

ALAMO Then and Now

As the twenty-first century begins, the community of Alamo can look back on a proud past. After the California Gold Rush, Alamo was the first permanent post office between Mission San Jose and Martinez .

The First People

People have lived in this area for over 5,000 years. The Tatcan Indians, a Bay Miwok tribe closely connected to the Saclans of Walnut Creek, lived in Alamo in the eighteenth century. After Mission San Jose was founded in 1797, its grazing area stretched throughout the San Ramon Valley.

A Mexican land grant, called the San Ramon Rancho, was deeded to Mariano Castro and his uncle Bartolo Pacheco in 1833. It covered today's Danville and Alamo. Castro owned the northern half which included Alamo.

In 1843 much of Alamo, Las Trampas and Tice Valley was granted to brothers Inocencio and Jose Romero and called Rancho El Sobrante de San Ramon. Because of missing title papers, the brothers lost their ranch in American courts in 1857.

An American Village

Pioneers Mary Ann and John Jones traveled through Alamo in 1847. She provides the earliest English description of the area in her diary. Her husband stopped the wagon, saying "Mary, look! Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" She wrote later:

On every side, the valley and surrounding hills were covered with thick, velvety clover, and with wild oats standing waist high, waving and rippling in the summer breeze, like the bosom of a lake.

The Jones family returned to Alamo in 1851, after California had become a state. He became the first postmaster in 1852 and she applied her considerable energies to schooling children and beginning a Cumberland Presbyterian church. Other early Alamo founders included David Glass, George Engelmeyer, Silas and Susanna Stone, Captain Wall, Joshua Bollinger and James Foster.



Mary Ann Smith Jones

The area was named Alamo which means poplar or cottonwood tree in Spanish. Because of its location and fine weather, Alamo grew early. An important road from the redwoods near Moraga ran through Tice Valley to Alamo. It provided redwood for the building materials which Americans preferred over the adobe brick homes Mexicans had used..

Pioneer Names on Alamo Landmarks

Stone Valley Road is named for the Stone family. In 1853 Silas and Susanna Stone and their family arrived in Alamo. Eventually over 1,000 acres in Alamo belonged to Stone family members.

Rancho Romero School takes its name from the Romero brothers who once had a Mexican grant for land in Alamo and Tice Valley.

Miranda Road gets its name from the Miranda family, Mexican Californians who lived here before and after the Gold Rush.

Hemme Avenue reflects the Hemme family ranch just south of the village of Alamo. August Hemme was an innovative and prosperous rancher who took the lead in bringing the San Ramon Branch Line of the Southern Pacific to the valley.

The Hemme, Bollinger, Jones and Stone ranches began by grazing cattle and raising wheat, hay and other grains. In 1891 the local train station

was placed on the Hemme Ranch near today's Hemme Avenue; later it was re-named the Alamo station.



Alamo Freight Station

Eventually orchards and vineyards spread across the area. Almonds, walnuts, all kinds of fruits and grapes thrived in the mild climate. Alamo pioneer Myron Hall in 1873 grafted Persian cuttings to native walnut trees and helped start the prosperous walnut industry in Contra Costa County. His “mother tree” was tended for over 100 years.

The Alamo post office is the oldest continuously run office in the valley. It was always an important community gathering place. According to longtime Postmistress Bertha Linhares, when the mail was expected the men

sat in the post office-store in the winter ... the women went into our sitting room and visited with my mother ... We always heard all the news and troubles of the Alamo residents.

Her father, brother and sister were also postmasters from 1905 to 1960.

Alamo in Modern Times

During World War II an Alamo air watch tower was built by the community. People volunteered, looking for Japanese war planes around the clock from 1942 to 1945. San Ramon Valley's population totaled 2,126 at that time.



Alamo Grammar School

The Alamo Improvement Association (AIA) began in 1953. For 60 years its purpose has been: to advance and improve the welfare of properties in Alamo and to preserve the established character of Alamo as an agricultural and semi-rural residential area.

After the war hundreds, then thousands, of new people arrived. Round Hill Country Club opened in 1960 on land which formerly belonged to the Mott sisters and Grover Squire. The freeway was completed from Walnut Creek through Alamo in 1964.



Rapid valley growth fueled controversies, some of which focused on the liberal philosophy of a new Superintendent of Schools in the sixties. Debates about the pace of development led to several votes on cityhood, spearheaded by residents who wanted more local control. Each lost in Alamo. An Alamo-Danville incorporation election in 1964 lost 2,086 to 1,958, with “loss of identity for Alamo” the main concern. A more recent Alamo-only incorporation effort in 2009 failed by a large margin.

Today Alamo is an enclave of green with many one-half acre lot homes between Walnut Creek and Danville. Its population in 2010 was 14,750. People enjoy several parks in the area including Livorna Park, Hap Magee Ranch Park, Las Trampas Regional Wilderness and the Iron Horse Regional Trail. Alamo is governed by the County Board of Supervisors and an appointed Municipal Area Council which advises the Supervisor on police, planning and park issues.

Alamo residents take pride in the same natural beauty which appealed to the pioneers over 150 years ago.

Firsts in Alamo {in a box}

Week-long religious revival meetings were held at the Alamo-Danville border each fall during the 1850s. Several hundred people came from long distances, camped and heard four or five ministers preach several times a day. Baptisms were performed in San Ramon Creek.

The Union Academy, the first high school in the Valley, was located on the Alamo-Danville border from 1859 to 1868. Its program, based on San Francisco's curriculum, included basic education, foreign languages and calisthenics.

The first newspaper was the Pacific Cumberland Presbyter published in 1861. This paper provided news and uplifting moral messages and was published in Alamo (perhaps at the Union Academy) by T. M. Johnston for several years.

The Alamo Masonic Lodge No. 122 F. & A.M. was founded in January of 1858 and met upstairs in the brick Engelmeyer store. After the huge 1868 earthquake, the Lodge moved to Danville and then Walnut Creek.

The Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District runs the Alamo Cemetery at El Portal. The first recorded burial took place in 1856.

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