



# ART Inspired Park

The Ohlone-speaking First People have lived in what we now call the San Francisco Bay Area for thousands of years. The bay and surrounding landscape provided ample fish, animals and plants for the thriving community. Both the bay and landscape played a key role in the daily lives of the First People: fish, plants, and animals formed the basis for food, shelter, and clothing.



Historic Territories of the Ohlone (Costanoan) Peoples. Map based on information from "A Gathering of Willows: The Native American Peoples of Central California," written by Linda Yonema

The Ohlone-speaking tribal groups were and are master basket weavers. Baskets carried everything from water to food harvests and were used for storage, cooking and ceremonial practices. Yet, few baskets crafted by the Ohlone-speaking tribal groups remain from life before the mission period. As part of a ritual practice, many baskets and other possessions were burned at the time of the owner's death. Some surviving baskets are exhibited in museums all around the world, including the Oakland Museum, the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, and the British Museum in London.



Historic Ohlone basket.



Conceptual park design, 2013.

The Paving pattern seen in this park was inspired by patterns found in both surviving and contemporary Ohlone basketry.

# WHO WAS Roberto Antonio Balermimo



Roberto Antonio Balermimo played a key role in San José's early development. Born circa 1782 to Ohlone-speaking parents, Balermimo grew up within Mission Santa Clara. On September 26, 1785, his father, Guascai, and mother, Sulum, had Roberto Antonio baptized at the mission. As time passed, Balermimo and his parents would cultivate the land and raise cattle, pigs, and sheep upon the Mission.

Then in 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain and acquired California. By 1836, Balermimo had built his adobe home and managed the land called Rancho de los Coches (Ranch of the Pigs). Already well developed, Balermimo petitioned to have his ranch, over 2,200 acres, officially granted to him by Mexico. In 1844, after 8 years, the Governor of California, Manuel Michelorena, finally granted Balermimo ownership of Rancho de los Coches as well as his emancipation. Much time has passed, but you can still visit his adobe home today at 770 Lincoln Avenue.

During Mexican rule over San José, First People like Balermimo had an opportunity to bridge ancestral traditions with new European-style farming and ranching

practices. However, tribal practices were often misunderstood. The traditional rancho landscape, that appeared to settlers as unkempt and overgrown, was instead artfully maintained by Balermimo to provide everything from construction materials for his home, to food for his family and farm animals. A visitor unfamiliar with Balermimo's ranching practices wrote:

*...willows so thick, and so thickly woven together with wild blackberry vines, wild roses and other thorny plants, that it appeared at first as if I never could get through. I could see nowhere but by looking straight up, for the willows were in places fifty feet high and a foot in diameter."*

- American settler William A. Manley

Despite Balermimo's success at managing his sizable ranch, he was no match for the highly successful and shrewd Spaniard Antonio Maria Suñol. Through business dealings, Balermimo became indebted to Suñol by an amount of \$500.00; this was

an enormous sum in 19th century San José. Balermimo's only option for repayment was to give Suñol his beloved Rancho de los Coches. Suñol was not heartless; he allowed Balermimo and his family to live on and manage the ranch for the remainder of their lives. Balermimo's son, Juan Crisostoma, was the last family member to live on the ranch. According to Suñol, Crisostoma passed in 1851. Suñol, another locally significant figure, is remembered in San José and has a street in his name, just blocks from Balermimo's adobe home.

Balermimo and his ancestors were from the Tamiyen triblet of the Ohlone-speaking First People. While there are no known descendants of Balermimo today, we do know about his parents, marriages, and children. At the Mission Santa Clara, Balermimo married a Tamiyen triblet member named Maria Estafana in 1801, and they had four children. Maria Estafana died only ten years later. Balermimo remarried in approximately 1815 to his second wife, Chebuunot. Together, Roberto Antonio and Chebuunot had seven children. The map above depicts the historic legacy of Balermimo's ranch lands, encompassing much of Western San José.