance to help establish new businesses in Alviso and bolster existing businesses.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, the Alviso Family Health Center was awarded the Bay Area’s first prepaid contract negotiated under the Medi-Cal Reform Act of 1971,¹⁵⁸ meaning that Medi-Cal patients had access to services previously offered only by private medical providers.¹⁵⁹ “By anyone’s standards,” one *San Jose Mercury* journalist wrote, “the biggest thing in Alviso is the Alviso Family Health Center. It has the biggest building, the biggest payroll and reaches the most people of any agency in the immediate area.”¹⁶⁰

A new dental clinic addition was constructed in 1975, allowing the health center to care for twice as many patients (**Figure 28**).¹⁶¹ This phase was funded by a \$667,000 federal grant awarded under the 1946 Hospital Survey and Construction Act, commonly known as the Hill-Burton Act.¹⁶²



Note that the 1975 dental clinic addition is visible at the far left.

SOURCE: ESA, 2023

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Figure 27
Alviso Health Center

¹⁵⁷ “Health Unit in Alviso Gets Grant,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 29, 1972, p. 24.

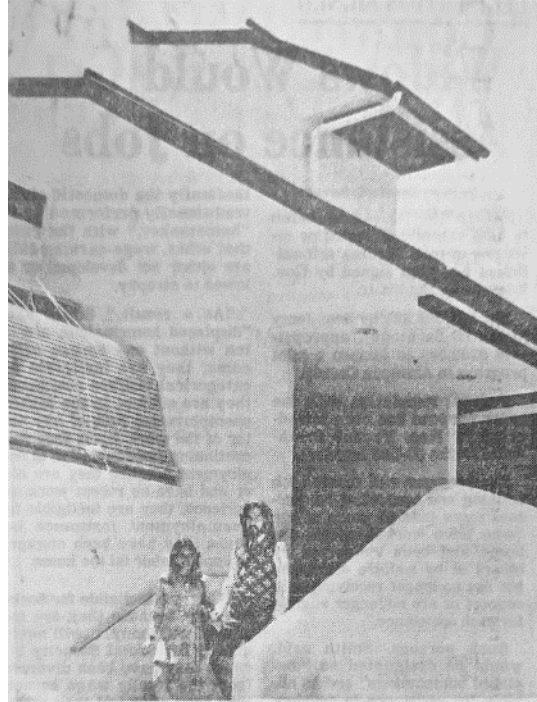
¹⁵⁸ “A Bay Area First: Alviso Health Contract,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 18, 1972, p. 25.

¹⁵⁹ Charlotte Beyers, “A Health Center That Grew and Grew,” *California Today*, November 19, 1972, p. 46.

¹⁶⁰ Willys Peck, “Alviso’s Tide of Progress May Wash Out Valued Folkways,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 9, 1972, p. 27.

¹⁶¹ “Low-Income Dental Clinic Opens Today,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 27, 1975, p. 8.

¹⁶² “Celebration Set for Health Center,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 18, 1972, p. 19.



SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, September 27, 1975, p. 8

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Figure 28
Dental Clinic Addition to the Alviso Family Health Center, 1975

New Clinics and Financial Troubles

Throughout the 1970s, newspaper accounts detail the many cycles of financial strain and success that plagued the Alviso Health Center. This was largely due to fluctuations in federal and state programs, which comprised a significant portion of the annual operating budget. In 1973, shortly after the new clinic building opened, reports of a \$94,000 deficit emerged.¹⁶³ This was followed by a decade of expansion as the organization opened or took over five more clinics in other low-income neighborhoods of San José.¹⁶⁴ They were:

- Eastridge Health Center – 1661 Burdette Drive¹⁶⁵
- Jackson Health Center – 280 North Jackson Avenue
- Josefa Chaboya de Narvaez Health Center – 2410 Senter Road
- Olinder Health Center – 1245 East Santa Clara Street
- Olinder Annex – 1275 East Santa Clara Street

¹⁶³ “Health Center \$94,000 in Red,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 3, 1973.

¹⁶⁴ Susan Yoachum, “Alviso Clinics’ Financial Troubles Include Officials’ 6-Figure Salaries,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 16, 1982.

¹⁶⁵ The Eastridge Health Center closed in October 1982. Susan Yoachum, “Problems in Care at S.J. Clinics Cited,” November 13, 1982, *San Jose Mercury*, pp. 1A, 20A.

By the end of the year, the Olinder Annex was closed as a new round of financial troubles loomed after nearly a year of avoiding bankruptcy.¹⁶⁶ Yet throughout the 1980s early 1990s, the foundation continued to operate and serve the low income communities in San José.¹⁶⁷ Eventually, the strain of operating brought the Alviso Family Health Foundation to a critical point. By 1997, it faced a \$2 million deficit.¹⁶⁸ It could either merge with another health care provider or be forced to close.¹⁶⁹

Merger

At the same time that the Alviso community banded together to create the Alviso Family Health Foundation in 1968, the citizens of San José's Gardner neighborhood worked to establish their own local health clinic. Also working with the Stanford Medical School, and in partnership with Sacred Heart Church, the Gardner Health Center was established to serve the cannery and service workers near downtown San José.¹⁷⁰ Although smaller than the Alviso Health Center, Gardner Health Services took over the Alviso Family Health Foundation in 1997 and continues to operate the clinic today.¹⁷¹

Additional Reading

For more information about the complex social and political climate surrounding its establishment of the Alviso Family Health Center, see Ernesto Galarza's 1973 report titled "Alviso: The Crisis of a Barrio" in *Man of Fire: Selected Writings of Ernesto Galarza* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

21st Century

Several civic improvements have been made to the Alviso neighborhood since 2000.

Fire Department

In 2002, San José voters passed the Neighborhood Security Bond Act that provided funding for various types of public safety facilities throughout the city. Under the bond act, four new fire stations were constructed including a new Fire Station No. 25 at 5125 Wilson Way in Alviso that replaced the old fire station located at 1590 Gold Street.¹⁷² The present-day Fire Station No. 25 was completed in 2007 (**Figure 29**).¹⁷³

¹⁶⁶ Susan Yoachum, "Clinics to Fight Closure," *San Jose Mercury*, December 11, 1982, p. 2B.

¹⁶⁷ David Ansley, "Health Foundation Recovering, But Still Needs Cash Transfusion Loans Sought From S.J. Private Group to Prevent Bankruptcy," *San Jose Mercury*, June 10, 1991, p. 1B.

¹⁶⁸ Lisa M. Krieger, "Alviso Health Center Cuts Service," *San Jose Mercury*, July 31, 1999, p. 1B.

¹⁶⁹ Donna Alvarado, "Three Depart Alviso Clinic Amid Probe," *San Jose Mercury*, May 19, 1994, p. 1B.

¹⁷⁰ "Gardner: Past, Present and Future," *Gardner Health Services*, October 4, 2016, <https://gardnerhealthservices.org/gardner-past-present-and-future/>.

¹⁷¹ Krieger, "Alviso Health Center Cuts Services," July 31, 1999.

¹⁷² San José City Council, "Memorandum: Relocation of Fire Station No. 25 Project," June 1, 2006, p. 2, http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/Agenda/060606/060606_08.01sup.pdf.

¹⁷³ "Architect Hired for Fire Station – Facility Expected to Have Two Engines, Six Bedrooms," *San Jose Mercury*, December 29, 2009, p. 6B.



SOURCE: San José Fire Department (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 29
San José Fire Station No. 25

Alviso Youth Center

The present-day Alviso Youth Center at 5040 North First Street opened in 2002 (**Figure 30**).¹⁷⁴ The two-classroom center was built as a much-needed addition to the George Mayne Elementary School, and funding was provided by the City of San José, the Santa Clara Unified School District, and corporate donors including Cisco Systems, Legacy Partners Commercial, and Devcon Construction.¹⁷⁵ Currently, a variety of classes for youth and teens are offered by the Boys and Girls Club of Silicon Valley.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Janice Rombeck, “Youth Center’s Opening Number,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 18, 2003, p. 1B.

¹⁷⁵ “Students Mark Sept. 11 with Special Projects,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 10, 2002, p. 2B.

¹⁷⁶ “Alviso Youth Center,” *City of San José*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/12/2040>.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 30
Alviso Youth Center

Public Art

In 1998, the San José City Council accepted the donation of a 16-foot-tall totem pole from Alviso woodcarver Charles Everett.¹⁷⁷ It was originally installed at the former fire station located at 1590 Gold Street,¹⁷⁸ and it was later relocated to the new Fire Station No. 25 at 5125 Wilson Way after the building was completed in 2007 (Figure 29).

Since initiating its Public Art Program in 1984, the City of San José has installed two public artworks in the Alviso Neighborhood in recent years. In 2003, artist Donna Billick created two complementary pieces that were installed on the south side of the Alviso Branch Library at 5050 North First Street (**Figure 31**). *Alviso* is a four-sided bench inlaid with ceramic tiles that surrounds an upright sculpture in the form of a book with colorful mosaics depicting native flora and fauna. *Alviso Mandalas* is a pair of ceramic mandalas (circular plaques with spiritual symbolism) measuring six feet across that are mounted on the library's south wall.¹⁷⁹

The stormwater pump station at 1030 Catherine Street is protected by low walls along Gold and Catherine streets that feature an art installation titled *Dreams of the Salt Marsh* which was completed by Sam Tubiolo in 2019 (**Figure 32**). The 240-foot-long art piece is composed of colorful ceramic tiles assembled to tell the story of Alviso. It includes scenes of native Ohlone inhabitants, local natural resources, Alviso's maritime history, the Bayside Canning Company, Victorian-era architecture, and the railroad.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ San José City Council, "Minutes of the City Council," February 17, 1998, http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/1998_CnclMins/02_17_98min.htm.

¹⁷⁸ Dick Egner, "Alviso to Get New Library," *San Jose Mercury*, June 4, 1998, p. 10B.

¹⁷⁹ "Public Art: Alviso Bench and Mandalas (Alviso Library)," *City of San José*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/3123/1396?npage=2>.

¹⁸⁰ "Public Art: Dreams of the Salt Marsh (Alviso Storm Pump Station)," *City of San José*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/3123/1396?npage=2>.



SOURCE: Google Maps, photo by Star Wilmington, 2018 (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 31
Alviso and Alviso Mandalas



SOURCE: Google Street View, September 2022 (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 32
Dreams of the Salt Marsh

Transportation and Infrastructure

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

Railroad

The South Pacific Coast Railroad built narrow-gauge tracks through Alviso and began passenger and freight service in 1878. Due to a dispute between the railroad and Alviso's citizens, a depot was not constructed until after 1881.¹⁸¹ The depot was originally located parallel to and on the west side of the railroad tracks on the same lot as the Alviso Hotel (**Figure 33**), and it was later relocated to its current location on the east side of the tracks.¹⁸²



SOURCE: Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 33
Undated Photograph of the Alviso Depot in Original Location

Stagecoach

Travel by stagecoach was a common mode of transportation in the mid- and late 19th century. As early as 1850, there was a stage line between San José and Alviso, and at Alviso, passengers would take a ferry to or from San Francisco (**Figure 34**).¹⁸³ Eventually, the stage line was extended to Monterey.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ City of San José, Application for California Point of Historical Interest: Port of Alviso, 1995, p. 47.

¹⁸² 1930 Sanborn map.

¹⁸³ "Vessels Advertised," *Daily Alta California*, June 5, 1880, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Charles F. Outland, *Stagecoaching on El Camino Real, Los Angeles to San Francisco 1861–1901* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Col, 1973), pp. 8–9.

There were several stagecoach operators in and near Alviso. These included John Vierra, whose stagecoach and horses were lost in a fire in 1896;¹⁸⁵ a Mr. Carter, whose coach full of passengers overturned in 1877;¹⁸⁶ and Alviso pioneers Harry Wade Sr. and his son Harry George Wade, who arrived in the port town in 1851 and established a successful freight business. They constructed a brick warehouse (1657 El Dorado Street; damaged by fire in 2021 and demolished in 2023) that was initially used to store grain and hay before it was shipped to San Francisco. The Wades later invested in the stagecoach business, and the warehouse became a storage and repair shop for their vehicles as well as those belonging to other companies including Wells Fargo.¹⁸⁷ According to Harry Wade Sr.'s descendant, Jan Jensen, the Wade warehouse was also used as temporary housing for Chinese laborers arriving by boat in Alviso. The Wades would transport the laborers by stagecoach to work in the gold mines and railroads farther east.¹⁸⁸ In 1928, Maggie Wade Higgins sold one of her family's stagecoaches to Wells Fargo. The coach was restored, driven over the Bay Bridge during the opening ceremony in 1936, and has been on display at the Wells Fargo Museum in San Francisco ever since.¹⁸⁹



SOURCE: History San José, History San José
Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 34
Stagecoach in San José bound for Alviso, ca. 1895

An article published in 1896 in the *San Francisco Call* claimed that “the old stage that is at present running between San Jose and Alviso is probably the most ancient vehicle in use in

¹⁸⁵ “Fire Near Alviso,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 18, 1896, p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ “Stage Accident,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 3, 1877, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ “San José Historic Landmark No. 67: H. G. Wade’s Warehouse” (historical marker near the warehouse).

¹⁸⁸ Jan Jensen, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 16, 2023.

¹⁸⁹ “Wade Family Script,” no date, in the collection of Jan Jensen.

California to-day.”¹⁹⁰ The coach was reportedly shipped to California from the East Coast in the 1850s, and in 1864 it was purchased by Ed Marlatt of Alviso who operated it along the San José-Alviso Road for several decades:

[After buying the stagecoach in 1864,] He soon acquired considerable property about Alviso, the most valuable of all being the big brick warehouse in which the San Jose freight was stored until Ed’s teams could transport it to its destination. Ed was the king of that section of the country in those days and could have been a Senator had he wanted to.

The broad-gauge [San Francisco & San Jose] railroad made the first cut at the business of the old stage, and Alviso began to lose some of its importance. But when the narrow gauge [South Pacific Coast Railroad] went directly through the little town that settled it. The wharves began to rot away and the idle warehouses to fill to pieces. But there was always a little business [for Marlatt] until the steamboat line put on its own stage to San Jose.¹⁹¹

Like the Wades, Marlatt also transported Chinese laborers, but his route was limited to San José.¹⁹²

By late 1901, the Western Navigation Company, which operated the steam ships between Alviso and San José, determined that there was a quicker and more efficient mode of overland transportation. The company bought 10 motorcars, presumably to replace the stagecoaches in service, and determined that, “As to the line to Alviso [from San José] and to Saratoga and Los Gatos...there is enough travel by stage now to justify the operation of the automobiles.”¹⁹³

20th Century

Railroad

The South Pacific Coast Railroad merged with the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1937.¹⁹⁴ Passenger trains made their last stop in Alviso in 1939, and freight service ended in 1942.¹⁹⁵ The depot building was sold in 1939 and moved from its original location on the west side of the railroad tracks to the east side “to spend its final, forlorn existence as a residence for various of the salty village’s citizenry.”¹⁹⁶ Over the subsequent years, the former depot served as an artist’s studio and a private residence (**Figure 35**).¹⁹⁷ The building, which is the last vestige of Alviso’s status as a destination by rail, is a contributor to the Port of Alviso National Register Historic District.

¹⁹⁰ “The Oldest Stagecoach in California,” *San Francisco Call*, May 10, 1896, p. 17.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ “Motor Carriages Are on the Way,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 5, 1901, p. 5.

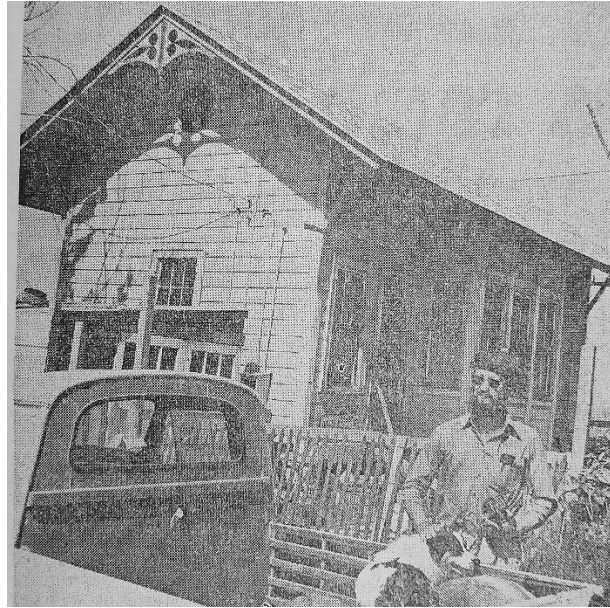
¹⁹⁴ “Railroads: Southern Pacific Railroad Subsidiaries,” *Santa Cruz Trains*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.santacruztrains.com/2016/05/southern-pacific-railroad-subsidiaries.html>.

¹⁹⁵ David C. Loring, *The History of Alviso, California*, prepared for the Community Development Lab at Stanford University, October 1966, p. 20, provided by Bart Laine.

¹⁹⁶ “Old Alviso Depot Sale Recalls Days of Thriving Port,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 10, 1938, p. 8.

¹⁹⁷ Robert Burrill and Lynn Rogers, *Images of America: Alviso, San Jose* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), p. 73.

Beginning in 1991, the segment of railroad tracks between San José and Newark was incorporated into Amtrak's Capitol Corridor passenger route.¹⁹⁸ The service traveled through Alviso and made no stops. The Southern Pacific Railroad merged with the Union Pacific Railroad in 1996.¹⁹⁹ Since 1998, the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE, rebranded as the Altamont Corridor Express in 2012) has utilized the Union Pacific Railroad's Coast Subdivision between Newark and Santa Clara.



SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, November 7, 1972, p. 21

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 35
Relocated Former Railroad Depot, 1972

State Route 237

Defined in 1933, Route 9 was a principal northeast-southwest thoroughfare between present-day Mountain View and Milpitas. Before a vehicular bridge was constructed over the Guadalupe River, the course of Route 9 jogged through the center of Alviso via Gold Street and North First Street. In 1956–57, the new State Route 237 replaced Route 9 and eliminated the circuitous and collision-prone portion through Alviso altogether.²⁰⁰ The new route, sometimes called the Alviso-Milpitas Road, was a four-lane expressway, and it was elevated to freeway status in the mid-1990s.

Flood Control Measures

The periodic floods of the 19th century continued into the 20th century with greater frequency and devastation. These included major flood events in 1911, 1955, 1958, 1963, 1969, 1983, 1986, and 1995. Besides extreme weather and improper drainage, one of the root causes of flooding in northern Santa Clara County is subsidence (i.e., settling/sinking of the earth's surface) due to the

¹⁹⁸ "Train Links Sacramento, Bay Area," *Lodi News-Sentinel*, December 12, 1991, p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ "Railroads: Southern Pacific Railroad Subsidiaries," *Santa Cruz Trains*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.santacruztrains.com/2016/05/southern-pacific-railroad-subsidiaries.html>.

²⁰⁰ "State Route 237," *California Highways*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.cahighways.org/ROUTE237.html>.

excessive pumping of groundwater over more than a century. According to the Santa Clara Valley Water District, parts of Alviso subsided by as much as 13 feet between 1915 and 1969 (Figure 36).²⁰¹



The upper photograph (taken ca. 1915) shows the South Bay Yacht Club at its original elevation and location at the corner of Hope and North Taylor streets. The lower photograph (taken in 1970) shows significant subsidence of the clubhouse.

SOURCE: Santa Clara Valley Water District (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 36
Subsidence Along Hope Street

A variety of flood control measures were implemented over the course of the 20th century to alleviate the catastrophic conditions in Alviso, and some were effective for mere months. For example, in 1935–36, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) constructed a mile-long levee around Alviso, and almost immediately, it was reported that “Upkeep of the recently completed WPA levee system which encircles the town is...proving to be a thorn in the side of the city fathers.”²⁰² Within 15 months, flood waters very nearly crested above the levees which leaked in places,²⁰³ and within two years, the levee failed, forcing floodwater into Alviso on multiple occasions.²⁰⁴

In subsequent years, levees were built in segments as opposed to encircling the city, apparently either as stopgap measures to address the most imminent threats at a given time or as a benefit from a neighboring developer (e.g., levees were built on both banks of Alviso Slough during the 1940s as a result of the creation of salt evaporation ponds by the Leslie Salt Company). In 1958, a higher and wider levee was constructed on top of an earlier dike on the north bank of the

²⁰¹ “Subsidence,” *Santa Clara Valley Water Authority*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.valleywater.org/your-water/where-your-water-comes/groundwater/subsidence>.

²⁰² “Alviso Sinking City—Flood Peril Worries Council,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 14, 1937, p. 15.

²⁰³ “Alviso Keeps Dry Despite Record Tides,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 18, 1937, p. 13.

²⁰⁴ “Alviso Sounds SOS On Chronic Flood Problem,” *San Jose Mercury*, February 6, 1938, p. 20.

Guadalupe River.²⁰⁵ The next year, two “fill and cover” levees (i.e., earth-covered garbage piles): one along Alviso’s southern border, and another along Artesian Slough.²⁰⁶ Other temporary flood control measures were employed during the mid-20th century, but low-lying Alviso continued to be submersed every few years.

1983 Flood

On March 1, 1983, Coyote Creek (located on the east side of Alviso) overflowed, flooding the New Chicago tract (located northeast of Liberty and North First streets) with up to eight feet of water. An evacuation order was issued that night. The damage was extensive, and displaced residents sued the City of San José for failing to implement effective flood controls and the Santa Clara Valley Water District for mismanagement of the waterways under its jurisdiction.²⁰⁷ It wasn’t until 1989 that the city and the water district claimed responsibility for the disaster by paying \$13 million in damages to 350 Alviso families and property owners and in partial reimbursement to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for its role in providing emergency relief.²⁰⁸

In the months after the March 1983 flood, the City of San José built a temporary “ring levee” around Alviso measuring 5 feet high and 2 miles long, renovated a pump station to remove excess water from surrounding marshes, and installed 10 tide gates. In turn, the water district constructed a new 4.7-mile levee along the Guadalupe River through Alviso that measured 13 feet above sea level. ²⁰⁹ During construction of the ring levee, high levels of asbestos were detected in the fill material which was sourced from the Raisch Quarry in south San José. This discovery put Alviso on the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Superfund list on 1986 and initiated decades of remediation and litigation.²¹⁰ After earning “a clean bill of health” from the EPA in 2010,²¹¹ Alviso’s “South Bay Asbestos Area” remains a Superfund site in 2023.²¹²

Sewage Treatment

In 1930, San José had a newly completed subterranean sewer line located within the 1912 strip annexation area through Alviso, and the line dumped raw sewage directly into San Francisco Bay. By 1950, this had grown into an enormous sanitation and environmental problem for Santa Clara County, but it was largely a problem for Alviso, which had no control over San José’s or the county’s sewer systems but was nonetheless forced to deal with raw sewage on its shores. That year, San José voters passed bonds to build a new wastewater treatment facility, and in 1956,

²⁰⁵ “New Levee’s Taking Shape, *San Jose Mercury*, March 12, 1958, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ “Alviso Plans Big Levee On Slough,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 2, 1959, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ Mike Cassidy and Nick Anderson, “Alvisans Say S.J. Tried to Drown Community in ’83 Flood,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 28, 1993, p. 26A.

²⁰⁸ Lorenzo P. Romero, “\$13 Million Alviso Flood Accord Reached, About 350 Families Would Be Reimbursed Under Plan,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 7, 1989, p. 1A.

²⁰⁹ Armando Acuna, “Alviso Should Stay Dry,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 7, 1983, p. 4B.

²¹⁰ Paul Rogers, “Alviso Cleans Its Way Off Superfund – After 24 Years, EPA Detects ‘Very Low Levels’ of Asbestos,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 17, 2010, p. 1A.

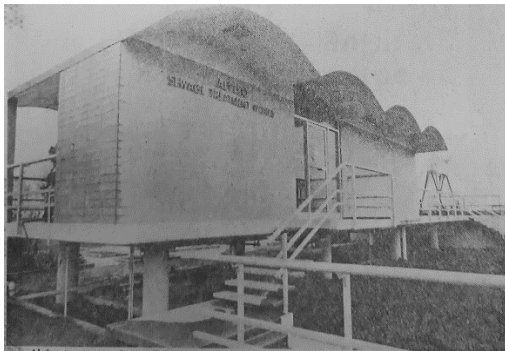
²¹¹ Paul Rogers, “Alviso Receives Clean Bill of Health from EPA,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 16, 2010, n.p. (web article, not print).

²¹² “South Bay Asbestos Area,” *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0902250>.

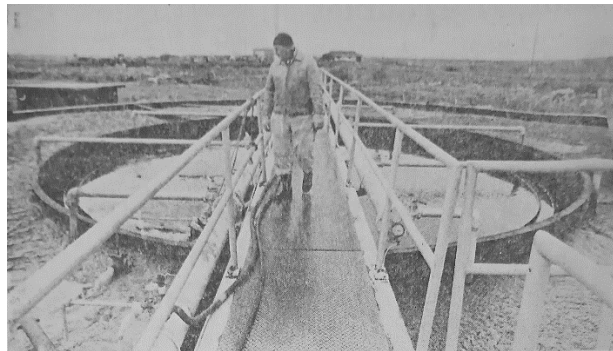
construction was completed on the first phase of the San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility on Los Esteros Road. The facility was enlarged and improved in phases through the 1980s.²¹³

An important detail in the history of the facility is that in 1951, the San José City Council banned all connections to its sewage system from outside the city limits.²¹⁴ This meant that Alviso and other independent communities were prevented from connecting to San José’s state-of-the-art facility and continued to rely on their own sewer systems. The use of the facility would later be used as a bargaining chip by San José during its 1950s–60s annexation blitz. For more information about the rapid expansion of San José under City Manager Dutch Hamann, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 89–94.

In early 1961, the State Health Department issued an order for the Alviso City Council to remedy its own uncontrolled sewage disposal problem caused by a dependence on cesspools that were regularly flooded. In May 1961, the citizens of Alviso approved a bond measure to allocate \$400,000 for the construction of a new sewage treatment plant. Additional funding was secured from a federal grant and the city’s cash reserves.²¹⁵ Construction began in October 1961 on new sewer lines connecting to a new primary and secondary sewage treatment plant located on the south side of Spreckles Avenue at Clark Street (**Figure 37**). Work was completed the following year.²¹⁶ The plant was constructed while Alviso was an incorporated city, prior to the 1968 consolidation with San José.



SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, February 20, 1975, p. 34



Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 37
Alviso Sewage Treatment Plant, 1975

Thirteen years later, it was reported that the plant “is now on the brink of falling apart and will probably be taken out of service soon...Apparent lack of upkeep is blamed for the condition of the Alviso plant.”²¹⁷ Since the City of San José absorbed Alviso’s debts upon consolidation in 1968, San José was responsible for building a permanent pipeline from Alviso to the much larger San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility on Los Esteros Road, bypassing the

²¹³ ESA, “California Department of Parks and Recreation District Record for the San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility Streamline Moderne Industrial Historic District,” 2016.

²¹⁴ “The Alameda Issue Up for Action Before Council,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 26, 1951, p. 9.

²¹⁵ “Alviso Plant (Sewer) to be Dedicated,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 24, 1963, p. 21.

²¹⁶ “Alviso Population Is 1,300,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 28, 1962, p. 25P.

²¹⁷ Stephen Gruber, “Alviso’s Sewage Plant ‘Falling Apart,’” *San Jose Mercury*, February 20, 1975, p. 34.

deteriorating Alviso plant.²¹⁸ The former Alviso Sewage Treatment Plant remains extant in 2023 and operates as the City of San José Spreckles Sanitary Station (**Figure 38**).



SOURCE: Google Street View, September 2022 (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 38
San José Spreckles Sanitary Station

21st Century

Stormwater Pump Station

A new stormwater pump station was constructed in 2019 at the northeast corner of Catherine and Gold streets (Figure 32). In addition to the 900-square-foot generator building, the pump station includes a wet well, submersible pumps, a fuel tank, and an outfall discharge structure. The pump station is designed to increase stormwater capacity during inclement weather and protect Alviso from flooding.²¹⁹

Ethnic and Cultural Communities

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

In 1860, Alviso's population was 743, and 189—25 percent—were immigrants. Irish made up over half of the immigrant population, followed by (in descending order) Mexican, English, Chilean, Canadian, Scottish, and French.²²⁰ By 1870, the town's population was composed predominantly of male Chinese immigrants, and this demographic shift continued for the duration of the 19th century.

Chinese

A sizable Chinese population became established in Alviso beginning in the 1860s. The 1870 federal census shows that there were 121 Chinese immigrants—approximately 20 percent of the city's total population—whereas there were none in 1860.²²¹ The vast majority of the Chinese residents were male agricultural workers employed either in reclaiming marshland or farming

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ "Summary: Alviso Pump Station Project," *State of California*, January 28, 2016, <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/2016012064>.

²²⁰ Phillips, "The Port of Unrealized Dreams," p. 59.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 60.

strawberries.²²² None of the 19th-century federal censuses indicate where in Alviso the Chinese residents resided.

By 1880, the Chinese population had more than tripled to 374 people (all males) and accounted for over half of Alviso's population,²²³ and all but one Chinese were recorded as "laborers."²²⁴ Outside of cities, where Chinese were frequently employed as launderers or as domestic workers, historians generally agree that the term "laborer" meant that they worked in the fields.²²⁵

In 1879, California amended its constitution to prohibit landownership to any foreign-born person who was neither white nor of African descent. In Alviso, the Chinese laborers would have been tenant farmers. As one historian described, "The relationship between tenants and landowners was positive, amiable, and often appeared akin to familial relations."²²⁶ William A. Z. Edwards, William Erkson, and a Mr. Boots were among Alviso's white landowners who employed Chinese agricultural workers in their fields, and they each paid a daily wage of \$1 and split the proceeds from the harvest with the workers 50/50. Some landlords also paid for new and improved infrastructure (e.g. drilling wells for irrigation) and built new houses for the tenant farmers.²²⁷

Anti-Chinese sentiment continued to escalate across the nation and ultimately resulted in the federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. For more information about this law and subsequent anti-immigration policies, see this article on the National Archives website (external link).

Additional Reading

The Chinese experience in 19th-century California has been widely studied. For more information, see the San Francisco Planning Department's *Draft San Francisco Chinese American Historic Context Statement* (2021); Gloria Sun Hom's *Chinese Argonauts: An Anthology of the Chinese Contributions to the Historical Development of Santa Clara County* (Los Altos: Foothill Community College, 1971); and Cecilia M. Tsu's *Garden of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

20th Century

The residents of Santa Clara County represent a tapestry of numerous ethnic and cultural communities. Waves of immigrants arrived in the region beginning around the Gold Rush, and their numbers have continued to increase until the present day. By the turn of the 20th century, Alviso's population was remarkably diverse and included native Californians, American transplants, people of several European nationalities, and Chinese immigrants.²²⁸ Over the next few decades, Japanese and Portuguese immigrants arrived in Alviso to pursue work at the Bayside Canning Company and nearby farms. In the mid-20th century, Alviso—and the United

²²² Ibid., p. 82.

²²³ Ibid., p. 64.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

²²⁵ See Gloria Sun Hom, ed., *Chinese Argonauts: An Anthology of the Chinese Contributions to the Historical Development of Santa Clara County* (Los Altos: Foothill Community College, 1971).

²²⁶ Phillips, "The Port of Unrealized Dreams," p. 86.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 85–88.

²²⁸ U.S. Federal Census, 1900.

States—saw an influx of Mexican laborers who were issued temporary work permits under the Bracero Program. By the late 1960s, Alviso’s population was composed of three principal ethnic groups: Mexican/Mexican American, Portuguese/Portuguese American, and Caucasian.²²⁹

Japanese

Following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Chinese population in California decreased, while the number of Japanese and other immigrant groups increased. According to a report published in 1911 by the U.S. Immigration Commission, the first Japanese migrant farmers and their families arrived in Alviso ca. 1901, and within a decade, they had established “five colonies with 44 farmers all told.”²³⁰ (For information about the Japanese School in Alviso, see 20th Century Civic Improvements above.) While the report did not identify the locations of the colonies, scholars believe that they were likely located in the following areas along the Alviso-Milpitas Road: 34 acres leased to Iwataro Zenihiro by Frank Zanker; 20 acres leased to U. Yamagami by Edmund B. Farney; 20 acres leased to H.E. Furuto, U. Tomimatsu, T. Honda, Y. Wemura, and Y. Hirata by Paul Shearer; and 157 acres leased to Yaichi Yamakawa and M. Shirachi by Catherine McKiernan.²³¹

Each colony occupied a single leased parcel that was subdivided by irrigation ditches among the individual tenant farmers and family units. Houses were constructed near the center of the colony, and members collectively grew and tended crops, often relying on an agent to purchase and transport the produce to market.²³² A variety of fruits and vegetables were grown, and berry patches were the most numerous, making Santa Clara Valley the fourth largest producer of strawberries in the state.²³³ The 1911 report stated that, “The majority [of Japanese farmers in Alviso] appear to be strongly determined to ‘get on,’ to purchase land, and to reside permanently in this country.”²³⁴

According to author Cecelia M. Tsu, a common pattern of family settlement was exemplified by Yaichi Yamakawa, the tenant farmer who leased the McKiernan Ranch in Alviso:

Two years after arriving in California in 1899 as a young man of eighteen, Yamakawa and a business partner leased from the three McKiernan sisters a 157-acre parcel of land on Alviso-Milpitas Road. Yamakawa's wife, Kazu, probably a picture bride, arrived in the Santa Clara Valley in 1909, along with his younger brother Hiromu, barely eighteen years old the same age Yaichi was when he emigrated from Japan. Yaichi and Kazu had three children before she passed away in 1917. In or around 1921 Yamakawa married a twenty-three-year-old woman named Yoshiko, and the family remained on their San José farm on McLaughlin Road, which Yaichi had purchased in 1907, up until their World War II incarceration. His brother Hiromu sent for his wife, Chika, in 1914, and

²²⁹ Maria Guadalupe “Lupe” Lujan, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²³⁰ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States*, p. 445.

²³¹ Cecelia M. Tsu, *Garden of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 67–68.

²³² U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States*, p. 445.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

*by 1920, the couple had two young sons. They lived with Yaichi on his McLaughlin Road farm in San José, along with another brother, Ishijuro, who was three years older than Yaichi. By 1930, Hiromu Yamakawa, having lived in the Santa Clara Valley for over twenty years, had moved with his wife and four children to a Japanese farming cluster in Gilroy.*²³⁵

Some of the Japanese men sought employment on nearby ranches, and most of the Japanese women worked at the Bayside Canning Company in Alviso where they earned more than a dollar per day.²³⁶ The cannery was owned by Chinese-American Thomas Foon Chew, and he employed a large number of immigrants of many ethnicities as well as some white Americans. (The Bayside Canning Company is discussed in more detail under 20th Century Industrial and Commercial Development below.)

At the cannery, Japanese laborers were the objects of overt racism by white Alvisans.²³⁷ Following the exclusion of Chinese immigrants in 1882, white Californians appear to have felt less threatened by their industriousness and cultural differences, and anti-Asian sentiment was redirected at the growing number of Japanese immigrants. In an editorial published in 1908, the *San Jose Mercury* identified the Bayside Canning Company as “one of many” examples “of Oriental industry supplanting American” and urged county leaders to “seriously consider” “the urgent and immediate need for further regulation and restriction of our National immigration privileges.”²³⁸ The Women and Girls’ Anti-Japanese Union was formed later that year in response to a number of purported disputes between Japanese and Caucasian workers at the Bayside Canning Company. By organizing the 4,000 women employed in the local canning industry to go on strike, the group hoped “to force the owners of the largest canneries [in the Santa Clara Valley] to cease employing Orientals...[thereby improving] their own conditions and at the same time aid their husbands and brothers and men in general who are out of work, in taking the places now filled by the Asiatics.”²³⁹ These threats did not appear to faze Thomas Foon Chew, who owned the Bayside Canning Company outright and hired an increasing number of immigrant workers.

Around the same time, there were multiple outbreaks of beriberi among Alviso’s Japanese colonies. While beriberi is now understood to be a non-communicable, nutritional condition caused by a deficiency of vitamin B1 (thiamine), in the early 20th century, “the dread beri beri” was believed to be a contagious “Oriental disease...taking a hold on the white residents of California.”²⁴⁰⁻²⁴¹

²³⁵ Cecelia M. Tsu, *Garden of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 117.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²³⁷ U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States*, pp. 446, 451.

²³⁸ “An Example at Hand,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 4, 1908, p. 6.

²³⁹ “To Force Japanese Out of Canneries,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Oct. 21, 1908, p. 7.

²⁴⁰ “Japanese at Alviso Attacked by Beri Beri,” *San Francisco Examiner*, January 10, 1910, p. 2.

²⁴¹ “Beri Beri Among Alviso Japanese,” *Daily Palo Alto Times*, August 5, 1908, p. 1.

Between 1900 and 1940, the Japanese population of Santa Clara grew significantly from 284 to approximately 4,000 people.²⁴² In the months following the bombing of the Pearl Harbor Naval Base in Hawaii by the Empire of Japan on December 7, 1941, the American government issued several executive orders authorizing the removal of all people of Japanese descent into “relocation centers” in isolated inland locales. In reality, these people were given little to no time to put their affairs in order before they were incarcerated at internment camps. After World War II, the county’s Japanese population dwindled.²⁴³

Additional Reading

For more information about the Japanese experience in San José and Santa Clara County during the early 20th century, see Carey & Co.’s *San Jose Japantown Historic Context Statement* (2006); Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihiro’s *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in California’s Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino, CA: California History Center, De Anza College, 1985); and Cecilia M. Tsu’s *Garden of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Portuguese

The Portuguese were another prominent ethnic community to establish itself in Alviso. Portuguese immigrants (including Azoreans) who arrived in the Santa Clara Valley beginning in the late 19th century were lured by descriptions of the region’s agricultural abundance and promises of land and home ownership, and many operated dairy farms and cultivated crops across the region. In the 1890s, the South Pacific Coast Railroad employed Portuguese men to service the tracks in Alviso,²⁴⁴ and by 1900, the census reported 35 Alvisans of Portuguese nationality or descent.²⁴⁵

In Alviso, it appears that there were few Portuguese residents until the 1910s, after which time the Bayside Canning Company employed dozens of Portuguese workers. By 1920, members of the Soares, Machado, Santos, Antone, Prado, Joseph, Vargas, and other families were among the cannery workers.²⁴⁶

Mexican

Bracero Program: 1942–64

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, there were serious concerns that the deployment of American troops would result in widespread labor shortages across many industries. Indeed, this did come to pass, and the United States looked to Mexico to ameliorate the strain on the agricultural sector as it had done for several decades. For more information about the history of labor agreements between Mexico and the United States as well as the repatriation of Mexicans and labor strikes in San José, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 80–83.

²⁴² Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihiro’s *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in California’s Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino, CA: California History Center, De Anza College, 1985), p. 19.

²⁴³ Carey & Co., *San Jose Japantown Historic Context Statement*, 2006, p. 7.

²⁴⁴ Meg Rogers, *Images of America: The Portuguese in San Jose* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), p. 34.

²⁴⁵ U.S. Federal Census, 1900.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Federal Census, 1920.

The first Mexican nationals arrived in Alviso as migrant laborers under the Mexican Farm Labor Program Agreement, more commonly known as the Bracero Program.²⁴⁷ (An English translation of *bracero* is “one who works with his arms.”) In August 1942, the Mexican and United States governments signed the agreement which allowed for the legal entry and temporary employment of male Mexican nationals. Entry to the United States was authorized on an individual basis and primarily under agricultural labor contracts. When the Bracero Program concluded in December 1964, 4.6 million labor contracts had been granted, a large portion of which were given to returning individuals.²⁴⁸

Under the Bracero Program, rules were established to ensure decent wages and living/working conditions, provide free lodging and occupational insurance at the employer’s expense, protect workers from discrimination, and arrange for free transportation back to Mexico when a contract ended. In practice, American employers often—but not always—ignored these protocols, and some even exploited braceros as strikebreakers.²⁴⁹

After the Bracero Program ended in 1964, many Mexican immigrants remained—both legally and illegally—in the United States. The large number of laborers who had worked in Alviso decided to remain and brought their families, establishing a sizable and permanent Mexican community.

Labor Camps

During the 20th century, Alviso’s population comprised several ethnic groups, and many citizens did not speak English. They resided in distinct enclaves of non-English-speaking peoples. For several decades in the mid-century, the most numerous were the migrant labor camps occupied by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Based on archival research and conversations with current Alviso residents, there are no remnants of any labor camp in 2023.

O’Neill’s Camp

In the early 1950s, brothers Frank and Thomas O’Neill purchased a 30-acre property immediately north of the future site of George Mayne Elementary School in Alviso. Frank O’Neill then relocated 52 identical World War II-era cottages from San Francisco to rent them out in Alviso. The single-family cottages each had two bedrooms, an indoor bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room, and they were known collectively as O’Neill’s Camp (**Figure 39**).²⁵⁰ According to longtime Alvisan George Trevino, after the Bracero Program ended in 1964, “the families that didn’t leave [Alviso] moved into O’Neill’s Camp. So then O’Neill’s Camp basically became the main hub for people that weren’t really supposed to be here but were here.”²⁵¹ In the late 1960s, the camp was described as “several rows of brightly colored, prefabricated rental dwellings on tiny lots.”²⁵²

²⁴⁷ The Bracero Program was formalized in 1951 with Public Law 78.

²⁴⁸ “About,” *Bracero History Archive*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://braceroarchive.org/about>.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Elias Castillo, “Alviso’s Two Major Landlords Face Daunting Flood-Repair Job,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 31, 1983, p. 2B.

²⁵¹ George Trevino, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁵² Ed Hering, “Been Down N. First Street Lately?,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 25, 1968, p. 27.

In 1989, Frank O’Neill evicted the residents of O’Neill’s Camp—more than 300 people—so that he could demolish the cottages and have the property rezoned for industrial use.²⁵³ O’Neill’s Camp was demolished in the early 1990s.²⁵⁴ While a few displaced families were the recipients of low-income housing built nearby by Habitat for Humanity (see the discussion of Casa del Sol below), many more families left Alviso permanently.



SOURCE: *San José Sun*, April 4, 1973, p. 11

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 39
Cottage in O’Neill’s Camp, 1973

Other Mexican Labor Camps

Archival research identified a few other migrant labor camps operating in Alviso in the 1950s and early 1960s. These included:

- Berryessa’s Camp was located in the New Chicago area (the exact location was not confirmed). It was owned by Alexander Berryessa and operated without a permit until it was shut down in 1950 by the State Department of Industrial Relations. Several dozen migrant families who lived in tents and trailers had no clean water or bathing facilities.²⁵⁵
- Short’s Camp was located adjacent to Berryessa’s Camp in the New Chicago area (the exact location was not confirmed). It was initially operated by Lile E. Short and later by his children. In 1954, it was cited for unsanitary conditions by the California Bureau of Housing, to which Short responded that “the cottages listed as unsafe were no worse than many other buildings in Alviso.”²⁵⁶ He complied with the inspector’s order within 30 days.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ “A Reprieve in Alviso Evicting Families is Legal, but It’s Not Fair and It Won’t Help Development Plans,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 30, 1989, p. 6B.

²⁵⁴ Comparison of aerial photographs.

²⁵⁵ “State Orders Migrant Camp Closed,” *San Jose Evening News*, August 21, 1950, p. 5.

²⁵⁶ “State Gives Ultimatum on Alviso Labor Camp,” *San Jose Evening News*, July 7, 1954, p. 12.

²⁵⁷ “Alviso Council Delays Action on Annexation,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 3, 1954, p. 5.

- Romero’s Camp was operated by Pete Romero at an unconfirmed location in Alviso.^{258,259}
- Aboytes’ Camp was located on Spreckles Avenue in the vicinity of present-day Lujan’s Market (1557 Michigan Avenue).²⁶⁰ It was owned and operated by Miguel Aboytes.²⁶¹
- Brown’s Ranch was located near Alviso (the exact location was not confirmed) and comprised eight barracks buildings, a mess hall, and a bathhouse, and laborers were bussed to work. It was owned by Walter G. Brown.²⁶²

Community Outreach to Labor Camps

During the 1950s and 1960s, San José resident and disability advocate Dorothy Goble organized and taught classes to children and adults living in labor camps throughout Santa Clara County. Her first visit was to an unnamed migrant labor camp in Alviso in 1952, and she recalled, “I was shocked at the tremendous evidence of poverty, the lack of education, the lack of sanitary facilities and the lack of wholesome recreation. I couldn’t believe these conditions could be true in the United States of America in 1952. Comparing this deplorable situation with the efforts of UNESCO, I wondered why we couldn’t do as much at home as we did abroad.”²⁶³ With funding from the Santa Clara County Council of Churches through the Migrant Work Committee and the American Friends Service Committee, Goble singlehandedly sourced textbooks and offered classes on English and mathematics to Mexican farmworkers’ children at O’Neill’s Camp in Alviso. She also wrote and published several books including reading primers and guides for job- and citizenship-seekers that were used for years to come.²⁶⁴ She eventually recruited volunteer teachers, and the reach of Goble’s program spread to neighboring communities. By 1958, 70 children attended classes at three labor camps (including O’Neill’s Camp in Alviso and two in the Almaden area of south San José),²⁶⁵ and 48 migrant workers were taught conversational English and vocational skills at Almaden School in San José.²⁶⁶

Additional Reading

By far the most numerous population in Alviso since the 1940s is the Mexican and Mexican-American inhabitants. For a detailed overview of the recent history of Mexicans and other people from Latin America in California, see the California Office Of Historic Preservation’s *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement* (external link).

²⁵⁸ “‘Native Son’ Deported Six Times,” *San Jose Evening News*, November 24, 1958, p. 19.

²⁵⁹ “Gas Blast Seriously Hurts 52-Year-Old Field Worker,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 29, 1959, p. 4.

²⁶⁰ “Knife Used in Brawl,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 1, 1962, p. 6.

²⁶¹ Maria Guadalupe “Lupe” Lujan, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁶² Carl F. Heintze, “Farm Laborers Find Home Away from Home in Alviso,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 8, 1962, p. 17.

²⁶³ Sam Hanson, “From Visit to a Labor Camp—New Educational Pattern,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 21, 1963, p. 61.

²⁶⁴ Leigh Weimers, “Activism Blossoms in Pioneer,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 1, 1997, p. 1G.

²⁶⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Senate Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 1213, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Migratory_Labor/YZgvAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

²⁶⁶ “Classes for Migrant Field Hands Gaining a Foothold in the Valley,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 16, 1958, p. 6.

21st Century

In 2000, the population of Alviso was 2,234. Compared to increases in population since 1990 at the city and county levels (+14.4 and +12.3 percent, respectively), the population of Alviso saw a nearly 7 percent decline.²⁶⁷ Whereas Hispanic residents made up approximately 76 percent of Alviso’s population in 2000, this ethnic group comprised only 30 percent and 24 percent of the city and county populations, respectively.²⁶⁸

By 2020, the population of Alviso increased slightly to 2,251. Hispanic and Latino residents accounted for 61 percent of the population, and nearly all were of Mexican descent. Other racial groups included white (23 percent), Asian (14 percent), and Black or African American (2 percent).²⁶⁹

Residential Development

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

Early residential development in the town—and later the city—of Alviso was concentrated in two areas. The first was in the town center, which has historically been the area west of Liberty Street (see Figure 1). A few of the 19th-century residences are described below.

Secondly, many farms and ranches were located along the San José-Alviso Road, which follows the alignment of present-day North First Street (see Figure 1). There are no longer any 19th-century residential buildings located along North First Street.²⁷⁰

Wade Residence

Possibly the oldest extant building in Alviso, known as the Wade Residence at 1641–57 El Dorado Street, was reportedly shipped, prefabricated, from the East Coast via Cape Horn ca. 1855, earning it the nickname “the ‘round the horn house.’”²⁷¹ This was a common practice during the Gold Rush, when prospectors in remote locations in California could receive a complete kit of parts to erect a shelter.²⁷² Contemporary newspaper articles confirm that quite a few “‘round the horn houses” were located in Santa Clara County.

Alviso pioneer Harry Wade, Sr., and his descendants lived in this house for several generations, the last one being Mary Wade Higgins who sold the property in the 1960s (**Figure 40** and

²⁶⁷ San José State University Urban and Regional Planning Department, *Alviso, California Community Assessment and Urban Design Analysis*, September 2009, p. 48, <https://www.sjsu.edu/urbanplanning/docs/community-planning-reports/AlvisoCommunityAssessmentReport.pdf>.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁶⁹ “Explore Census Data,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table?q=95002&y=2020&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP05>.

²⁷⁰ The extant buildings located at 5004 and 5010 North First Street (currently the Balaji Temple) were originally associated with a farm owned by the Santos family during the 20th century. These buildings were among the many residences relocated to Alviso from elsewhere during the mid-20th century.

²⁷¹ Jan Jensen, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 16, 2023.

²⁷² “Prefabricated Homes,” *National Park Service*, 2011, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/prefabricated-homes.htm#:~:text=Prefabricated%20homes%20were%20produced%20during,prospectors%20to%20quickly%20construct%20homes.>

Figure 41).²⁷³ Harry Wade, Sr. constructed a large brick warehouse immediately to the south and operated several businesses at that location. (For more information on Wade’s warehouse, see 19th Century Transportation and Infrastructure above.)



SOURCE: Sourisseau Academy, published with permission in *Images of America: Alviso, San José*, p. 79.

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 40
Wade Residence, ca. 1891



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 41
Wade Residence

Tilden-Laine Residence

Arguably the most imposing single-family residence in Alviso, the Tilden-Laine Residence at 970 Elizabeth Street is an excellent example of the Italianate style of architecture that was popular both regionally and nationally from ca. 1840 to ca. 1890 (**Figure 42**). It was constructed in 1887 as the residence of Susan Ortleby Tilden, the widow of Alviso postmaster and judge David Tilden. Their daughter, Minerva, married well-known Alviso merchant Thomas Laine and inherited the

²⁷³ Jan Jensen, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 16, 2023.

house. Thomas Laine owned a general store between the house and the railroad tracks. In 1917, the building collapsed and its materials were removed from the site.



SOURCE: Tom Laine, published with permission in *Images of America: Alviso, San José*, p. 108.

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 42
Tilden-Laine Residence, 1890

The house was meticulously renovated in 2011 and remains one of Alviso’s most recognizable landmarks (**Figure 43**).



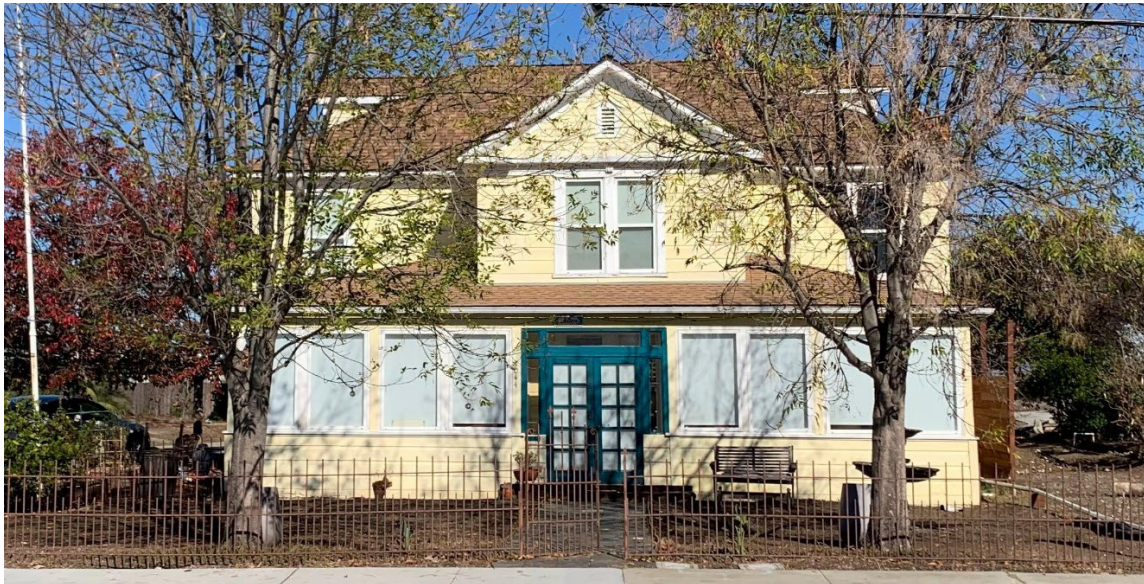
SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 43
Tilden-Laine Residence

La Montagne Boarding House

Originally built as a private residence sometime before 1895, the house at 1044 Catherine Street was reportedly remodeled in 1904 to serve as a boarding house for PG&E employees.^{274,275} It was later purchased by William Clampett and Jane Huxham in the 1920s. During the 1940s, boat restoration work for PG&E was performed in the barn behind the home. Today, the building is known by Alvisans as “the Big Yellow House” (**Figure 44**).²⁷⁶ While the original date of construction is reported to be ca. 1870 on the 1973 National Register Nomination, the appearance of the house is more appropriate to 1890–1900 design trends, specifically the Colonial Revival style of architecture.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 44
La Montagne Boarding House

20th Century

Prior to the 1950s, residential development in Alviso occurred slowly and almost exclusively west of Liberty Street. The speculative New Chicago tract (located northeast of Liberty and North First streets) was subdivided and sold beginning in 1890, but the vision of establishing Alviso as a destination for industrial, commercial, or residential development—“the Chicago of the west”—was never realized. (For more information about New Chicago, see the Mid- and Late 19th Century Historical Overview above.) One reason for this was because most of the 4,400 parcels

²⁷⁴ The building appears in the distance of an 1895 photograph of the area as shown in *Santa Clara County and Its Resources* (San Jose: San Jose Mercury, 1895), p. 281. It is highly doubtful that the building dates to the 1870s as reported in some documentation. The style, size, and association with the La Montagne family cannot be verified prior to the early 1890s.

²⁷⁵ The association with PG&E has not been verified. However, it is reported in both the 1995 California Point of Interest application and on the historical marker in front of the property. City of San José, *Application for California Point of Historical Interest: Port of Alviso*, 1995, p. 47.

²⁷⁶ “La Montagne Boarding House, ca. 1890,” *The Historical Marker Database*, revised February 7, 2023, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=24450>.

went to buyers who defaulted on their property taxes, and the parcels were eventually claimed by the State of California. In 1948, the City of Alviso and Santa Clara County initiated negotiations to purchase approximately 3,000 New Chicago parcels from the state.²⁷⁷ In 1949, the city acquired the parcels south and west of Spreckles Avenue, and the county retained the parcels to the north and east.²⁷⁸ In 1955, the Alviso City Council voted to sell the unimproved city-owned lots in the former New Chicago area for as low as \$5 each. Interested buyers were required to purchase two or more adjacent lots, lay down at least two feet of dirt fill, and erect buildings within one calendar year.²⁷⁹ Within a decade, 10 blocks in the former New Chicago area were relatively densely populated with single-family homes.²⁸⁰

House Moving as a Common Practice

It has been estimated that 75 percent of the buildings erected in Alviso during the mid-20th century were relocated—already assembled—from elsewhere.²⁸¹ Some were relocated more than once, like the cottages for cannery workers that were transported from San José to Alviso in 1929 and moved at later date to vacant parcels near Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church by the grandparents of Bart Laine, a third-generation Alvisan.²⁸²⁻²⁸³ The cottages are no longer extant.

During the mid-20th century, extensive freeway construction and other large development projects throughout the San Francisco Bay region necessitated clearing large swaths of land, cutting through residential neighborhoods and displacing inhabitants. The houses slated for removal were offered for free or sold cheaply to people who paid to haul them away, and Alviso, with its plentiful, inexpensive, and flood-prone land, became the final destination of many secondhand homes.²⁸⁴ Only a few house-moving companies operated in the area, and they collaborated with structural engineers to lift, move, and reinstall the buildings in their new locations.²⁸⁵ These late 19th and early 20th century homes arrived in Alviso by way of Milpitas, Campbell, San José, and elsewhere.²⁸⁶ Through archival research and interviews, the following houses were certainly relocated to Alviso:

- 1432 Grand Avenue was relocated to Alviso sometime between 1957 and 1963 from North Eighth Street in San José²⁸⁷

²⁷⁷ Benny A. Phillips, “1890 Alviso Boom; 1948 Grand Finale,” *San Jose Mercury*, October 10, 1948, p. 22.

²⁷⁸ Patricia Loomis, “Grand ‘New Chicago’ Dream Revived,” *San Jose Evening News*, August 22, 1955, p. 13.

²⁷⁹ “New Chicago Land Rush Slows Down,” *San Jose Evening News*, October 5, 1955, p. 25.

²⁸⁰ This is based on a comparison of historic aerial photographs from 1956 and 1965.

²⁸¹ Bart Laine, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ This account of cottages for agricultural workers located near the Catholic church was verified by George Trevino: “Down Michigan [Avenue], closer to the [Catholic] church, there was little buildings, shacks basically. But they did have bathrooms and kitchens. Where a lot of the farm workers used to live.” George Trevino, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁸⁴ Jesus Canales, Eduardo C. Resendez, and Arthur M. Baros v. City of Alviso and City of San José, Case No. 73-1109, p. 6, in *Records and Briefs of the United States Supreme Court*, 1973, accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Records_and_Briefs_of_the_United_States/y429biKC5ysC?hl=en&gbpv=0

²⁸⁵ One such house-moving company was Kelly House Movers, and one such engineer was Scott Structural Engineering. Bart Laine, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁸⁶ Bart Laine, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁸⁷ Frank Sweeney, “Just Call Alviso the Painted Lady!” *San Jose Mercury*, June 23, 1968, p. 27.

- 1364 Michigan Avenue was built ca. 1936 and relocated to Alviso sometime between 1957 and 1963 from an unknown location²⁸⁸
- 1392 Michigan Avenue was built ca. 1936 and relocated to Alviso sometime between 1957 and 1963 from an unknown location²⁸⁹
- Bart Laine’s current residence [Note to reviewer: This should be replaced with address once confirmed] was built ca. 1940s and relocated to Alviso from Winchester Boulevard²⁹⁰
- George Trevino’s childhood home [Note to reviewer: This should be replaced with address once confirmed] was relocated to Alviso²⁹¹
- According to longtime Alvisan George Trevino, “a lot of those houses that came in [from elsewhere]” were moved to Grand and Michigan avenues²⁹²

One area from which many Alviso houses originated was the bygone Coleman Loop neighborhood of San José which was once bounded by present-day Coleman Avenue on the west and south, Interstate 880 and San José International Airport on the north, and the Guadalupe Freeway (State Route 87) on the east.²⁹³ The San José Municipal Airport (known today as the Norman Y. Mineta San José International Airport) first offered commercial flights in 1949, and the first jet service occurred in 1966.²⁹⁴ The noise generated by jets in the urban setting became a major concern. In order to comply with California airport noise regulations, the City of San José systematically purchased properties “in a sea of 1930s- and 1940s-vintage bungalows just south of San José Municipal Airport” (i.e., in the Coleman Loop neighborhood), auctioned the buildings, and relocated the residents away from the direct flight path.²⁹⁵ Many houses were offered free of charge or for a low cost and trucked to Alviso.²⁹⁶

In his 1973 report *Alviso: The Crisis of a Barrio*, the prominent civil rights advocate and labor organizer Ernesto Galarza described the character of Alviso thusly:

The architectural style of the town is heavily accented by row of homes with the unmistakable stamp of cultural transplants from another epoch and another place. The Mexican Alvisans have improved these relics. Many of the original structures have been remodeled, enlarged, painted and landscaped...Amidst the variety of remodeled and refurbished houses, single-room shacks, bungalows and farm-labor camp barracks there are no high-rise, high-rent apartments. On the whole, housing

²⁸⁸ See the DPR 523 form for 1365 Michigan Avenue in the Alviso Neighborhood Survey Report.

²⁸⁹ See the DPR 523 form for 1392 Michigan Avenue in the Alviso Neighborhood Survey Report.

²⁹⁰ Bart Laine, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁹¹ George Trevino, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Frank Sweeney, “S.J.’s Property Purchase Project Around Airport Takes Time, Cash,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 13, 1978, p. 4.

²⁹⁴ “SJC Timeline,” San José Mineta International Airport, accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.flysanjose.com/sjc_timeline.

²⁹⁵ Frank Sweeney, “S.J.’s Property Purchase Project Around Airport Takes Time, Cash,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 13, 1978, p. 4.

²⁹⁶ Maria Guadalupe “Lupe” Lujan (Alviso resident and representative of La Raza), interview with Becky Urbano (ESA), October 28, 2022.

*in Alviso presents a gray façade streaked by the seasons behind which families double up and ponder their chances of survival as a community.*²⁹⁷

Beginning around 1974, the San José City Council advised against any more buildings being relocated to Alviso. The City no longer encouraged people to move to Alviso because it was considered to have “inadequate services” and was located in the flight path of a proposed new airport near San Francisco Bay, and “a city board that issues permits to move houses could block such a move.”²⁹⁸ (The plan for an airport located near Alviso was short lived, and the San José city manager confirmed that the scheme was abandoned in October 1975.²⁹⁹)

Summerset Mobile Estates

Alviso’s first community of mobile homes was developed in 1977 on the site of a landfill that was also used as a dumping site during the 1950s.³⁰⁰⁻³⁰¹ The main entrance is located on Gold Street, and the community includes 112 mobile home units, a community center, a swimming pool, and a playground.

Casa del Sol

As described above under 20th Century Ethnic and Cultural Communities, approximately 300 Mexican-American families were displaced when the former labor camp known as O’Neill’s Camp issued a blanket eviction notice in the early 1990s. Several families were able to remain in Alviso thanks to a volunteer-led project to construct new single-family housing for low-income Alvisans. The Casa del Sol project, as it was known, was a collaboration between the international housing ministry Habitat for Humanity, the Organización Comunidad de Alviso (OCA or Alviso Community Organization), and Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Alviso.³⁰² Between 1991 and 1995, volunteers built a total of nine single-family homes for low-income Alvisans. Three were built on Wabash Street, four on Michigan Avenue, and two on State Street.³⁰³⁻³⁰⁴ Archival research did not confirm the precise locations of the Casa del Sol homes.

21st Century

Residential development in recent decades has been concentrated at the intersection of North First Street and Grand Boulevard. Besides the tract numbers, archival research did not identify the names of any subdivisions.

²⁹⁷ Ernesto Galarza, *Man of Fire: Selected Writings*, Armando Ibarra and Rodolfo D. Torres, eds. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), pp. 103-104.

²⁹⁸ “City Sells Houses Near Airport,” *San Jose News*, June 12, 1974, p. 36.

²⁹⁹ Stephen C. Gruber, “Airport Won’t Move,” *San Jose News*, October 10, 1975, p. 1.

³⁰⁰ Advertisement,” *San Jose Evening News*, March 30, 1977, p. 15CL.

³⁰¹ Carolyn Jung, “EPA Unearths Asbestos in Alviso – Pipe Fragments Found Under Vacated Mobile Home,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 14, 1994, p. 1B.

³⁰² “Decent Housing for Poor People in Alviso Begins to Become Reality,” *Valley Catholic* 8, no. 3 (January 1990), p. 1.

³⁰³ Mary Anne Ostrom, “They’re Nailing It Down: Group Builds a Dream for Alviso Families,” *San Jose Mercury*, April 15, 1991, p. 1B.

³⁰⁴ Broderick Perkins, “Grants to Provide Housing for Poor,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 22, 1995, p. 9F.

The Tract No. 9199 subdivision is a collection of 34 detached, single-family homes constructed in 2000 by developer LBL-Duc Alviso, LLC.³⁰⁵ The subdivision occupies the block bounded by North First Street on the south, Grand Boulevard on the east, Archer Street on the north, and Michigan Avenue on the west.

The Tract No. 9293 subdivision includes 59 detached, single-family homes constructed in 2001 by developer Blackwell Village, LLC.³⁰⁶ The subdivision occupies the area immediately west of the Alviso Branch Library that is bounded by North First Street on the south, Trinity Park Drive on the east and north, and Grand Boulevard on the west.

Industrial and Commercial Development

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

Waterfront Development

An 1894 bird's eye drawing of Alviso shows a concentration of industrial buildings along the Alviso Slough, and several prominent businesses are identified (**Figure 45** and **Figure 46**). From nearest to most distant, they are:

- John Martin and Son which “controls three brick warehouses on the water-front, which are used for the storage of hay and grain. The rates of storage are very reasonable, [...] taking into consideration that the insurance is just one-half that charged on wooden structures...”³⁰⁷
- J. E. Fisher whose warehouse “is one of the largest and best storage places in Santa Clara county. It is a substantial brick building, 180 feet long, with a depth of eighty feet, with a capacity of 15,000 tons.”³⁰⁸
- S. H. Chase Lumber Company which “owns immense warehouses and lumber yards in Alviso, and also operate [sic] a large planing mill there. Its facilities for furnishing long timber in this county has made its headquarters at this port the distributing port for lumber in this valley...Considering everything pertaining to the lumber business no firm or corporation in this valley is better equipped to carry on business than the S. H. Chase Lumber Company.”³⁰⁹

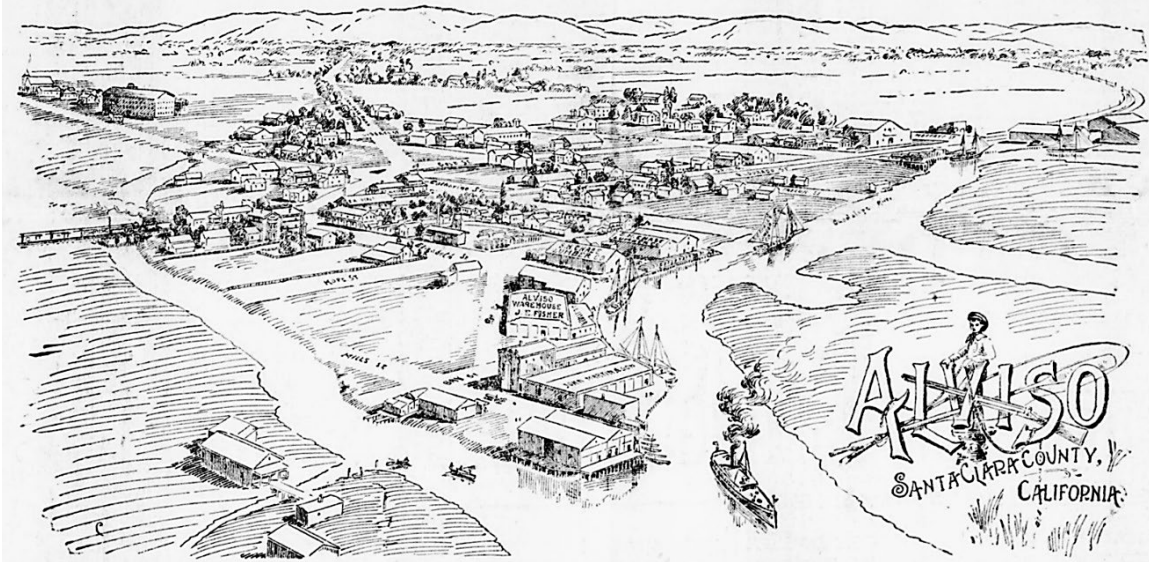
³⁰⁵ San José City Council, “Minutes of the City Council,” November 2, 1999, http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/1999_CnclMins/11-02-99min.htm.

³⁰⁶ San José City Council, “Minutes of the City Council,” October 17, 2000, http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/2000_CnclMins/10_17_00min.htm.

³⁰⁷ “An Old Pioneer,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1.

³⁰⁸ “Important to Shippers,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1.

³⁰⁹ “Port Alviso,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1.

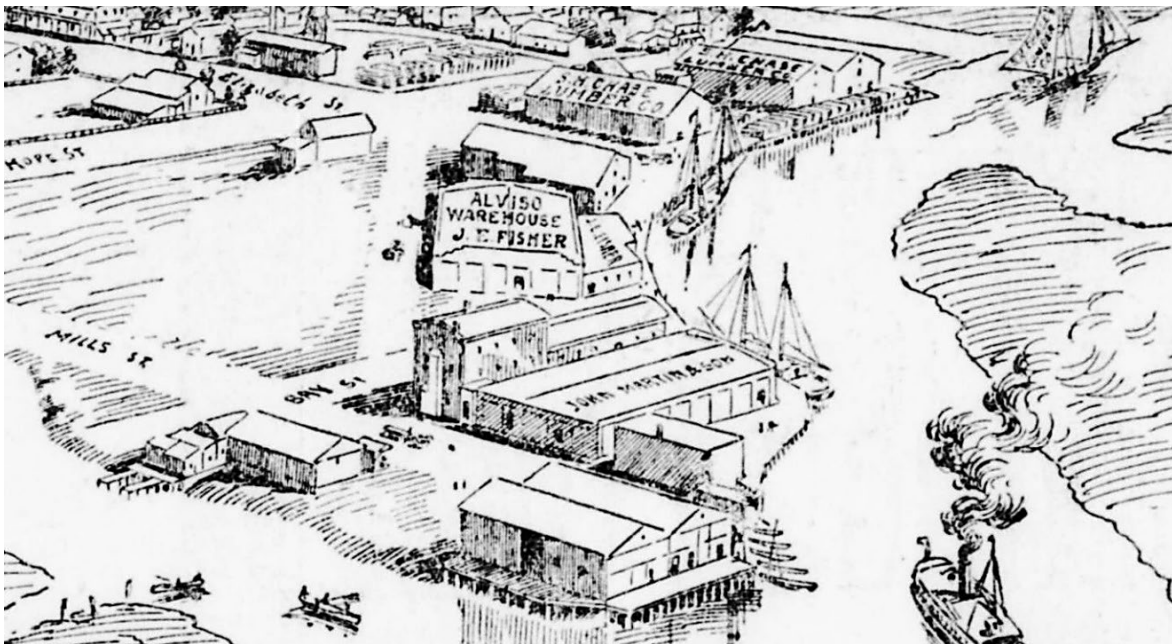


View facing southeast.

SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 45
Bird's Eye View of Alviso, 1894



The site in the center foreground is the present-day location of the Alviso Marina County Park. From front to back, the following businesses are identified: John Martin and Son, J. E. Fisher, and S. H. Chase Lumber Company.

SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, June 24, 1894, p. 1

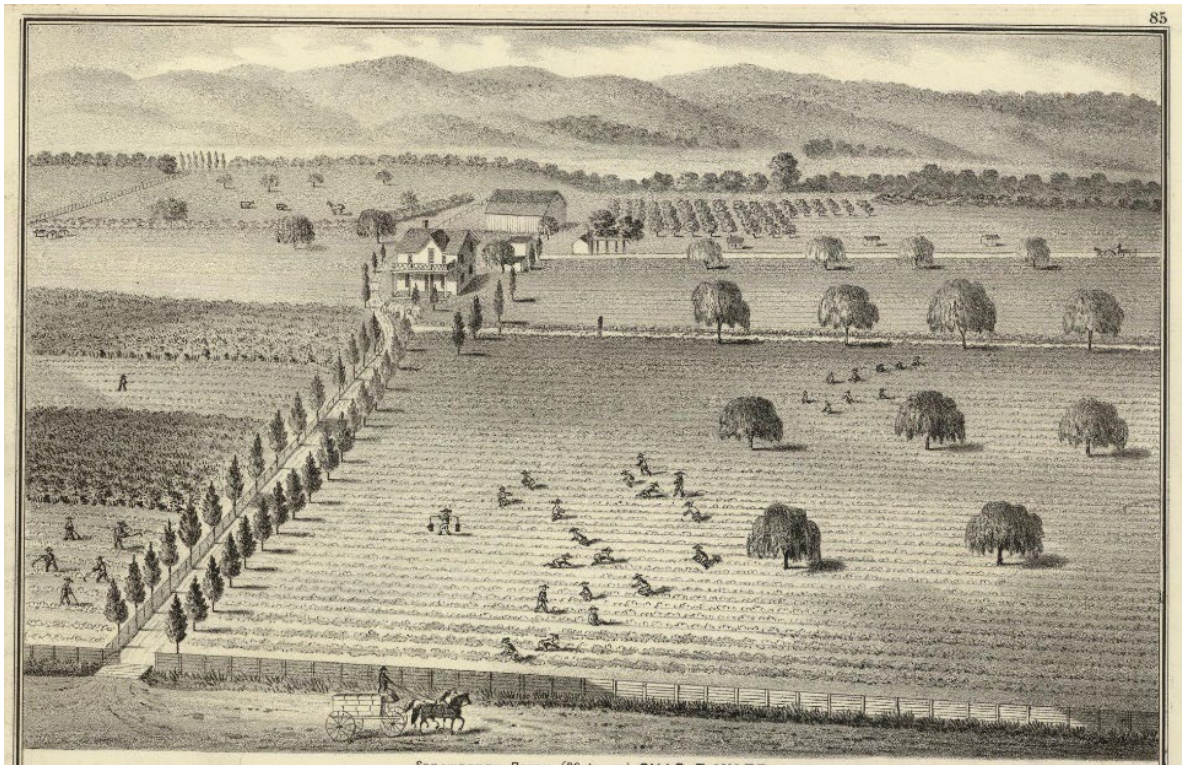
Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 46
Detail of Bird's Eye View, 1894

Besides storage warehouses and a lumber yard, late-19th-century business enterprises in the vicinity of Alviso included an oyster shell dredging operation (presented in more detail under 20th Century Industrial and Commercial Development) and James Lick’s Alviso Mill. Built in the 1850s approximately 2.5 miles upstream from the port in the present-day Rivermark community, it was the largest steam flour mill in Santa Clara County until 1873. At that time, it was converted into a paper mill and was destroyed by fire in 1882. Lick’s mansion on the mill property is extant.³¹⁰

Agriculture and Orchards

As described above under 19th Century Ethnic and Cultural Communities, much of Alviso’s produce was cultivated by Chinese tenant farmers on land owned by white men. Within the city, a large variety of crops were grown including strawberries (Longworth and Sharpless varieties) and asparagus, for which Alviso was especially well known; raspberries, blackberries, sugar beets, apples, pears, and tomatoes (**Figure 47**).³¹¹



SOURCE: Thompson & West, *Historical Atlas Map of Santa Clara County*, 1876 (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 47
Charles E. Wade's Strawberry Ranch in Alviso, 1876

³¹⁰ Dwight Mitchell, "Lick's Alviso Mill Played Historic Role," *San Jose Mercury*, April 1, 1951, p. 20.

³¹¹ *San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources* (San Jose: Smith & Eaton, 1895), p. 280.

Other Prominent Businesses

Union Warehouse

The Union Warehouse at 1200 Hope Street was originally constructed ca. 1858 to replace an earlier warehouse built by the firm of Clark, Rand & Snyder (**Figure 48**). When constructed, the Union Warehouse was part of a complex that also included docks on the Guadalupe River. After completion of the San Francisco-San José Railroad in 1878, the importance of shipping in the area declined, and the warehouse was used primarily for storage of hay.³¹² In the early 20th century, the building was incorporated into the adjacent Bayside Canning Company.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 48
Union Warehouse

Alviso Hotel

An establishment named the Alviso Hotel existed as early as the 1870s.³¹³ The extant building at 995 Elizabeth Street was originally constructed sometime before 1907 as a Queen Anne-style inn known as the Alviso Hotel (**Figure 49**).³¹⁴ (Archival research did not confirm if the Queen Anne-style hotel was the same building as the 1870s Alviso Hotel.) When built, it shared a lot with the railroad depot. According to longtime Alvisan George Trevino who owned the building in the 2000s and renamed it the Marina Seafood Grotto,

The Alviso Hotel was where people [from outside Alviso] would escape. They would come to Alviso so they could go hunting in [the nearby, bygone community of] Drawbridge. A lot of them would...stop at the Alviso Hotel [(Figure 50)]. They'd have entertainment, they'd have ladies. They'd go out hunting for a while and have a gay old time. So the Alviso Hotel was where they would all come to have fun. They'd go out shooting, there's women, there's some gambling...It was entertainment for a lot of people [from] different areas [who] wanted to get away.³¹⁵

³¹² City of San José, Application for California Point of Historical Interest: Port of Alviso, 1995, p. 46.

³¹³ *History of Santa Clara County, California* (San Francisco: Alley, Bowen & Co., 1881), p. 567.

³¹⁴ 1908 Sanborn map.

³¹⁵ George Trevino, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.



The railroad depot is visible at the left in its original location.

SOURCE: CardCow website [external link]

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 49
Alviso Hotel, 1907



SOURCE: History San José, History San José
Photographic Collection [external link]

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 50
Hunters with Their Game in Front of the Alviso Hotel, ca. 1905

During the Prohibition Era (1920–33), the Alviso Hotel was a notorious place for bootleggers. Its saloon was repeatedly raided, and this is notable because the hotel was managed at that time by Alviso city councilman John Ackerman and frequented by Alviso chief of police William

Perkins.³¹⁶ As a punishment for illegal activity, the hotel was closed for business for one calendar year beginning in November 1928.³¹⁷

Few changes were made to the building before the mid-1960s.³¹⁸ At that time, the northeast turret that marked the main entrance was removed, the front (north) façade was remodeled, and the original roof form was replaced with the current low pitch gable roof.³¹⁹ By December 1964, it was renamed the Marina Club and Hotel,³²⁰ and arsonists caused extensive damage to the building in 1966.³²¹ The building was briefly rebranded as the Day and Night Club later that year, and in May 1968, the building was rechristened as the Marina Seafood Grotto.³²²

20th Century

Several industries played major roles in defining the character of Alviso in the early 20th century.

Agriculture and Orchards

In 1901, Alviso was considered “one of the wealthiest districts agriculturally in the county.”³²³ Ranches in the city and immediate vicinity produced large quantities of blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, pears, apples, prunes, potatoes, peas, asparagus, beans, corn, and dairy products.^{324,325} These goods were “of excellent quality, commending always the very highest prices,” and 100,000–200,000 pounds of goods were shipped per month on average from the Port of Alviso to San Francisco.³²⁶

By 1978, an environmental consultant reported that, “Soils in Alviso...have no agricultural capability. Resource value of the Baylands is for wildlife habitat, watershed or salt pond evaporators.”³²⁷ Additionally, Alviso was perceived as an isolated quarter of San José being “separated from San José proper by vast fields, some of which are fallow and some of which are still devoted to interim agricultural uses.”³²⁸

³¹⁶ “Officials Involved in Alviso Bootleg Raid,” *San Jose Evening News*, February 9, 1932, p. 1.

³¹⁷ “Judge Orders Hotel Padlocked for Year,” *Oakland Tribune*, November 24, 1928, p. 3.

³¹⁸ See the 1952 photograph of the Alviso Hotel by Minor White, PC-RM-White, California Historical Society, PC-RM-White_52-046, https://digitalibrary.californiahistoricalsociety.org/object/3780?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=0590ca78a6571e956a0b&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=7.

³¹⁹ This is based on comparisons of aerial photographs taken in 1965 and 1968.

³²⁰ “Merry Christmas, Happy New Year,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 25, 1964, p. 51.

³²¹ “Outbreak of Fires Hit Area,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 23, 1966, p. 2.

³²² Advertisement, *San Jose Evening News*, May 4, 1968, p. 7.

³²³ “Port Alviso and Its Harbor Improvements,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 22, 1901, p. 14.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Cecelia M. Tsu, *Garden of the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 31, 35.

³²⁶ “Port Alviso and Its Harbor Improvements,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 22, 1901, p. 14.

³²⁷ City of San Jose Planning Department, *San Jose Community Block Grants (HUD) Addendum to the Environmental Impact Report and Statement*, 1975, p. 28, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.google.com/books/edition/San_Jose_Community_Development_Block_Gra/89o3AQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Canning

The fruit and vegetable canning industry in Santa Clara County began in 1871 when Dr. James Dawson began experimenting with commercial canning techniques at his residence in San José.³²⁹ Canning on an industrial scale was a natural complement to the vast orchards that were then being planted throughout the Santa Clara Valley and around the San Francisco Bay Area. For more information about the early canning industry in Santa Clara County, see the 2021 *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, pages 62–65.

The most significant industry in Alviso during the early 20th century was canning produce. In 1905, a group of local farmers and investors organized to establish the Fruit Canning Company of Alviso.³³⁰ The cannery operated from a preexisting building known as the Boots warehouse.³³¹ The following year, the farmers' cannery was purchased by Sai Yen Chew—a Chinese-born San Francisco resident—and renamed the Bayside Canning Company (sometimes spelled Bay Side).

Sai Yen Chew and his son Thomas Foon Chew (also known as Thomas Foon) strategically invested in the cannery over the following decades, and the younger Chew eventually took over as manager. In 1907, the Chews purchased adjacent properties from J. C. Fisher and Harry Wade and reportedly invested \$30,000 to expand the old cannery.³³² By 1908, the cannery complex comprised a one-story, wood-frame cannery building; two brick warehouses, one of which was the former Union Warehouse at 1200 Hope Street that was converted to cold storage; a wood-frame water tower; a small, wood-frame box storage building; an in-ground concrete storage tank; an in-ground oil tank; and an artesian well (**Figure 51**).³³³ One new building was erected annually in 1913, 1914, and 1915, and five more buildings were added in 1919.³³⁴ By 1920, the Bayside Canning Company in Alviso was the third largest cannery in the United States after the Del Monte Plant No. 1 in San Francisco (extant) and the Libby, McNeill & Libby plant in Sacramento (extant).³³⁵ Significant improvements were made in 1929 when Chew constructed a 28,000-square-foot warehouse and a large addition to the cannery building. He also built a combination dormitory and kitchen building for cannery workers (extant and known as the Chinese Cookhouse at 906 Elizabeth Street)³³⁶ and purchased 30 cottages from the J.H. Flickinger Company of San José and relocated them to Alviso to serve as on-site housing for cannery workers (**Figure 52**).³³⁷

³²⁹ City of San José, *Draft San Jose Historic Context Statement*, September 29, 2021, p. 63.

³³⁰ “A Cannery at Alviso,” *San Jose Evening News*, February 11, 1905, p. 6.

³³¹ “Old Town Charter of Alviso Still in Force,” *San Francisco Examiner*, February 12, 1905, p. 20.

³³² “The New Bay Side Canning Company,” *Campbell Interurban Press*, May 17, 1907, p. 1.

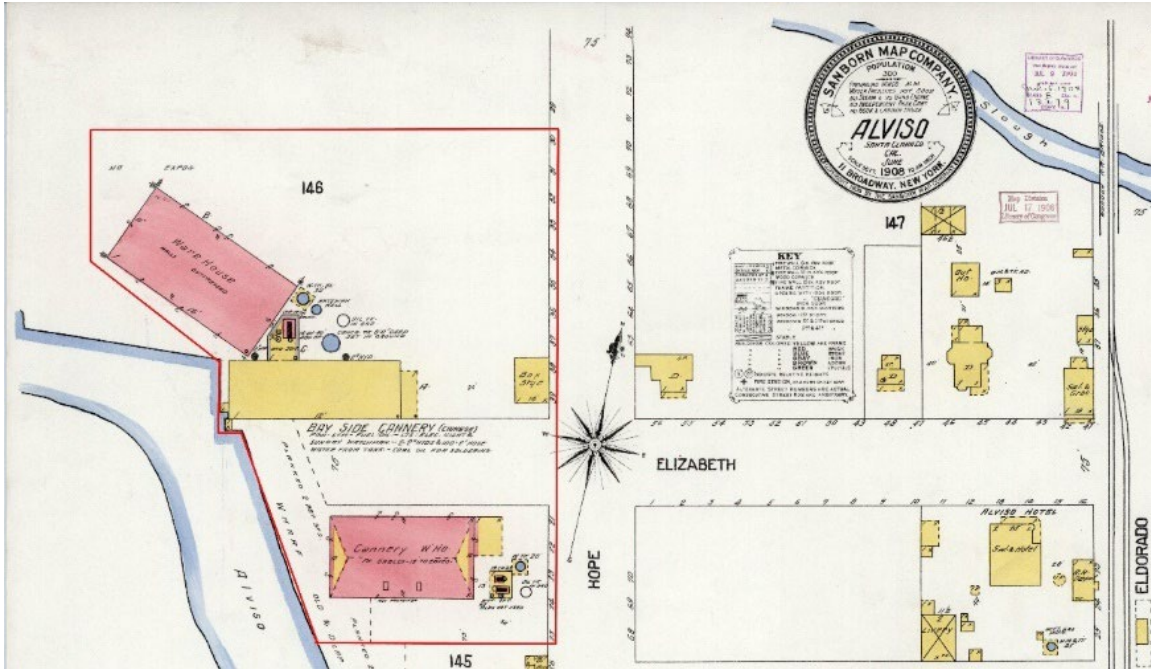
³³³ 1908 Sanborn map.

³³⁴ David C. Loring, *The History of Alviso, California*, prepared for the Community Development Lab at Stanford University, October 1966, p. 16, in the collection of Bart Laine.

³³⁵ Tsu, *Garden of the World*, pp. 77-78.

³³⁶ City of San José, “Application for California Point of Historical Interest: Port of Alviso,” 1995, p. 49.

³³⁷ “Alviso Laughs Last with Giant Building Plan,” *San Jose Mercury Herald*, April 6, 1929, p. 1.

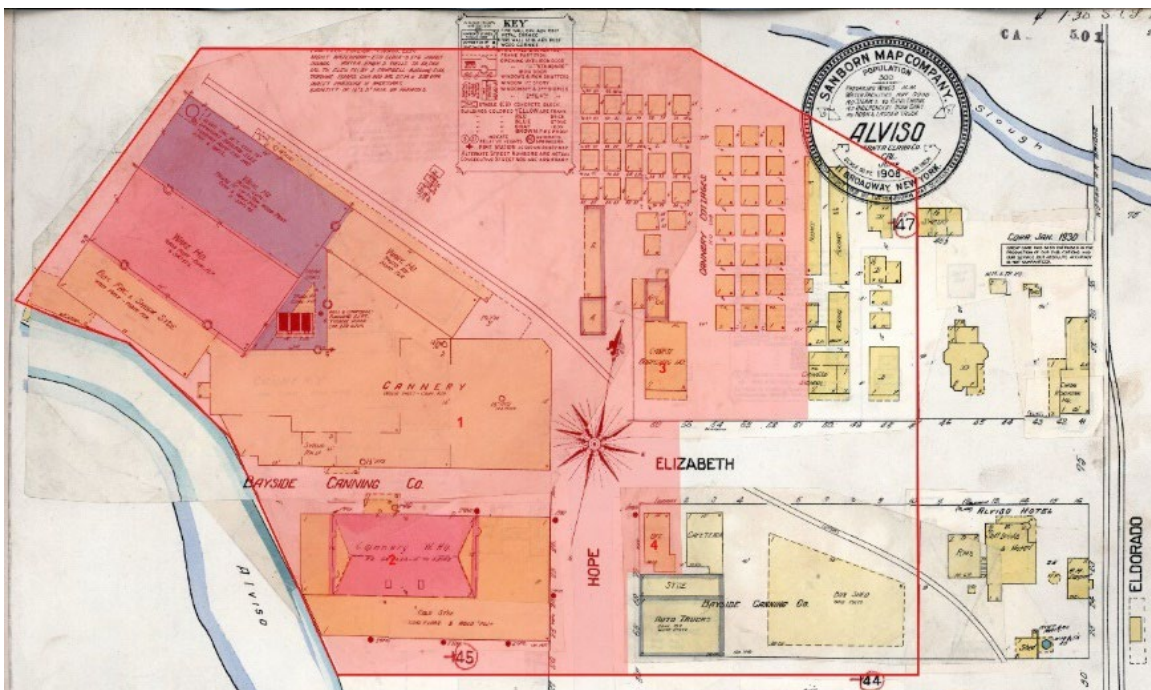


The boundary of the cannery property is outlined in red.

SOURCE: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1908

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 51
Layout of the Bayside Canning Company, 1908



The boundary of the cannery property is outlined in red and includes an expansion of the cannery building and dozens of workers' cottages. The area shaded red represents the extent of the recommended Bayside Canning Company Historic District.

SOURCE: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1930

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 52
Layout of the Bayside Canning Company, 1930

When the Bayside Canning Company was first established, it utilized a laborious packing process to can tomatoes by hand,³³⁸ and all employees were Chinese except for a foreman and laborer from Japan.³³⁹ Under Thomas Foon Chew’s leadership, production was modernized and operations expanded to can spinach, cherries, apricots, plums, peaches, pears, tomatoes and various tomato products, fish sauce, and fruit cocktail.³⁴⁰ Items were packed under various labels including Del Monte; Libby, McNeill & Libby; Bohemian; Calfruit; Calico; Gondolier; Precita; and Snow Peak,³⁴¹ and only the highest quality products receiving the “Bayside” label (Figure 53).³⁴² In Alviso, he employed a diverse workforce of immigrants of Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, Filipino, and Irish descent.³⁴³ Two more Bayside canneries were constructed in 1919 (Isleton, Sacramento County) and 1924 (Mayfield [now Palo Alto], Santa Clara County).³⁴⁴



Both labels include an emblem in the center for the Bayside Canning Company, Alviso, California.

SOURCE: History San José, Ralph Rambo Collection (external links 1 and 2)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 53
Labels for Bayside Canning Company Products Sold under the Bayside and Bohemian Brands

³³⁸ *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California.*

³³⁹ HABS No. CA-2686: Bayside Cannery, pp. 9–10.

³⁴⁰ *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California.*

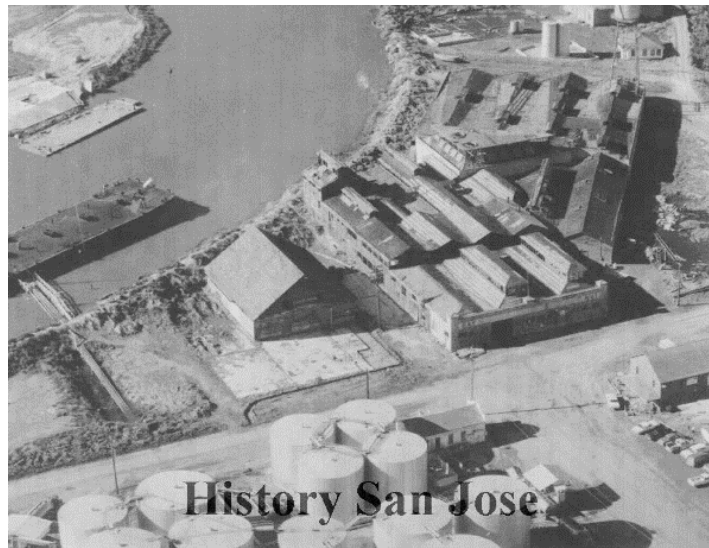
³⁴¹ “Bayside Canning Company,” *Packing Houses of Santa Clara County*, accessed May 5, 2023, http://vasonabranh.com/packing_houses/index.php?title=Bayside_Canning_Company.

³⁴² HABS No. CA-2686: Bayside Cannery, p. 11.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁴⁴ California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*, December 1988, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/5views/5views3h6.htm.

Thomas Foon Chew was widely renowned as a generous and caring manager. According to several accounts, he hired everyone who inquired about a job at the Bayside Canning Company. He provided housing for many workers and their families, offered hot meals, and paid fair wages. He was a decent, upright family man who was respected by immigrant communities as well as his peers in business and industry.³⁴⁵ After Thomas Foon Chew died at the age of 42 on February 24, 1931, it was reported that 25,000 people attended his funeral procession in San Francisco’s Chinatown, and he was eulogized as “loyal and responsive to his duties of citizenship and brotherhood.”³⁴⁶ The Bayside Canning Company was forced into receivership in 1933, and it was sold to the Bay Shore Cannery Company in 1936. The cannery continued to operate under different owners through the 1960s (**Figure 54**).³⁴⁷



SOURCE: History San José, History San José Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 54
Aerial View of the Bayside Canning Company, ca. 1950s

Shellfish Dredging and Processing

Oysters are a plentiful resource found in San Francisco Bay. Historically, there was no market for the native Olympia oyster (*Ostrea lurida*), as it was considered to have ornamental value only. Around 1870, farmed European flat oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) were introduced to the South Bay Area and quickly became a desirable and profitable food source. In the last quarter of the 19th century, as the Santa Clara Valley transformed into a populous commercial center, increasing amounts of raw sewage and industrial waste were discharged into the bay. By the turn of the 20th century, people would no longer consume oysters from these polluted waters.³⁴⁸ While they were no longer farmed for human consumption, oyster shells were an abundant source of calcium

³⁴⁵ “Dead ‘King’ Honored in S.F. Funeral,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 9, 1931, pp. 1, 6.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ *HABS No. CA-2686: Bayside Cannery*.

³⁴⁸ California State Lands Commission, *Final Environmental Impact Report: An Action to Accept Competitive Bids on a Mineral Extraction Project for Oyster Shell Deposits in South San Francisco Bay*, July 1978, p. 1,657, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.slc.ca.gov/Meeting_Summaries/1978_Documents/08-31-78/Items/083178C38.pdf.

carbonate needed to manufacture assorted agricultural and industrial lime products. The farms continued to operate and sold the oysters to enterprising merchants who established a robust shell dredging industry in and around Alviso.³⁴⁹

W.B. Ortley Shell Company

The earliest shell large-scale dredging operation was owned by William B. Ortley (1875–1941) and established near the mouth of the Guadalupe River in the 1890s. He was born in Alviso to a local pioneer family, and his father, Captain John J. Ortley, Sr., operated the Union Line of freight and passenger steamboats between Alviso and San Francisco.³⁵⁰ William B. Ortley’s business was founded as a freight operator and initially hauled hay, grain, and lumber by barge and later moved canned goods around San Francisco Bay. The shell dredging side of his business, which he ran with brothers John Jr. and Oliver Ortley and was sometimes referred to as the Ortley Brothers Company, began in the late 1890s and operated for more than 50 years.³⁵¹ Ortley’s fleet of five freight boats collected tons of shells from oyster beds located near Dumbarton Point. The shells were transported to his Alviso plant located immediately west of the South Pacific Coast Railroad bridge over the Guadalupe River where they were dried, baked, and ground for sale as agricultural lime (**Figure 55** and **Figure 56**).³⁵² In 1900, Ortley’s shell dredging operation was composed of one wood-frame warehouse, an office, and two sheds on the north shore and two warehouses and a dock on the south shore.³⁵³ A shell grinder was added in 1928.³⁵⁴ William Ortley died in 1941, and his brothers John Jr. and Oliver died in 1950 and 1954, respectively. By December 1951, the Ortley plant had been abandoned and damaged by fire.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁹ Abby Cohn, “Bay Offers Potential for Pearls of Profit,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 6, 1985, p. 4B.

³⁵⁰ “Life-long Resident Dies at 81,” *San Jose Evening News*, December 13, 1949, p. 4.

³⁵¹ “Out on the Water: Yacht Club Will Cruise to Redwood City Tomorrow,” *San Jose Evening News*, May 19, 1900, p. 6.

³⁵² “Low-Down on Higher-Ups,” *San Jose Mercury*, March 12, 1930, p. 12.

³⁵³ 1908 Sanborn map.

³⁵⁴ “The County Viewpoint,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 5, 1928, p. 12.

³⁵⁵ “Abandoned Plant Damaged by Fire,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 27, 1951, p. 16.

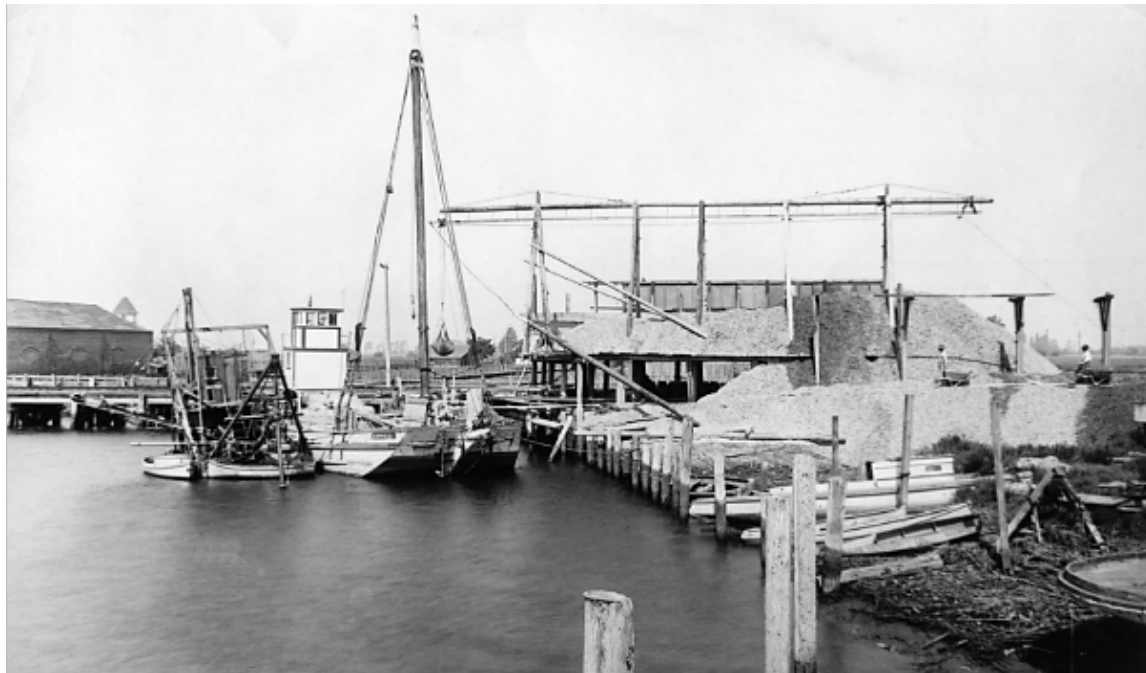


This view faces south and shows the operations on the south bank of the Guadalupe River. The South Pacific Coast Railroad bridge is visible at the far left.

SOURCE: History San José, Clifford Hunter Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 55
Ortley Shell Company, ca. 1915



This view faces east and shows the operations on the south bank of the Guadalupe River. The South Pacific Coast Railroad bridge and Harry Wade's brick warehouse are visible at the far left.

SOURCE: Clyde Arbuckle Photograph Collection, San José Public Library California Room (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 56
Ortley Shell Company, ca. 1915

Other Shell Dredging Companies in Alviso

The Agricultural Lime and Compost Company (later renamed the Bay Shell Company) was founded ca. 1924. The business office was originally located in San Francisco and later moved to Oakland, and the operations were always located in Alviso.³⁵⁶⁻³⁵⁷ In 1966, the Bay Shell Company was one of three commercial operations in the Port of Alviso.³⁵⁸ The last newspaper articles mentioning the company were published by the *San Jose Mercury* in August 1980.

The L.H. Beck Dredging Company was founded in 1931 with operations in San Mateo and a plant in Alviso.³⁵⁹ In 1942, there were four shell dredging companies operating in Santa Clara County, three of which were located in Alviso: the Bay Shell Company, the W.B. Ortle Shell Company, and the L.H. Beck Company.³⁶⁰

Solar Salt Production

Solar salt, which is harvested through the evaporation of salt water by the sun, is an ancient practice. It was employed by Native Americans for thousands of years and later by Spanish missionaries who used salt to cure meat and fish. As northern California's population soared during the Gold Rush, demand for salt for both personal and mining uses grew, and the solar salt industry in the Bay Area was born.³⁶¹

Around San Francisco Bay, the solar salt industry developed in three distinct areas (or units): Eden Landing on the southeast shore between the San Mateo Bridge and Alameda Creek, Ravenswood on the southwest shore flanking the Dumbarton Bridge, and in the vicinity of Alviso at the southernmost end of the bay between Adobe Creek in Mountain View and Cushing Parkway in Fremont (**Figure 57**). These areas were characterized by shallow marshland, and the combination of tidal action and warm summers made the South Bay Area ideal for producing salt.³⁶² Beginning in the 1850s, the natural salt ponds in Eden Landing became home to many commercial salt producers including Pioneer, Mount Eden, Rock Springs, L.N. Whisby, Ohlsen and Cox, Occidental, Paradise, Oliver, Commercial, Rocky Point, and Union Pacific Salt.³⁶³ Industrial-scale solar salt production reached Ravenswood beginning in the 1890s with the C.E. Whitney Company and several others that were eventually consolidated to form the Leslie Salt Company.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁶ Clarence A. Logan, "Limestone in California," *California Journal of Mines and Geology* 43, no. 3 (July 1947), pp. 174-357.

³⁵⁷ "California Mineral Commodities in 1951," *California Journal of Mines and Geology* 50, no. 1 (January 1954), pp. 59-147.

³⁵⁸ The Port of Santa Clara County operated fuel and napalm storage facilities under a federal contract. "News of South Bay: Petitioners Abandon Recall Election of Alviso Councilman Tony Santos," *San Jose Mercury*, May 24, 1966, p. 14Z.

³⁵⁹ Clarence A. Logan, "Limestone in California," *California Journal of Mines and Geology* 43, no. 3 (July 1947), pp. 174-357.

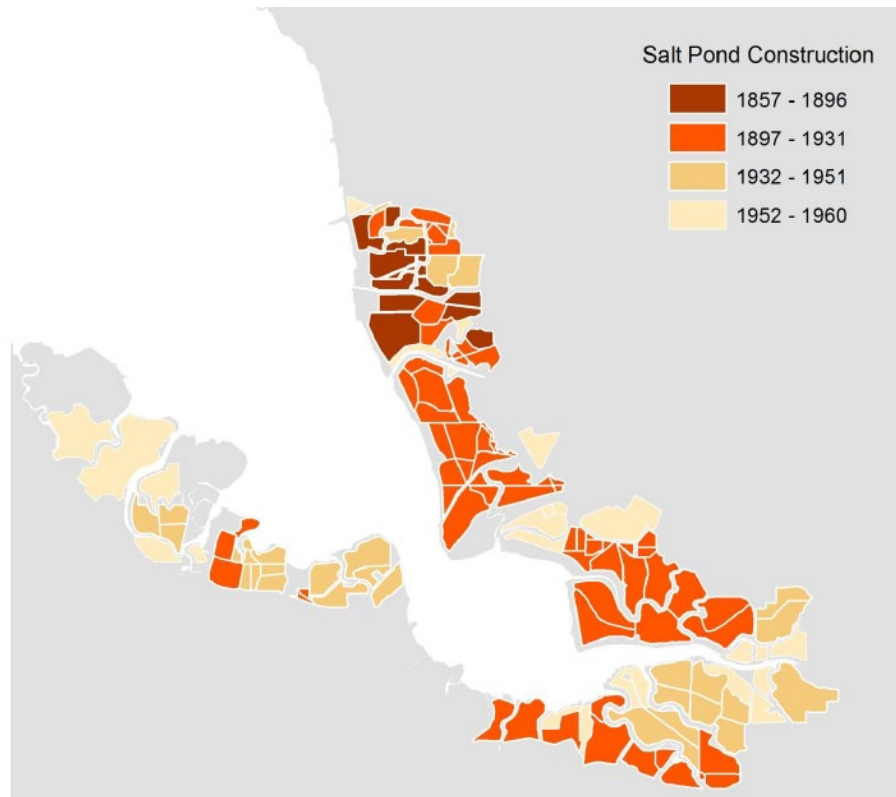
³⁶⁰ "County Limestone Output Declines," *San Jose Mercury*, August 27, 1942, p. 20.

³⁶¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 8, *Solar Salt Pond Identification and Evaluation Report*, March 2009, p. 4.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 22-26.

³⁶⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 8, *Solar Salt Pond Identification and Evaluation Report*, March 2009, p. 38.



Note that Alviso (shown in the lower right) had no salt ponds until 1929.

SOURCE: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 8,
Solar Salt Pond Restoration Project, 2013

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 57
Historical Development of Salt Ponds around Southern
San Francisco Bay

Industrial production of salt around Alviso began relatively late in 1929. The Alviso Salt Company built evaporation ponds between the City of Alviso and Mayfield Slough in the present-day Baylands Nature Preserve in Palo Alto, and the Arden Salt Company cultivated the shoreline from Alviso to Dumbarton Point to the northwest.³⁶⁵ The Alviso Salt Company promised to provide jobs for Alvisans and cottages for its employees, and an estimated \$5 million was spent to build evaporation ponds, dikes, canals, and a plant forming “the largest and greatest solar salt works in the world.”³⁶⁶ But the company filed for bankruptcy after one harvest and was acquired by the Arden Salt Company in 1931.³⁶⁷⁻³⁶⁸ The Leslie Salt Company bought the Alviso Salt Company in 1936 and gradually demolished the Alviso plant, and it was in turn acquired by the Cargill Salt Company in 1978.³⁶⁹

In 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified the South Bay Solar Salt Industry Landscape as a historically significant vernacular landscape that includes the salt ponds

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

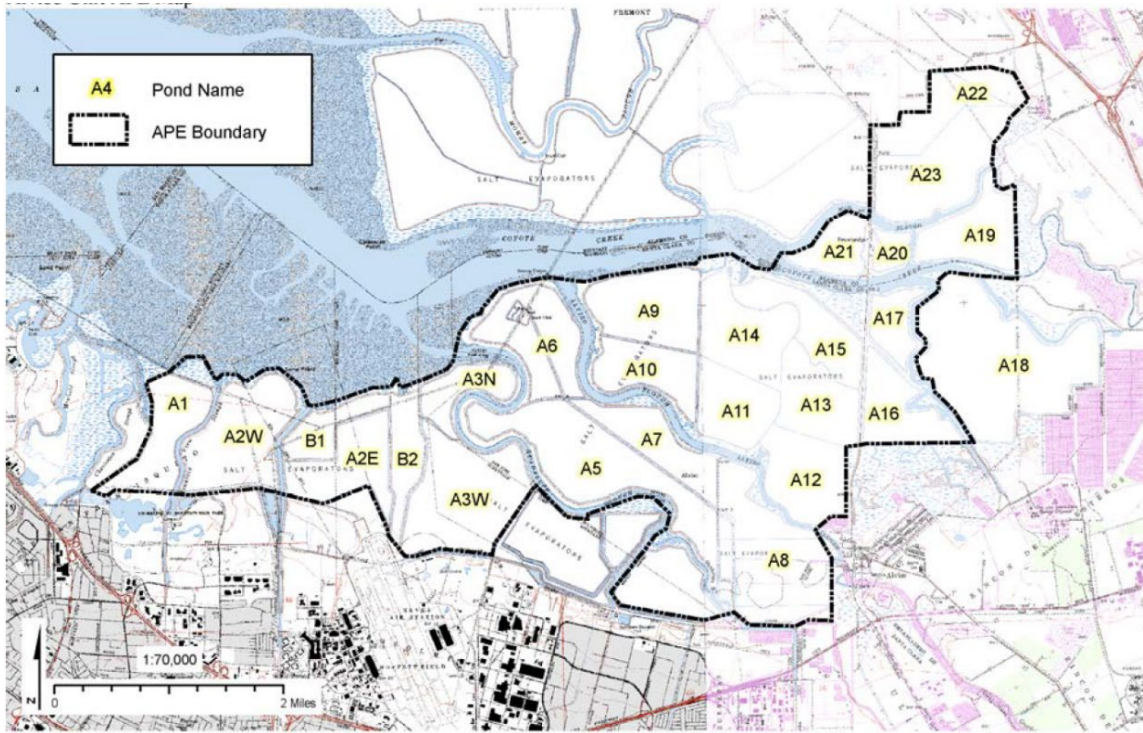
³⁶⁶ Melton Ferris, “Great Alviso Salt Works Falls into Wreckers’ Hands,” *San Jose Mercury*, February 24, 1938, p. 11.

³⁶⁷ Ted Bredt, “Ups and Downs of a Nowhere Town,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 21, 1976, California Today section, p. 6.

³⁶⁸ William E. Ver Planck, “Salt in California,” *California Division of Mines Bulletin No. 175* (March 1958), p. 111.

³⁶⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 8, *Solar Salt Pond Identification and Evaluation Report*, March 2009, p. 31.

in Alviso, Ravenswood, and Eden Landing. The Alviso Salt Pond Historic Landscape was determined eligible for listing as a historic district in the National Register under Criterion A (events) “because it is associated with the twentieth century period of industrialization when one operator [i.e., the Leslie Salt Company] created a vast network of evaporation ponds to produce the large amount of brine necessary to meet production demands... The Alviso Unit landscape clearly reflects the industrial zenith and development of huge tracks of salt marsh for salt brine production. The large exterior levees and vast ponds are the signature features of the Alviso Unit solar salt landscape.”³⁷⁰ Furthermore, the historic district was found to retain “fair integrity” due to the continued existence of the following character-defining features: perimeter levees, interior pond divisions water, and locations of water control structures (but not the structures themselves) that reflect the 1953 configuration.³⁷¹ The 9,677-acre Alviso Unit contains 28 salt ponds, the majority of which are included within the boundaries of the Alviso Salt Pond Historic Landscape (Figure 58).³⁷²



Note that Pond A18 was included as a contributor to the historic landscape after the production of this map.

SOURCE: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 8, *Solar Salt Pond Identification and Evaluation Report*, 2009

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 58
Map of the Alviso Pond Historic Landscape

³⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 31.

Other Prominent Businesses

The businesses presented below were identified as historically significant by Alviso residents during a series of public meetings held in 2022 by the City of San José Planning Division. There were many other businesses that served the community of Alviso during the 20th century, and only a few are mentioned in this report.

Vahl’s Restaurant (1513 El Dorado Street)

As early as 1936, local newspaper articles identified Fred Baumbach (who would later become Alviso city councilman and mayor) as the owner and operator of the Newport Inn located at present-day 1513 El Dorado Street in Alviso.³⁷³ The Newport Inn was described as an “eight barstool tavern”³⁷⁴ and a “popular club frequented by yachtsmen.”³⁷⁵ Baumbach died in November 1941,³⁷⁶ and it was at this time that Amelia Vahl took over operations of the Newport Inn.

Amelia Vahl met her second husband, Swedish immigrant Eric Vahl, after she became proprietress of the Newport Inn, and they married prior to April 1944.³⁷⁷ During the 1940s and 1950s, her business was named in local newspapers as Vahl’s Newport Inn, Vahl’s Club, and Vahl’s Restaurant. Historic newspaper articles indicate that Vahl’s was known for its large dinners and banquets, and it was often used as a community event space. Mr. and Mrs. Vahl ran Vahl’s together, serving Italian fare, providing a community gathering place, and surviving periodic floods for more than four decades. The building’s current appearance is the result of multiple renovations and additions constructed between ca. 1945 and ca. 1990 (**Figure 59** and **Figure 60**).³⁷⁸ The proprietors lived in the upstairs residential unit until Eric’s death in 1986.³⁷⁹ Amelia continued to run the restaurant until her death in 2004.³⁸⁰ Vahl’s remains a popular destination in 2023.

³⁷³ “Singing Society in Visit to Baumbach’s,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 27, 1936, p. 11.

³⁷⁴ “Alviso Mayor’s Funeral Will Be Held Tomorrow,” *San Jose Evening News*, November 17, 1941, p. 8.

³⁷⁵ Mike Cassidy, “‘The Boss’ – The Gal Behind the Vahl Says She May,” *San Jose Mercury*, September 6, 1992, p. 1B.

³⁷⁶ “Alviso Mayor’s Funeral Will Be Held Tomorrow,” *San Jose Evening News*, November 17, 1941, p. 8.

³⁷⁷ The name “Amelia Vahl” (her married name) appears in “Notice of Intention to Engage in the Sale of Alcoholic Beverages,” *San Jose Mercury*, April 11, 1944, p. 17.

³⁷⁸ These dates are based on comparisons of aerial photograph between 1948 and 1999. See *Historic Aerials*, accessed May 19, 2023, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>.

³⁷⁹ Alan Gathright, “Amelia Vahl – Longtime Alviso Restaurateur,” *SF Gate*, January 1, 2005, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Amelia-Vahl-longtime-Alviso-restaurateur-2708239.php>.

³⁸⁰ Gathright, 2005.



This photograph predates a mid-1960s remodel of the building.

SOURCE: Paul Rebozzi, reproduced in *Images of America: Alviso, San Jose* (2006)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 59
Undated Photograph of Vahl's



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 60
Vahl's

Lujan's Market (1557 Michigan Avenue)

According to Lupe Lujan, whose parents owned and operated Lujan's Market, notes that the market was purchased from Miguel Aboytes and that Aboytes had already established a small market there to sell groceries and general items to the Mexican laborers who lived in the vicinity during the 1960s.³⁸¹ Blanca and Alfonso Lujan purchased the market from Aboytes in 1967, and members of the Lujan family have operated it since that time (**Figure 61**).³⁸² As of 2023, the market is closed, but the family still retains ownership of the building.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 61
Lujan's Market

Alviso Boat Dock/Perkins' Store (1160 North Taylor Street)

Stanley Perkins, Sr. (1911–2004), became the mayor of Alviso in 1938 and the postmaster in 1940.³⁸³ He and his wife, Alma, constructed a general merchandise and bait shop called the Alviso Boat Dock at 1160 North Taylor Street in 1949 (**Figure 62**).³⁸⁴ According to one account, the post office was simultaneously relocated to the new building.³⁸⁵ While this could not be verified, an addition was constructed on east side of the building by 1963, and the post office was located there from at least 1963 until 1993 when it was relocated to the building at 1525 Gold Street (extant and currently functioning as the Alviso post office).

³⁸¹ Maria Guadalupe "Lupe" Lujan, oral history interview conducted by Johanna Kahn (ESA), March 23, 2023.

³⁸² "Lujan's Market, Established since 1967," commercial sign, *Google Streetview*, June 2016, https://www.google.com/maps/@37.4311211,-121.9660477,3a,75y,141.47h,88.61t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s7cK_rgYYnoibPshlxaSqMA!2e0!5s20160601T000000!7i1331218i6656?entry=ttu.

³⁸³ "Adversity Finds Alvisan Rich in Friends," *San Jose Mercury Herald*, May 6, 1940.

³⁸⁴ Betty Barnacle, "S. Perkins, Alviso's First Postmaster," *San Jose Mercury*, April 23, 2004, p. 7C.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Stanley Perkins served as the Alviso postmaster until 1977, and he operated the Alviso Boat Dock at the same time. By 1976, it had become a family business run by Stanley; his son, Robert; and Robert's wife, Norma.^{386,387} The Alviso Boat Dock closed permanently ca. 2001.



SOURCE: ESA, 2023

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 62
Alviso Boat Dock/Perkins' Store

Business Parks

Beginning in the mid-1980s, several business parks were constructed immediately north of State Route 237 in Alviso. They were concentrated in two locations: east of North First Street and west of the Guadalupe River. Construction dates were determined by cross referencing historic aerial photographs with assessor records.

East of North First Street

The first business park was built between 1984 and 1987 and included 11 office and light industrial buildings at 110, 150, 161, and 175 Nortech Parkway; 4413, 4415, 4433, 4445, and 4620 Fortran Drive; and 145 and 155 Baytech Drive. Archival research did not confirm the name(s) of this business park, and it is possible that it may have been developed as multiple smaller business parks. All buildings are extant.

The second such development constructed in 1997 was the Alviso Tech Park. It comprises the four buildings at 110, 120, 130, and 140 Baytech Drive, and all buildings are extant.

The Baytech Business Park was constructed ca. 1998 and included the four extant buildings at 150, 160, 170, and 180 Baytech Drive.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Bill Romano, "Sail Goes 'Beserk' [sic] in Wind, Bowls Over Handlers, Injures 2," *San Jose Mercury*, May 24, 1978, p. 2F.

³⁸⁷ "Irate Alviso Set to Take Its Toll," *San Jose Mercury*, March 4, 1973, p. 25.

³⁸⁸ Katherine Conrad, "Carramerica Makes Big Deal in N. San Jose – Boston Scientific Leases Buildings," *San Jose Mercury*, October 10, 2006, p. 3C.

West of the Guadalupe River

A collection of five buildings at 2100, 2130, 2150, 2160, and 2190 Gold Street were constructed in 1998–99 on the site of a landfill. The complex—which has been known at various times as the Legacy Techpark,³⁸⁹ Bixby Technology Center,³⁹⁰ and Gold Street Technology Center,³⁹¹ is located immediately south of the Summerset Mobile Estates. All buildings are extant.

21st Century

Continuing the pattern of development begun in the 1980s, large-scale commercial projects are concentrated along the north side of State Route 237.

Business Parks and Technology Centers

Google Midpoint Campus

Between 2018 and 2020, Google acquired nine buildings in Alviso totaling 1.32 million square feet for its Midpoint Campus located north of State Route 237 and east of North First Street (**Figure 63**). Since August 2022, the buildings have been undergoing renovations.³⁹²

In January 2018, Google purchased three buildings (5079, 5087, and 5093 Disk Drive) with 564,000 square feet of industrial space and 65 loading docks.^{393,394} The buildings were constructed in 2015–16 as Phase One of the Midpoint@237 business park. The developer of that project was Trammell Crow Company, the architect was HPA, and the contractor was Lusardi Construction.³⁹⁵

In October 2018, Google purchased two office buildings at 4300 and 4400 North First Street a short distance south of the industrial buildings.³⁹⁶ The buildings were constructed in 2001 as the Cisco Systems campus.³⁹⁷

³⁸⁹ Eric Yunker (Remedial Project Manager, southern California Section, Superfund Division, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), “Memorandum: Five-Year Review for the South Bay Asbestos Superfund Site, San Jose, CA EPA ID# CAD980894885,” sent to Keith Takata (Director, Superfund Division), September 29, 2000, <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/HQ/178254.pdf>.

³⁹⁰ Katherine Conrad, “Two Sales in Santa Clara Show the Market is Still Hot,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 30, 2007, p. 4C.

³⁹¹ George Avalos, “North San José Sees Surge of Interest with Tivo Deal,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 24, 2018, p. 7C.

³⁹² George Avalos, “Google Starts Construction Work on Large Campus Emerging in San Jose,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 13, 2022, p. C8.

³⁹³ George Avalos, “Google Grabs North San Jose Properties Amid Major Expansion,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 30, 2018, Real Estate section.

³⁹⁴ “Midpoint@237,” *Miyamoto International*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://miyamotointernational.com/midpointat237/>.

³⁹⁵ “Midpoint@237,” *Trammell Crow Company*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.trammellcrow.com/en/projects/western/san-francisco/midpoint237>.

³⁹⁶ George Avalos, “Google Grabs North San Jose Buildings – Up to 2,000 Employees Could Work in Large Office Campus,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 1, 2018, p. 7C.

³⁹⁷ Tracey Kaplan and Matthai Chakko Kuruvila, “Cisco Suspends Building Frenzy – Fremont, Alviso Projects on Hold,” *San Jose Mercury*, April 19, 2001, p. 1C.

In May 2019, Google purchased three additional office buildings (4550 North First Street and 65 and 95 Nortech Parkway) located between the two earlier land purchases.³⁹⁸ The buildings were constructed as Phase Two of the Midpoint@237 business park that was originally marketed as “The Office” and later rebranded as I3@NorthFirst.³⁹⁹ The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver-certified Phase Two was named the 2016 Industrial Project of the Year by the Silicon Valley Business Journal.⁴⁰⁰

In January 2020, Google purchased a ninth building at 110 Nortech Parkway adjacent to its other properties.⁴⁰¹ The building was constructed in 1984–85 as part of the Nortech Center.⁴⁰²



This aerial view faces north. The nine Google-owned buildings are identified with the multicolored “G” logos.

SOURCE: *San Jose Mercury*, August 13, 2022, p. C8

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 63
Google Midpoint Campus

America Center

Built in two phases on the Marshall Landfill, the America Center business park is located along America Center Drive (the northerly extension of Great America Parkway) in Alviso (**Figure 64**).

The first phase in 2009 included construction of the two six-story office buildings at 6001 and 6201 America Center Drive (originally named Great America Center Drive) totaling 426,700

³⁹⁸ George Avalos, “Google Creates Megacampus of 1 Million Square Feet with New Purchase,” *San Jose Mercury*, May 18, 2019, p. 1B.

³⁹⁹ Jeff Fredericks, “Exclusive: North San Jose Office Project Near Google Gets a New Brand, Brokers in Hunt for Tenants,” *Silicon Valley Business Journal*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2018/05/08/n-san-jose-office-project-i3-north-first-midpoint.html>.

⁴⁰⁰ “Midpoint@237,” *Miyamoto International*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://miyamotointernational.com/midpointat237/>.

⁴⁰¹ George Avalos, “Google Starts Construction Work on Large Campus Emerging in San Jose,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 13, 2022, p. C8.

⁴⁰² “Building Permits,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 19, 1984, Extra 4 section, p. 3.

square feet. This was the original America Center project (also referred to as America Center West), and the developer was Legacy Partners.⁴⁰³ Current tenants include Flex, MetricStream, Glassbeam, and Polycom.

The second phase was developed by Steelwave and completed in 2018. It included two office buildings at 6220 and 6280 America Center Drive, a restaurant/fitness center building at 6250 America Center Drive, and a multi-story parking garage.⁴⁰⁴ Current tenants include Hewlett Packard and Bill.com.



This aerial view faces northwest. Phase One included the two buildings on the far left, and Phase Two included the three buildings in the right background. Note that the Aloft Santa Clara Hotel in the foreground was not built as part of the America West campus.

SOURCE: Connect CRE (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 64
America Center

Hotels

The Alviso neighborhood features four hotels built during the 21st century. These are Extended Stay America at 2131 Gold Street (2001), Aloft Santa Clara at 510 America Center Court (2015), Homewood Suites by Hilton at 4315 North First Street (2017), and Fairfield Inn and Suites at 656 America Center Court (2019).

⁴⁰³ Pete Carey, “Empty Office Buildings Dot Silicon Valley,” *San Jose Mercury*, August 20, 2009, n.p.

⁴⁰⁴ George Avalos, “Bill.com, Fresh from IPO, Will Shift Headquarters to San Jose,” *San Jose Mercury*, January 10, 2020, n.p.

Recreational Development

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

South Bay Yachting Association

The South Bay Yachting Association was founded in 1888 as a recreational and social club that organized races, regattas, and outings for its members and related clubs around San Francisco Bay. Its first officers were prominent San José architect Joseph O. McKee, Commodore; Dr. Hume A. Spencer, Vice Commodore; John E. Auzerais, Secretary; and S.E. Smith, Treasurer. Members initially met at various locations in San José, and the launching location was at the Port of Alviso. The club was rechristened as the South Bay Yacht Club in 1896.⁴⁰⁵

20th Century

Thanks in large part to its direct access to San Francisco Bay, Alviso has long been a destination for leisure seekers. Popular pastimes that continued into the 20th century included duck hunting, sailing, and fishing, and new forms of recreation attracted people from far and wide.

South Bay Yacht Club

The South Bay Yacht Club, which was founded in 1883 as the South Bay Yachting Association, historically used the Port of Alviso as its point of departure. Members constructed their clubhouse building in 1903 at the corner of North Taylor and Hope streets, a site that was immediately adjacent to the shoreline at that time (**Figure 65**). The clubhouse was dedicated on June 24, 1903, with a clam bake and barbeque. The club continued as a social and community organization, maintaining a small fleet of boats within a mooring basin on the Guadalupe River. Between 1930 and 1960, land throughout Santa Clara Valley dropped by up to 15 feet as a result of ground water depletion. This necessitated construction of levees along the waterways, including along the Guadalupe River. In 1969, the club abandoned the mooring basin and constructed docks with berthing slips accessible from shore.

Also during this time, the clubhouse was subject to frequent and occasionally severe floods. The most severe damage occurred in 1983 when the clubhouse flooded with nearly six feet of water. This caused severe damage to the flooring and foundation. Following the flood, the Santa Clara Valley Water District began construction of a new, much higher levee system. The building was relocated to its current site (southwest corner of Hope and Catherine streets) in conjunction with the levee project. It was rededicated in 1985 and continues to serve its membership and the community.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ “A Brief History of the South Bay Yacht Club,” *The South Bay Yacht Club*, January 3, 1996, <https://southbayyachtclub.com/history>.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.



SOURCE: History San José, History San José
Photographic Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 65
South Bay Yacht Club in Original Location in Alviso, ca.
1910

Racetracks

By the early 1930s, Alviso had gained a reputation as a city of vices, especially gambling. In 1933, developer Arthur Grey constructed the Alviso Greyhound Track on the site of the present-day San José Fire Department Station 25 (5125 Wilson Way) (**Figure 66**).⁴⁰⁷ The \$100,000 dog track was designed by Jerry Dawson of Berkeley, who was known as a designer of many race courses, and it was operated by the Alviso Kennel Club for the Alviso Greyhound Breeders' Association. Before it opened in May 1933, the 28-acre dog track was touted as "one of the finest in the country, with all the latest comforts and conveniences for patrons."⁴⁰⁸ The operation was short lived, and within months the promoters were reported to "have folded their tent and gone."⁴⁰⁹ The property (including the grandstands and track) was sold for a small fraction of the original cost.⁴¹⁰ In May 1934, the track was rechristened as the Alviso Speedway and was home to automobile and motorcycle races for two decades.⁴¹¹ In 1952, the track was demolished and replaced with a community of small rental homes known as O'Neill's Camp (see 20th Century Ethnic and Cultural Communities section above).

In 1955, a new Alviso Speedway with a banked dirt track and seating for 3,000 spectators opened on the north side of State Street between Essex Street and Pacific Avenue (**Figure 67**).⁴¹² The Alviso Speedway continued to operate until 1972,⁴¹³ and it was demolished soon after.

⁴⁰⁷ Archival research did not confirm the exact location of the dog track. A comparison of historic aerial photographs shows that it was located in the approximate location of the present-day fire station at 5125 Wilson Way.

⁴⁰⁸ "Dog Race Meet at Alviso to Open May 27," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 14, 1933, p. 4H.

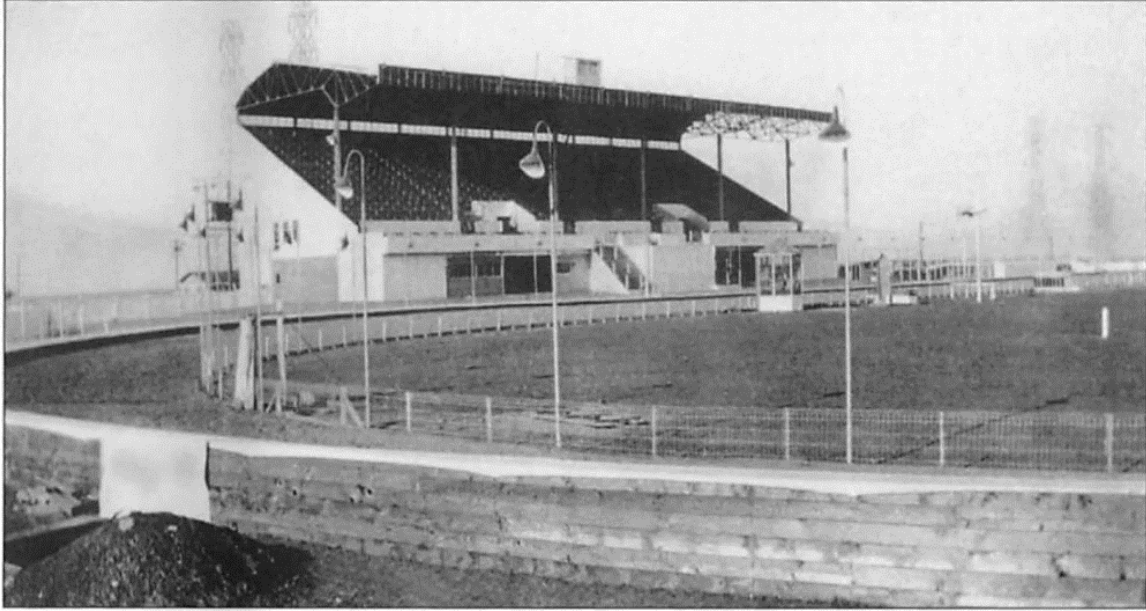
⁴⁰⁹ "Dog Track's Passing Causes No Mourning," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, September 21, 1933, p. 4.

⁴¹⁰ "Alviso Dog Track Is Sold for \$7400," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, June 8, 1935, p. 1.

⁴¹¹ Advertisement for Alviso Speedway, *Peninsula Times Tribune*, May 18, 1934, p. 8.

⁴¹² "20-Lap Event Is Scheduled at New Alviso Speedway," *Salinas Californian*, September 8, 1955, p. 24.

⁴¹³ "Weekend Sports," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 6, 1972, p. 42.



SOURCE: Alviso Library, reproduced in *Images of America: Alviso, San José* (2006)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 66
Undated Photograph of the Alviso Greyhound Track



Residences on the south side of State Street are visible in the background.

SOURCE: Historypin (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 67
“New” Alviso Speedway, ca. 1962

Alviso Marina

In 1964, residents of Santa Clara County voted in favor of a new public marina to be constructed in Alviso. The marina was sited at the southeast corner of Leslie Salt Company’s salt evaporation pond A12, where a nine-acre basin was dredged to a depth of seven feet at low tide and levees were built around it, creating an inlet from Alviso Slough (**Figure 68**). The marina was dedicated

on June 23, 1968, during a day of festivities and boating demonstrations. It featured 76 berths, two concrete boat launch ramps, a large parking lot, and public restrooms, and plans were announced to expand the facilities in phases over subsequent years (**Figure 69**).⁴¹⁴



The extent of salt evaporation pond A18 is shown at the center of both photographs. The marina was constructed in the southeast corner of the pond and is visible in the 1965 photograph.

SOURCE: UC Santa Barbara, FrameFinder, CAS-SCL_2-93 (left) and CAS-65-130_9-97 (right)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 68
Location of the Alviso Marina, 1963 (left) and 1965 (right)



This photograph faces south.

SOURCE: History San José, Leonard McKay Collection (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 69
Aerial View of the Alviso Marina, ca. 1966

⁴¹⁴ “County’s New Marina Dedication Sunday,” *Cambrian Weekly News*, June 19, 1968, p. 1.

Silt accumulated in the marina at a rate of two feet per year,⁴¹⁵ and by the close of 1971, “The siltation problem [had] become so severe...that the Alviso Harbor [was] on the verge of being rendered useless.”⁴¹⁶ In that state, boats could only pass through at high tide. Over subsequent years, the County of Santa Clara dredged the marina twice, but the problem reoccurred within months.⁴¹⁷ Dredging was extremely costly, and regular dredging of the Alviso Marina was determined by the County to be infeasible.

In 1980, the County commissioned a feasibility study by the renowned San José civil engineering and architecture firm Ruth and Going to identify solutions to the siltation problem that were within the County’s budget as well as alternative methods for operating the marina.⁴¹⁸ Among the recommendations were 1) a dry stack system to store small boats without masts out of the water, thereby eliminating the need to dredge the entire marina,⁴¹⁹ and 2) a marina with locks to control the level of the water for the storage of larger boats.⁴²⁰ Ultimately, none of the recommendations were implemented, and silt continued to accumulate.⁴²¹

The marina was finally abandoned by Santa Clara County in 1985, becoming vegetated with bulrush and trapping several boats in the mud.⁴²² Despite there no longer being access to the water, the County park continued to attract birders, plein air painters, and sunset gazers.⁴²³

Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

The San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge was originally established in 1972 through the efforts of local environmental activism and California Congressman Don Edwards. Proposed in the late 1960s as a 10,000-acre refuge, hunting preserve, and water and marshlands preserve,⁴²⁴ the acreage more than doubled over the course of four years to nearly 22,000 acres spread across four distinct areas or units (Fremont Unit, 5,520 acres; Mowry Slough Unit, 7,175 acres; Greco Island Unit, 5,587 acres; and Alviso Unit, 3,060 acres) (**Figure 70**).⁴²⁵ The \$20.3 million refuge received approval from the U.S. House of Representatives in February 1972, and the budget included \$9 million for acquisition of wetlands over a period of five years plus \$11.3 million for visitor centers, boardwalks, and other refuge programs.⁴²⁶ It was the nation’s first urban national wildlife refuge.

⁴¹⁵ Dillingham Associates, *Alviso Marina County Park Master Plan*, prepared for Santa Clara County Environmental Resources Agency and Department of Parks and Recreation, October 1997, p. 22.

⁴¹⁶ Tom Harris, “Silt Choking Off Alviso Harbor,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 7, 1971, p. 22.

⁴¹⁷ Ed Pope, “County Sees Little Hope for Alviso Marina,” *San Jose Mercury*, April 17, 1985, pp. 1B, 8B.

⁴¹⁸ Completed projects designed by Ruth and Going include the Santa Teresa Community Hospital (known today as the Kaiser San José Medical Center) and Santa Clara University’s Buck Shaw Stadium.

⁴¹⁹ Dillingham Associates, *Alviso Marina County Park Master Plan*, p. C-6.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, B-7.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, pp. 2, B-7.

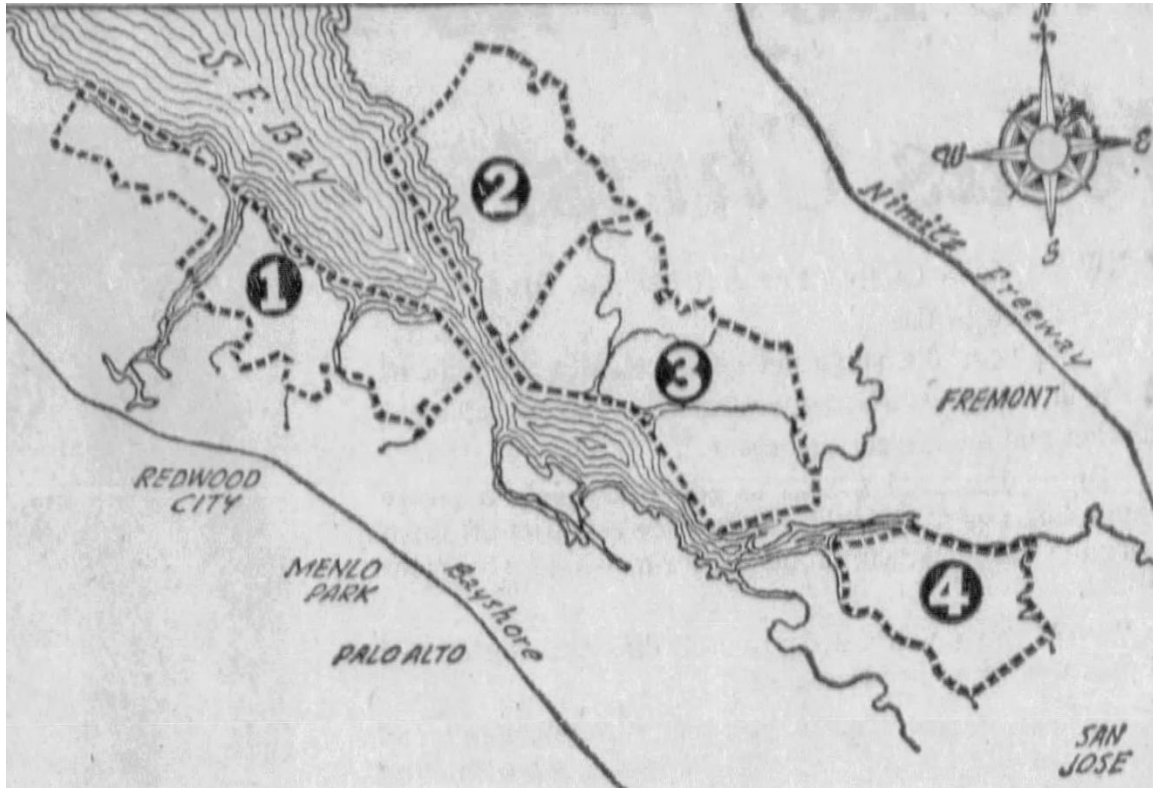
⁴²³ Mike Cassidy, “Boat Slip for Landlubbers – Marina Maintains Charm Without Water,” *San Jose Mercury*, November 10, 1992, p. 1B.

⁴²⁴ “South Bay Refuge Sought For Wildlife,” *Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer*, September 23, 1968, p. 1.

⁴²⁵ “S Bay Wildlife Refuge Supported,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1971, p. 38.

⁴²⁶ “House Oks Bill for SF Bay Wildlife Refuge,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 1972, p. 2.

Work began on the headquarters and interpretive center in Fremont in 1977, which included parking areas, access roads, trails, visitor context points, signage, and landscaping. S.J. Amoroso Construction Company of Foster City completed the work, with EDAW providing architectural and engineering services. Groundbreaking started at the same time in Alviso for a similar environmental education center (EEC) at the south end of the refuge,⁴²⁷ and the EEC was completed in 1979 (**Figure 71**).⁴²⁸ In 1995, the refuge was renamed in honor of Congressman Don Edwards who led the legislative charge in preserving the wetlands in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴²⁹



SOURCE: *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1971, p. 38

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 70
Map of Proposed Units of San Francisco Bay
National Wildlife Refuge, 1971

⁴²⁷ "Work Starts on Wildlife Refuge," *The Argus*, December 10, 1977, p 10.

⁴²⁸ Mary T. Fortney, "At Last Our Endangered Species Will Have a Place to Call Home," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, December 12, 1978, p 26.

⁴²⁹ "Refuge Named for Congressman," *Californian*, December 30, 1995, p 24.



SOURCE: Photo by Ronald Horii (external link)

Alviso Historic Context Statement

Figure 71
Environmental Education Center and Boardwalk at Don
Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge

21st Century

Alviso Marina County Park

The Alviso Marina was built by Santa Clara County and opened to the public in 1968. As described above under 20th Century Recreational Development, periodic dredges of Alviso Slough were very costly, and the marina could not feasibly be maintained. It was abandoned in the 1980s.

The county completed a \$3 million renovation of the facility in 2005 and constructed new levees, several miles of hiking trails around the adjacent salt ponds, picnic areas, public restrooms, interpretive signage, and a parking area (**Figure 72**).⁴³⁰ Portions of Alviso Slough were dredged over the next few years, and a new boat launch ramp, two piers, and additional parking were constructed in early 2010. The grand reopening of the 20.6-acre Alviso Marina County Park took place on June 5, 2010.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Paul Rogers, “Boating Access Closer to Reality,” *San Jose Mercury*, December 1, 2009, p. 1B.

⁴³¹ Steve Johnson, “Alviso Opening Launches ‘Beginning of a New Era’ – Public Finally Has Access to the Bay from San José,” *San Jose Mercury*, June 6, 2010, p. 1B.



SOURCE: Photo by Wanderenvy, distributed under a CC BY-SA 3.0 license (external link)

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Figure 72
Alviso Marina County Park, 2013

Topgolf

Alviso’s newest amenity is Topgolf, a recreational venue featuring a high-tech outdoor driving range, virtual golfing, event spaces, and a restaurant. Opened in 2021 between North First Street and the Guadalupe River, Topgolf San José is the first of the company’s locations in the Bay Area (**Figure 73**).⁴³²



SOURCE: Topgolf (external link)

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Figure 73
Topgolf San José

⁴³² “New Flagship Topgolf Venue to Open Doors in San Jose,” *Topgolf*, April 12, 2021, <https://press.topgolf.com/2021-04-12-New-Flagship-Topgolf-Venue-to-Open-Doors-in-San-Jose>.

Associated Property Types

Each of the six themes presented in this context represent types of development that characterize the Alviso neighborhood. The architecture associated with these themes varies depending on the period in which it was constructed. Generally, the Alviso neighborhood has evolved over three major periods of development that roughly follow the centuries in which they occurred. However, withing these three major periods, there are several sub-periods that should be considered when identifying potential historic resources within Alviso.

Mid- and Late 19th Century (1847-99)

The mid- and late 19th century is the best documented timeframe in the existing historical narratives of Alviso. It begins before California joined the United States in 1850, includes Alviso's original charter as a town (1856), and is most widely associated with the history of the Port of Alviso as a major transportation and commercial hub for Santa Clara County. It is followed by a period of economic stagnation as residents and companies contended with the rise of rail transportation and the decline of the port as a major commercial hub. During this period, port-related activities, such as warehousing, continued to partially buoy the local economy, but growth and development was limited. Development associated with this period is concentrated west of Gold Street and close to the original shoreline of San Francisco Bay, the Guadalupe River channel, and Alviso Slough.

20th Century

The architecture of Alviso in the 20th century is best understood within three distinct shifts in economic and civic development: the rise and decline of the Bayside Canning Company (1906-33), importance and decline of local agriculture (1933-68), and consolidation with the City of San José (1968-99).

Cannery Period (1906-33)

A second period of commercial growth and vitality occurred when the Bayside Canning Company was established in 1906. It spurred nearly a quarter century of vitality that utilized the port, attracted new residents, and supported the community of Alviso. Development associated with the cannery overlaps with the area associated with the Port of Alviso. Many of the buildings and structures associated with this period were moved elsewhere or removed completely. Those that remain in situ have been repurposed. The greatest concentration of buildings from this period is located around the intersection of Hope and Elizabeth streets.

Local Agriculture and Migrant Labor Camps (1933 – 1968)

While canning continued in Alviso for a short period after the Bayside Canning Company went into receivership, the failure of the company ushered in a long period of economic decline when local agriculture provided the most stable means of employment. During this period (1933 – 1968), the neighborhood demographics shifted from residents of European and Asian ancestry to those of Mexican ancestry. This shift was driven by development of open space around the salt marsh into a neighborhood of relocated homes and migrant labor camps. Development from this

period is primarily located east of Gold Street in the twelve blocks bounded by Gold and North First Streets, State Street, Spreckles Avenue, and Grand Boulevard.

Consolidation with San José (1968-99)

Consolidation with the City of San José coincided with a period of increased civic and social engagement within Alviso that was an extension of the broader Latino civil rights movements occurring throughout California and the United States. Direct familial and social connections between Alviso, the Community Service Organization (CSO), and Cesar Chavez fueled the rise of community-centered development. Combined with new investments by the City of San José in municipal services, this period is marked by investment in community-focused services, buildings, and infrastructure improvements. These largely occurred east of Gold Street and along the main east-west thoroughfare of North Taylor and North First streets.

21st Century

Since 2000, development within Alviso can be classified as either an extension of civic improvements begun after 1968, new multi-family residential construction, or commercial growth in the form of office parks. Residential construction after 2000 was concentrated along North First Street between Michigan Avenue and Trinity Park Drive. Office park construction has been located on the southern edges of the Alviso neighborhood on land that was historically used for fruit orchards. These large parcels are closer to the two State Route 237 interchanges that mark the entry points into Alviso: North First Street and Gold Street. Presently, visitors to Alviso must drive through these office parks to reach those portions of Alviso discussed in this context statement. Because this development will not reach the age threshold until 2045, identification of these properties is not included at this time.

Property Types by Theme

For each of the themes of this context, a brief description of the types of properties and their general location(s) are provided. Where a common form of construction or design may unify property types in a specific period, character-defining features are also discussed to aid in identification. Not every theme will have property types included in each time period.

Civic Improvements

Civic architecture is associated with the function of the town, and later the city, of Alviso. They include buildings and structures that may have been funded by taxes or community contributions, are focused on providing services to the community, and/or served as public amenities. Examples of the types of buildings and/or building uses that fall under this theme include but are not limited to:

- Town and/or city offices;
- Jails, courtrooms, and/or fire stations;
- Schools and educational facilities;
- Post offices;
- Libraries; and

- Community improvement and social service organizations.

It is important to recognize that Alviso has a history of using buildings for multiple functions, for repurposing buildings for new functions, and for unconventional locations based on the available building stock. It is possible that potential historic resources under the Civic Improvements theme were, or may currently be, used for other purposes. They generally will share no specific architectural characteristics that identify them as civic buildings until the late 20th century. At that point, the City of San José was more likely to apply design choices for its civic improvements that are like those found elsewhere in the city, and thus represent a more standardized approach to architecture.

Associated Buildings

- Constable office and jail (ca. 1865) – 1621 El Dorado Street
- Old City Hall and Alviso firehouse (1933) – 1060 North Taylor Street
- Perkins Store and post office (1949) – 1160 North Taylor Street
- Former Alviso School auxiliary classroom building and former CSO office (ca. 1929) – 1568 Liberty Street
- Alviso Health Center/Gardner Health and Dental Clinic (1972/1975) – 1621 Gold Street
- George Mayne Elementary School (1956) – 5030 North First Street

Transportation and Infrastructure

Transportation facilities played an important, if somewhat invisible, role in the development of Alviso. The Port of Alviso served as a commercial hub, but it also brought people into and out of the area in large numbers during the mid-19th century. When ferries were replaced by railroads, that infrastructure cut through the center of the community, generating safety and logistical problems. And most widely, the levees that circle Alviso have dramatically altered the appearance of the neighborhood. They also brought with them consequences when those levees failed, flooding the community multiple times. Examples of transportation and infrastructure buildings and structures include but are not limited to:

- Harbor and port buildings;
- Water channels and areas of dredging;
- Levees;
- Railroad tracks, rights-of-way, and buildings;
- Bridges, roads, and sidewalks (or absence of sidewalks).

Associated Buildings and Structures

- Railroad depot (ca. 1885) – 1303 El Dorado Street
- Salt ponds (as early as 1929) – along San Francisco Bay shoreline
- Guadalupe River Levee (as early as 1935) – east bank of Guadalupe River
- Former Milpitas-Alviso Road (now North First Street)

Ethnic and Cultural Communities

Settlement in Alviso included immigrants from a variety of countries and cultures who came to work in the canneries, the orchards, and drying sheds that were the economic driver of Santa Clara County in the late 19th and 20th centuries. They include Chinese and Japanese workers in the Bayside Canning Company facilities during the cannery period. During the mid-20th century, this shifted to Mexican and Central American immigrants. They settled alongside European immigrants from Portugal, Spain, Ireland, and other countries creating a multicultural community that was rare during this period. Examples of buildings and structures associated with ethnic and cultural communities include but are not limited to:

- Worker’s housing or the sites of workers housing (e.g., labor camps, company housing, etc.);
- Culturally specific facilities (e.g., Japanese schools, social clubs, etc.);
- Churches ;
- Businesses that were owned by members of specific communities or catered to specific communities; and
- Social and community improvement organizations.

Associated Buildings

- Bayside Canning Company buildings (1906-32) – concentrated on Hope and Elizabeth streets
- Former Alviso Community Center/CSO office (ca. 1929) – 1568 Liberty Street
- Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church (ca. 1951) – 1385 Michigan Avenue
- Lujan’s Market (ca. 1961) – 1557 Michigan Avenue
- Alviso Health Center/Gardner Health and Dental Clinic (1972/1975) – 1621 Gold Street

Residential Development

Residential development in Alviso occurred primarily during two periods: during the Port of Alviso heyday and after World War II. This corresponds to the first phase of commercial development when there was significant wealth and optimism associated with the tremendous importance that the town gained with its prime water access. After the port declined in importance, residential development was very slow and much more modest in scale. The affordability of land in the post-World War II period corresponded to a time when large infrastructure projects in the county (e.g., highways, airports, etc.) created a stock of free or low-cost houses available for relocation. The result was development of a new neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s comprised of early 20th-century building stock from other parts of San José and beyond. This created pockets of Alviso that appear older than they really are: a mid-20th-century neighborhood populated by early-20th-century homes. Examples of residential buildings include but are not limited to:

- One- and two-story, 19th-century homes west of Gold Street on large lots, often with accessory buildings; and
- One-story, early-20th-century homes east of Liberty Street on small lots, often heavily altered, that were moved to Alviso prior to 1968.

Associated Buildings

- Tilden/Laine Residence (1887) – 970 Elizabeth Street
- Trevey/Huxham Residence (1902) – 1413 El Dorado Street
- Wade Residence (ca. 1855) – 1641 El Dorado Street
- Unnamed residence (ca. 1870) - 1364 Michigan Avenue

Industrial and Commercial Development

Commercial development in Alviso has historically been associated with access to transportation or water. The Port of Alviso included warehouses for storage and piers for shipping. The canning and shell dredging companies needed ready access to the waterfront. Support businesses such as stores, restaurants, and shipping companies were located farther inland but were still within three blocks of water access. In the mid- and late 20th century, water access was less important than easy highway access as commercial development expanded to the south and east. Examples of industrial and commercial buildings and structures include but are not limited to:

- Warehouses;
- Hotels;
- Grocery and retail stores;
- Farm and agricultural support buildings; and
- Repair facilities – boatyards and garages.

Associated Buildings

- Union Warehouse (ca. 1858) – 1200 Hope Street
- Vahl’s Restaurant (ca. 1935) – 1513 El Dorado Street
- Perkins’ Store/Norma’s (1949) – 1160 Taylor Street
- Lujan’s Market (ca. 1961) – 1557 Michigan Avenue

Recreational Development

Easy access to water also influenced the development of recreational facilities in and around Alviso. The community of Drawbridge is well outside the study area for this project but is closely related to Alviso under this theme. Many Alviso residents used the bay access for recreational purposes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 20th century, Alviso was a popular destination for less reputable forms of entertainment such as gambling and racing. More recently, civic improvements have also contributed to increased recreational construction in the neighborhood. Examples of recreational buildings and structures include but are not limited to:

- Docks, piers, and structures that allow for water access;
- Social and/or sport clubs;
- Gambling halls and card rooms;
- Racetracks; and

- Public recreational fields and buildings.

Associated Buildings

- South Bay Yacht Club (1903) – 1491 Hope Street
- Chinese Casino (1917) – 990 North Taylor Street
- Alviso Swimming Pool (ca. late 1970s) – Wilson Way

Summary and Other Considerations

Because of the strong connection between Alviso and the Chinese and Mexican immigrant communities, identification of potential historic resources should also consider references to broader development trends in California. To aid with these efforts, the National Park Service and the California Office of Historic Preservation have prepared guidance on property types and areas of significance that may be helpful as the study of Alviso’s historic resources continues. These guidance documents include:

- *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (National Park Service)
- *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement* (Office of Historic Preservation)
- *American Latino Heritage Theme Study* (National Park Service)
- *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California, 1850-1970* (Office of Historic Preservation)

Several of these theme studies are described in more detail in the Alviso Neighborhood Survey Report.

Conclusion

This Alviso Neighborhood of San José Historic Context Statement establishes a framework of important historic themes and property types under which potentially significant buildings, structures, objects, districts, and landscapes can be identified and evaluated.

The community of Alviso has a rich and often contentious history. This historic context statement attempts to present the broad story—the good, the bad, and the ugly—of the city-turned-neighborhood, which can be characterized by cyclical booms and busts: the boom of the Port of Alviso followed by the bust of regional railroads bypassing the town; the boom of the promises of New Chicago as an industrial and commercial center followed by the bust of bankruptcy and deception; the boom of the Bayside Canning Company followed by the bust of the untimely death of its esteemed owner; the boom of assurances made by the City of San José surrounding consolidation followed by the bust of lengthy lawsuits, perceived inaction, and discriminatory practices. On multiple occasions, Alviso made national headlines for reasons both positive and negative. For example, the initial success of the Alviso Family Health Clinic earned widespread recognition as a model institution for other American communities, while periodic catastrophic

floods and infrastructural failures marked Alviso as the neglected hinterland of San José. Since the late 19th century, Alviso has been home to several ethnic and cultural communities whose influence can be observed throughout the neighborhood in the present day.

Alviso is resilient and tenacious, and its residents have overcome adversity in numerous forms since it was incorporated as a California city in 1852. While some outsiders may only see the vestiges of a once-prosperous city, Alvisans proudly embrace the neighborhood's storied past and advocate for its preservation.

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