Current Headlines in Evergreen

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The Village of Evergreen

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The story of Evergreen is a story of names—names of families who built their homes, planted orchards and gardens, drilled wells and raised their children on land known as Rancho Yerba Buena, a Mexican land grant.

As the land changed hands, some of the new land owners paid Antonio Chaboya and then paid as much as three times more to lawyers and land speculators. Yes, even then Evergreen was being developed and became a most desirable location for building and new businesses to locate.

Many of the original buildings and sites are still standing. Evergreen is a village that dates back 145 years. The map accompanying this story shows a few of the original building sites. We ask you to be considerate of all those kind people who allowed us to record their history. Please remember the residences and properties described are private.

It was many years ago when I began to collect and document the local history. At that time I was concerned that there was no mention of Evergreen history in any of the local archives. When I began to ask the community who and what was here, I was so surprised to find there were more direct descendants from the original families still in Evergreen than in any other community in the Valley.

Over the next months I hope to share with readers the stories recalled by those wonderful and generous families. I hope you file the map away for reference as we cover in more detail the history of the families mentioned in this article.

Evergreen’s first businesses

Before the days of mass production, mail-order parts, paved highways and automobiles, every small community had to be largely self-sufficient. The skills of the ironworker were much in demand. The village smithy was as essential to the community as the general store.

Here in a small barn, where the fires of the forge were kept hot, the tools of the demanding craft were brought to Evergreen. Perry Smith established Evergreen's first business—a blacksmith shop. This shop would later become Andy’s Evergreen Garage, currently Hinman's Garage.

On May 15, 1868, C.C. Smith and Francis "Joe" Smith opened the first general merchandise store and remained in business for 61 years near what today is San Felipe Road and Yerba Buena Avenue. In August of 1870, the legislature resolved that Evergreen should have a post office. F.J. Smith was the Postmaster and for 14 years he drove his wagon to San Jose and back with the mail for $12 per year.

Later in 1874, Francis "Joe" Smith built a winery next to the general store. Just southeast of the winery he built his home, which is now a San Jose landmark.

Francis’ brother, Charles Smith, built a residence in the village that greatly resembled the F. J. Smith home. Separated by a driveway, the homes were surrounded by white fences, eucalyptus, Italian Cypress and many fruit trees.

Frank McMurry established a saloon in 1869, and Stevens and Peppin opened a butcher shop in 1872.
Early performances

In earlier days the old school served as a backdrop for minstrel shows and dramas. With limited seating, crowds had to peek in through the windows to see the performances.

Soon it became apparent that Evergreen needed a real social hall. In 1866, the Evergreen Social Hall provided a stage complete with scenery built by the local residents. Audiences came by buggy and horseback from as far away as San Francisco and all around the Bay Area to attend plays.

The first Evergreen School was built as early as 1858 and the school district formed by 1866. The Matthews family donated land for the school building on the southwest corner of White and Aborn roads. Two newer schools would be built on that site in the next 98 years before Evergreen Elementary School would move to its current site on Fowler Road.

There are hundreds of stories to tell, photos to share and families to thank. I see boxes to open, files to revisit and hopefully I will not overlook any of the notes, tapes and records I have kept over the years. I can only ask that the reader enjoy these memories and perhaps consider sharing their own written history with their own family and friends.

We are all a part of living history. Share that story with a friend, neighbor, child and grandchild. Where we came from helps us all to know where we are going. Perhaps knowing the past will help us all on the way to a better tomorrow.

I would like to especially thank Evergreen Valley College's Library Director Vicki Atherton. With her support and assistance, The Evergreen Heritage collection is now in a permanent home and may be viewed by appointment.

Special acknowledgements go to the families and friends of Evergreen, including Pat Loomis, Clyde Arbuckle, Ralph Rambo, Glorie Anne LaFey, Jack Douglas, Richard Neiman and my husband, Vince, for putting up with stacks of Evergreen history boxes and files all these years.

The first driving map of Evergreen was originally published by the Evergreen Times in 1987.