

THE HENSLEY HISTORIC DISTRICT

This chapter presents a historic overview of the Hensley Historic District, as well as a summary of the character-defining characteristics and design goals for infill construction. Designing a building to fit into the context of a neighborhood requires careful thought. First, it is important to realize that while the historic district conveys a certain sense of time and place associated with its history, it also remains dynamic, with alterations to existing structures and construction of new buildings occurring over time. It shall be noted that alterations to properties in the Hensley Historic District are subject to requirements set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 13.48 of the San Jose Municipal Code, and property owners may be required to obtain a Historic Preservation Permit.

Historic District Background

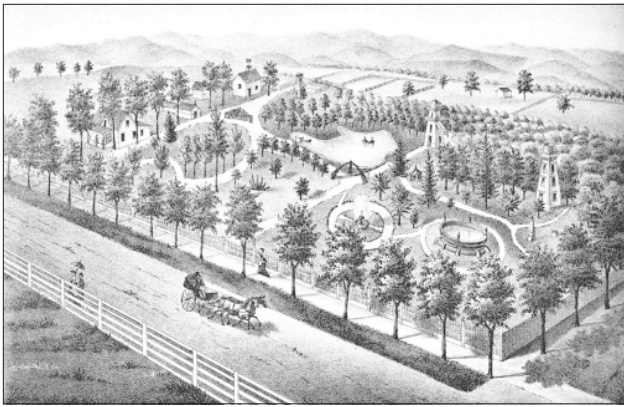
The Hensley Historic District (see map on page 96) was adopted as a local Historical Landmark District in 1990 by the San Jose City Council. The district contains over 225 buildings that contribute to its historic character, representing the largest concentration of Victorian era residences in greater San Jose. The boundaries of the designated district are generally North Second, East Empire, North Sixth, and East Julian Streets, with some residences on both sides of these perimeter streets included. The district also contains a number of other non-contributing buildings, which generally were constructed after World War I. They are considered non-contributing because they do not add to the sense of time and place of early San Jose, or have been so altered that the integrity of these structures to their original design has been lost. The period of significance for the establishment of the historic district is 1865-1918.

The area was first recognized for its significance in the 1970s when the Santa Clara County Historic Resources Commission surveyed the area and identified it as a district of historical value to the region. Through the efforts of the Hensley Residents Association, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The 1990 City of San Jose local landmark designation enlarged the area slightly by including an additional 24 properties. These properties are at the north and south ends of the National Register district, and were found to be

consistent with its period of significance and architectural style to warrant inclusion in the city's preservation planning program.

The namesakes of the district, Major Samuel J. and Mary Helen Hensley, were early San Jose residents of the American period, whose lives are interwoven with the origins of modern California. They established residency in 1853 on the east side of North First Street in the vicinity of present-day Ryland Mews, living in a two-story prefabricated house that Mary Helen's father, Elisha O. Crosby, had brought from the East Coast in 1851. Elisha came to California in 1848 during the Gold Rush, and was a member of the state constitutional convention in Monterey in 1849. He was instrumental in making California's first election a success. Crosby lived briefly in San Jose, and as an early State Senator authored California's common law statutes. Mary Helen met Samuel Hensley in 1850 when the California delegation had come East to lobby Congress for statehood, and her journey in 1850 to California via Panama marked the entry of California to the Union, for she carried the admission documents in her blue silk umbrella. This umbrella is now on display at the State Capitol in Sacramento as an artifact of an important event from our past.

Samuel Hensley was 26 when he came to California with the Chiles Party of 1843, working at Sutter's Fort until being swept up into the events of the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846. Colonel Fremont enlisted him in his battalion, and he was quickly promoted to Captain of



1876 Thompson & West Atlas, showing the Hensley estate, viewed from First Street.

the mounted rifleman. By the end of the war he had obtained the title of major, and by the time he married Mary Helen in April of 1851 he had already entered into a successful business career. He later devoted much of his energy to the California Steam Navigation Company and amassed a great fortune. His estate, once planned as the site of the state capitol, was bounded on the south by the present railroad right-of-way, and by First, Fourth, and Hensley Streets. It was landscaped in 1856 by James Lowe, and is avidly described in many histories of the era for its lush, enchanting setting. Hensley's health failed him prematurely however, and he died in 1866, leaving his widow with two children. Mary Helen lost the 1851 house to fire on November 26, 1870, and built a large southern style mansion to replace it. By 1890 she had moved to Montana with her daughter. The estate was subdivided in the 1880s and the house removed; its final disposition is not known.

The present Hensley Historic District contains the larger neighborhood around the Hensley estate, and developed slowly following California statehood. The original San Jose survey by Chester Lyman extended only to Julian Street. Although the gridiron of the city's topology was expanded northward to Rosa Street by 1850, this area, known as White's Addition, remained rural until the late 1860s. The historic photograph on this page shows the future district from the vantage point of the County Courthouse building just after it was completed in 1868. In the foreground is the San Jose Institute, located just south of Julian Street. The large house across Julian to the right was built about 1860 by Shakespearean actor James Stark, who, with his wife Sarah Kirby, were San Jose's earliest thespians. They sold the property to Sherman Otis Houghton and Eliza Poor Donner in 1865. Sherman and Eliza are both key figures in early California history. Sherman was in Stevenson's Regiment during the Mexican War. He would later find success as a lawyer and politician, and he was intimately involved with the expansion of the railroads in California. Eliza is the well-known survivor of the Donner Party tragedy who chronicled the early years of the state. The Houghtons replaced the Stark House in 1881; the landmark Houghton-Donner mansion was later moved to its present location at 156 East St. John Street in 1909.

To the right, outside of the picture, was the 1853 house of Andrew Jackson Grayson, the "Audubon of the West." Grayson purchased the southern portion of Peter Quivey's property. (Quivey had assembled one of the earliest prefab houses in California near Fourth and Washington Streets in the late 1840s.) Grayson had



1868 view of the district from the south. Julian Street is in the foreground. Courtesy of History San Jose.

been commissioned as a Lieutenant by Commodore Stockton and raised a company of mounted riflemen in the California campaign. In his “Bird’s Nest Cottage” on Julian he developed his talents as an ornithologist, documenting California’s birds in his own paintings. His house was later occupied by James Morrison, an early mayor of San Jose, who also acquired the property now occupied by the Mi Pueblo supermarket. The Morrison daughters relocated two large mansions into the district, one of them still existing on Julian between Third and Fourth Streets. The larger of the houses was demolished to make way for a Safeway in the 1950s.

By 1868, lots across from the Hensley estate on Fourth Street had begun to be developed. The future line of the Central Pacific Railroad was configured between the Hensley and Houghton properties, and by 1869 a “Y” at Third Street would connect the line southward down Fourth Street. Robert Beattie had acquired a portion of Quivey’s property, and James Stevenson had the blocks near Empire Street between Fourth and Sixth Streets. During the next decade these blocks, as well as those owned by James A. Phillips and architect Victor Hoffman at the east side of the district would be subdivided, populating the area with small Victorian residences, most of which still exist today. At the north end of Hoffman’s property William Dougherty acquired his home site in the early 1870s, building a large Italianate mansion that was demolished after it was damaged in the 1906 earthquake. Dougherty was known as “The Lumber King of Santa Clara Valley.” He owned most of San Lorenzo Canyon and founded Santa Clara Valley Mill & Lumber Co.

The area north of Empire within the district was owned and occupied by 1870 by, among others, Zachariah “Buffalo” Jones, an early San Jose pioneer who opened



1885 Bird’s Eye View of the Hensley estate and environs, viewed from the northwest. The row of trees on the left is Jackson Street, and the large cluster of vegetation in the center is the Belden Estate at First and Hobson Streets.

the first sawmill in the Santa Cruz Mountains just above Los Gatos. This area also has the oldest building in the area which is located on Empire Street between Third and Fourth, but the origins of this house are not presently known. Residing at the southern end of the district at Second and Julian Streets was the family of Christian Freyschlag, a native of Bavaria, who would later develop a planned community at Agnew Station. Freyschlag was a major vintner in the 1880s, owning Lone Hill Vineyard near Los Gatos. Their house can be seen on the 1868 photograph, but it was gone by the turn of the century.

In 1875, George Melville Bowman, who had owned property in the district as early as 1870, founded the Golden Gate Packing Company west of Fourth Street within the “Y” of the Central and Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-ways. Incorporated in 1877, by the mid-1880s the company employed more than 400 people during the canning season, with an average yearly production of almost two million cans of fruits and vegetables grown in the valley. Bowman was one of the founders of the Garden City National Bank, and was a president of the First National Bank of San Jose. Bowman’s plant manager, Elmer E. Chase, would also contribute significantly to the history of the city. In 1916, Chase was elected to the City Council, and would serve two terms as President (Mayor). Following Bowman’s death, Golden Gate was sold to Hunt Brothers in 1918. The following year Chase formed the Richmond Chase Company with Edmund Richmond. Richmond Chase would later eclipse and buy back the local Hunt operation, and would finally merge with California Cannery and Growers after 1950. During Chase’s years with Golden Gate, he lived near the plant on North Third Street. His house still exists in its original location. The cannery site is now occupied by a Salvation Army facility and the only



Circa 1900 postcard view of North Third Street.

reminder left of the bustling cannery is a row of Washington palms along the west side of Fourth Street, which graced the front facade of the cannery. The curved fence to the south of the site is a reminder of the early alignment of the railroad right-of-way that led to the line down Fourth Street.

Following the establishment of Golden Gate on Fourth Street, Houghton began to subdivide his estate lands south of the railroad line. This portion of the Hensley District now contains a mix of Italianate and Victorian houses constructed in the late 1870s to 1880s, the last parcels developed just after 1900. Larger homes began to appear in the area, some built for multifamily use. The largest of these remaining is the W. H. Green flats (an 1896 photograph can be seen below) located at the corner of Fourth and Julian Streets, which has undergone drastic exterior modifications.

With the subdivision of the Hensley estate in the 1880s came three rows of new homes lining North Second and Third Streets between the railroad right-of-way and Empire Street. This previously undeveloped area was fairly well filled in by the 1890s and attracted prominent local residents, including William Knox Beans, president of the Bank of San Jose; William Nathaniel Noble, businessman and rancher; Arabella



An 1896 photograph of the W. H. Green flats, still standing at Fourth and Julian Streets.

and Jared Wing, viticulturists; Judge Perley; George Hostetter, orchardist; and George Bragg, carriage hardware supplier. The Beans house also later was the home of Congressman Arthur Free, who is recognized for his work in making Moffett Field a Naval Air Station.

Portions of the Morrison property also developed late in the period of significance for the district, and a number of large residences remain from this period on the west side of North Fifth Street north of Julian Street. Prominent early residents on this block include John D. Crummey, founder of FMC, William Haydock, builder, and A. B. Knowles, a dairyman and grocer. Although the Hensley Historic District is well populated with early residences of well-known prominent personages of San Jose, the district is a mix of both large architecturally designed residences as well as small vernacular houses. There are stories about the many occupants of these houses that are not well documented in local history books, but the primary significance of the district is based on the diverse residential architecture that can still be found on the 17 city blocks that the district encompasses. The personal histories of the residents of this neighborhood continue to be researched and recorded, such as the recent enlightenment of the contributions of Dr. Herrold, a North Fifth Street resident who was an important innovator in the development of commercial radio transmission in the twentieth century.

The district has remained largely intact to its period of significance, although a number of non-residential uses have compromised the historic integrity of the area in the later part of the twentieth century. The construction of the El Dorado bakery plant in 1954 on North Fourth Street resulted in the removal of a number of earlier houses, as did the construction of the 1958 Bank of America Check Printing Plant across the street (now the Italian American Heritage Center). Expansion of the Golden State Dairy on the original Hensley grounds on First Street at mid-century also resulted in the loss of a number of early residences from the period of significance. The overall character of the district, however, has remained that of a late nineteenth century neighborhood, and in the context of greater San Jose, the concentration of distinguished residential architectural designs in the Hensley Historic District has been recognized, both nationally and locally, for its remarkable preservation of the historical fabric of early San Jose.

Architectural Styles

The following list represents the many different architectural styles, types and forms represented in the neighborhood. For more information regarding the development of or the character-defining features of these architectural styles, consult *Chapter 2: Architectural Resources*.

- Neoclassical
- Colonial Revival
- Dutch Colonial Revival
- Shingle
- Italianate
- Queen Anne
- Stick
- Mission Revival
- Prairie
- Bungalow

Summary of Key Characteristics

Key design characteristics of this historic district include the following:

- Relatively uniform alignments on a street
- Variety of alignments from street-to-street
- Front yards are primarily open and are landscaped with grass and other decorative plantings
- Accessory buildings
- Hardwood trees
- Stone retaining walls
- Variety of sidewalk treatments (some are “detached” from the street with a grassy strip and some are “attached” to the curb)
- Driveways to the side
- Varied materials (use of wood, brick, stone and stucco)
- Concentration of Victorian-era architecture
- Uniform building scale
- Steep pitched roofs
- Asymmetrical massing
- Arts and crafts details
- Detached garages
- Front porches
- Dormers



Views from around the Hensley Historic District.



Design Goals

The Hensley Historic District should continue to develop in a coordinated manner so that an overall sense of visual continuity is achieved. Preservation of the integrity of this area is a primary goal of the City.

The design goals for the Hensley Historic District are:

- Maintain and preserve the historic and architectural qualities of the district through review of rehabilitation, alteration and new construction.
- Guide new construction so that it is compatible with the scale, style and character of the district.
- Preserve the environmental setting of the district by encouraging the retention of open front yards or designing fences that are in character with the historic buildings in the district.
- Recognize the importance of the diverse characteristics of each individual architectural design, especially on the front elevations, in the district.
- Encourage restoration and rehabilitation efforts to replace incompatible and inappropriate architectural elements that were added during times of uninformed building practices in a historic district.



Views from around the Hensley Historic District.