

San Lorenzo Business

Four Corners

The original town of San Lorenzo was at Hesperian (then called Telegraph) and Lewelling (then called Main). This intersection was called "The Four Corners." According to the 1878 Atlas of Alameda County: "At San Lorenzo there is a railroad station, two hotels, post-office, store, a few shops, excellent school, and a neat church, in which are held union services."

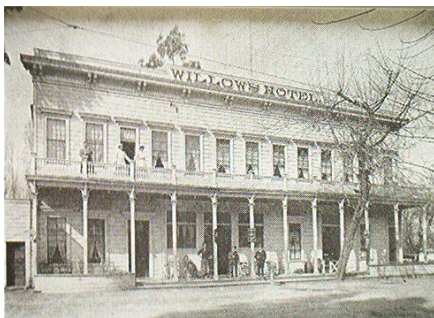


Shiman's Store

John L. Shiman opened the first store in San Lorenzo in 1853. It was situated along the San Lorenzo Creek. Shiman and most of the businesses in San Lorenzo served the local farmers. Farmers only got paid once a year when they harvested their crops. So businesses let farmers charge their purchases all year then pay them off when the crop money came in. All the rest of the year, farmers would keep their debt down by trading eggs and butter for goods. Shopkeepers had to be able to run their businesses with customers who only paid once a year.

The Village Blacksmith

A blacksmith was essential to the community because he didn't just shoe horses. The smith repaired and made almost anything metal - wagon, harness buckles, plow and other farm equipment. The first business in the village of San Lorenzo was Boyle's blacksmith shop, built in 1853. Boyle died after a few years and his shop was taken over by Henry Smyth, then by Smith.



Willows Hotel, 1863

The trip from San Jose to Oakland was slow enough that people often wanted to stop overnight. The Willows Hotel was run by Ezra Livingston to accommodate travelers along this dusty route.

San Lorenzo House

A second hotel, called the San Lorenzo House, was located at Lewelling and Hesperian. The hotel was a stagecoach stop, and mail was left there for local residents. The first San Lorenzo Postmaster was hotel owner Albert E. Crane.

The 20th Century



David Bohannon and San Lorenzo Village

The man who developed San Lorenzo Village became a celebrity within the property development community. His "California Method" of assembly line-style home construction was written about in many building industry publications because of its remarkable results: 1,500 San Lorenzo houses were built in 500 days. *Colliers* magazine noted that "for their wartime \$6,000, villagers got a package of house, a shiny new and accessible shopping center, a fine restaurant, movie palace and a round of activities in a social center supplied by the builder." For a "minimum wartime house," it had some unusual luxury touches: a fireplace, tile bathroom floors, linoleum floor in the kitchen and breakfast alcove, and cedar shingles.

Shopping in San Lorenzo Village

When David Bohannon planned the community of San Lorenzo Village, he included a downtown shopping area. Bohannon development retained ownership of the land, and leased out spaces for stores. Since San Lorenzo Village was surrounded by farmland, the downtown area had to provide every type of store and service the new residents could want.

Mervyn's Stores Start in San Lorenzo

Mervin Morris opened his first store in San Lorenzo in 1948. It was located at 341 Paseo Grande, although within a few years he moved to a larger store across the street. By 1960 the store had been expanded 13 times. Over time, more stores were built around the Bay Area, and San Lorenzo served as the distribution center. The Village Shopping Center formed the heart of a new residential area developed by the David D. Bohannon Corporation. Because he controlled the entire center, Bohannon played a vital role in the growth of the first Mervyn's. San Lorenzo residents were, for the most part, blue-collar workers and World War II veterans with young families. Most of them had just purchased their first homes. They wanted value from the merchandise they bought.

Mervin explained in his autobiography *Mervyn's with a "Y"* how his store came to have its unusual name. He had used his first name for his store to distinguish it from his father's Morris Department Store. "I had hired architect Herman Kanner to design the storefront. After reviewing his first sketch, I was surprised to find my name spelled with a "y." Kanner, however, explained that the "y" gave the name a more aesthetically pleasing appearance."

San Lorenzo Homes and Neighborhoods

Squattersville 1847-1854

When California first became a state in 1850, the United States government allowed people to live on unclaimed land – to "squat" on it. According to the law, anyone who improved the property could claim it as his own. Large sections of land throughout central California were available to squatters. But in San Lorenzo, the land was not open – it belonged to the Mexican landowners Francisco Soto or Jose Estudillo who owned large ranchos.

Yet San Lorenzo had so many squatters that it gained the nickname "Squattersville." The owners of the land had to spend years in court before they could finally force these newcomers to either move or buy the land

Four Corners

The intersection of the streets we now call Lewelling and Hesperian was the original center of San Lorenzo. If you go behind the shopping center at that corner, you will see the original homes that made up the community of San Lorenzo on Usher, Tracy, and Sycamore Streets.

Farm Houses

Many of the early settlers and squatters who came to San Lorenzo built small homes on their farm land. These homes were often miles from town, and were isolated from each other. Elise Bockman LaFleur remembers her grandfather Bockman's home: "Oh, it was a marvelous place for a city child to spend a summer. We lived in San Francisco, but I spent part of each summer there. ...There were walnut trees and wisteria vines, and I remember a huge magnolia tree in back of the house. I was always outside playing."
Brightside 1979

Heide House

One historic home still standing today is the Heide house. It was originally a farm house, so it was not located in town. This home has been restored and is now the headquarters for Village Realty at 1048 Grant Avenue. If you drive by, try to imagine when it was a farm house surrounded by acres of open fields.

San Lorenzo Mansions

The 1878 Atlas of Alameda County noted that in San Lorenzo some "residences, grounds, orchards, and gardens indicate a class of inhabitants that has profited by the natural wealth to make luxuriant and comfortable homes."

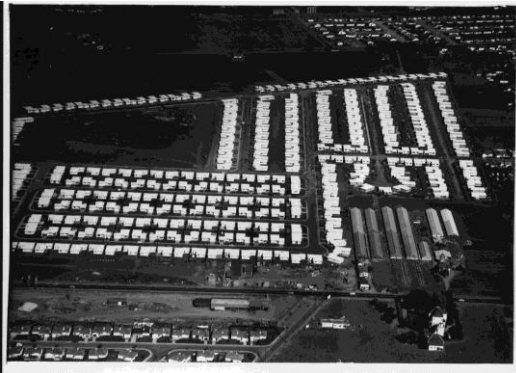
San Lorenzo had 11 mansions: Burr, Hathaway, King, Lewelling, Marlin (3), McConaghy, Meek, Roberts, Smyth, some of these people made their money by establishing orchards on the rich soil. Roberts established a landing along the bay and profited from transporting the fruit from the orchards to San Francisco. The Burr, McConaghy, Meek and Roberts homes are still standing. McConaghy house on Hesperian is open to the public.

Marlin Family

John and Eliza Marlin traveled by ship from Pennsylvania to Oregon, crossing the Isthmus of Panama before the canal was built. In 1852 they moved to "Squattersville." They raised fruits and vegetables, and continued to purchase more land until they had built a small fortune.

One of the Marlin daughters - Josephine Marlin Tychson - moved to Napa Valley and, after her husband's death, became the first woman to run a winery on her own. It is still in existence today as the Freemark Abbey Winery.

The 20th Century



San Lorenzo Village

World War II brought many jobs to California. People moved here from all over the United States to work in shipyards and other war production sites in the region. There were not enough homes and apartments for all these people. Since the factories were open 24 hours a day, sometimes workers on different shifts would rent one room and sleep on the bed in shifts.

David D. Bohannon worked with the U.S. government to create a solution to this problem. He devised a way to use factory methods to build homes quickly and inexpensively. His pre-cutting technique called "California method" involved setting up a factory on the construction site to cut lumber and assemble it into wall frames. These walls were then moved to each home site, ready to go up. After two small projects in Hillsdale and Sunnyvale, Bohannon was ready to create an entire community.

San Lorenzo Village was one of the nations' first planned communities. David Bohannon not only decided where the streets would go, but left spaces for schools, parks, stores, and a community center.

Pre-cutting techniques perfected by David Bohannon were adapted by developers all over the U.S. The most famous housing tract was Levittown, built 5 years after San Lorenzo Village.

Via

Do you live on a street whose name starts with "Via"? If so, you live in Bohannon's San Lorenzo Village. "Via" means Way or Street in Spanish. Many of the streets are named after women, such as Via Julia, Via Annette.

San Lorenzo Village Homes Association

Purchasers of homes in San Lorenzo Village had to agree to abide by rules created by the developer. Most of these rules were designed to maintain the value of the community by not allowing people to let their property become run-down. These covenants are similar to the rules often enforced by condominium homeowner associations today.

However, the original covenants also included restrictions on the race of acceptable buyers. These restrictions are still on the deeds for all property in the area, although they are no longer legally enforceable.

Living in San Lorenzo

The Squatters Organize

In the early days of California statehood, people claimed land simply by living on it. But in San Lorenzo the land had already been claimed by Mexican landowners. Some of the newcomers thought they had a legal right to squat on this land. In 1853, a group of them formed the "Pre-emptioners League" of "settlers upon what are supposed to be the public lands belonging to the United States." The leader of these squatters was Jacob Harlan, who had been a scout with General Fremont. He wrote a book about his experiences called *California '46-48*. (Today's Harlan Street is named after Jacob Harlan.)

The legal owners of the land in San Lorenzo had to spend years in court before they could finally force these newcomers to either move or buy the land.

Delivering Mail to the Four Corners Area

San Lorenzo's first Post Office was dedicated April 4, 1854. It was located in the San Lorenzo House (hotel), and owner Albert E. Crane was also the postmaster. He had to select a name for the Post Office, as "Squattersville" didn't seem like a good permanent name. The town could have been called "Crane's" since it was in his hotel, but Albert Crane was more modest than William Hayward, and the name of the old Mexican rancho was selected: "San Lorenzo."

The mail was received in Shiman's store starting in 1859. Residents had to come to the Post Office to pick up their mail until 1904 when Joe Correa began to deliver mail to homes. He used a wagon pulled by a horse named "Babe." Joe replaced Babe with the area's first car in 1918. He continued to be San Lorenzo's letter carrier until he retired in 1934.



Village Post Office

The first free-standing San Lorenzo post office opened in 1893. The building had previously been a barber shop, and was located on Lewelling Boulevard and Usher Street. Postmaster Gertrude Mooney and her assistant Mary Videll were in charge when the first Bohannon homes opened. Suddenly 1,325 new families needed mail service and the two women worked from six in the morning 'til midnight, seven days a week, in cramped and drafty

quarters. Streets have been named after both of these ladies in honor of their heroic efforts.

Earning a Living

Before the Second World War, most of the people who lived in San Lorenzo were farmers or worked on farms. New immigrants to the area worked as field hands, including a large number of Chinese who came here after the completion of the railroad in 1869. Those who could save money hoped to own their own small farm. A few successful land owners were able to make a small fortune from their acres and acres of land.

The large number of farms and farm workers affected other businesses in the area. Farmers were only paid once a year when their crops were harvested. They had to charge their purchases at local stores all year, then the pay bills once they received payment for their crops.

Orchards

Do you have a fruit tree in your yard? You may have one of the few artifacts of San Lorenzo's orchard era. Centennial Yearbook of Alameda County (1876) said: "San Lorenzo is a place of about 250 inhabitants, and one of the most beautiful horticultural villages anywhere to be found. It is a mass of orchards and gardens, with fine roads and good drives."

Vegetable Farms

The San Lorenzo area was famous for rhubarb and tomatoes. The ease of shipping vegetables by refrigerated rail car created a national demand for California vegetables as early as 1912. The first rhubarb of the season to find its way to east coast stores often came from San Lorenzo farms. The Nicoletti family sold some of their crops at a stand immediately in front of their house on Washington Avenue.

Fruit Dryer

It seemed logical for fruit growers in San Lorenzo to want to process their crops so they could sell them for a higher profit. They had been drying their own fruit by laying it out in fields. But in the 1870s, they tried something new. According to Centennial Yearbook of Alameda County 1876: "A few years [ago] a number of the fruit-growers formed a joint stock company and established the first Alden process fruit-drying establishment on the coast. For some cause, or perhaps a combination of causes, and although Chinese cheap labor was employed, the enterprise has not proved a success. The factory is in San Lorenzo." The fruit drying factory failed, but the community gained in the long run. The building became the Village Hall which was the social center of town for many years to come.

Nurseries and Greenhouses

In the early days of San Lorenzo, there were many nurseries and greenhouses on Lewelling, Grant and Ashland Avenues. According to the Centennial Yearbook of Alameda County (1876): "One of the foremost nurseries in the state is that of Eli Lewelling, at San Lorenzo." The family was from Wales, and originally spelled their name Llewellyn, but they soon "Americanized" it to Lewelling.

Japanese Nurseries

A wave of Japanese immigrants flowed to the East Bay in the early years of the twentieth century. The East Bay Flower Growers Association members were mainly Japanese. Families worked hard to establish greenhouses and raise flowers, along with specialty crops such as strawberries. Hot house roses and carnations were shipped via refrigerated cars to Los Angeles and New York. The first Japanese immigrants found work as:

- Cannery Foreman
- Tomato and Cucumber Farmer
- Berry Farmer
- Strawberry Farmer (8 families)
- Cucumber, Tomato, Pea, and

- Rhubarb Farmer
- Nursery Worker
- Nursery/Roses Worker

But the Japanese immigrants were not often welcomed by European immigrants. Laws were established that prevented Japanese people from becoming citizens or owning land. They had to rent land to farm. The last of the laws specifically limiting the rights of Asians was not repealed until 1965.

World War II brought sad years for Japanese residents of the United States. According to San Lorenzo historian Doris Marciel: "When the United States entered World War II after the bombing [by Japan] of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese were forced to leave their places and go into internment camps. Some of the farms went to ruin. After the war, many of the Japanese returned to re-establish farms and nurseries. After over 60 years of raising flowers in their nursery on Ashland Avenue, the Okada family sold its nursery. Because of the housing developments around the property, the agricultural zoning was changed requiring them to pay more taxes for the land. Also, flowers are shipped in from other areas at a lower cost."

Shipping

The most efficient way to get to San Francisco to sell crops was to take a boat from Robert's Landing. This landing at the mouth of the San Lorenzo Creek was originally established by Robert Thompson in 1850. William Roberts bought him out just a few months later. Besides shipping, the landing also served as a base for fishing boats and oyster hunters.

Manufacturing

In 1878 the only manufacturing jobs in San Lorenzo were at the blacksmith shop of Henry Smyth. According to the Historical Atlas of 1878: "Henry Smyth, who had been employed by Boyle and started the first forge-fire in San Lorenzo, succeeded to his business, which has grown into an establishment for repairing and manufacturing farm machinery, employing from fifteen to twenty men."

Cannery Work

California Packing Co. provided seasonal work at a facility in San Lorenzo in the early 1900s. It operated as Del Monte Plant Number 9. The large cannery opened with the asparagus season in early spring and ended in the fall with the tomato crop. Because many of the workers were women, the cannery operated a daycare center as early as 1919. The facility was located on Hesperian where the Highway 238 interchange is now.



21st Century Jobs

Today most jobs in San Lorenzo are retail. There is some light industry on Meekland Avenue. San Lorenzo was designed to be a "bedroom community" with residents commuting to work other places. That plan has worked, and today the majority of San Lorenzo residents commute to work.

San Lorenzo Schools



San Lorenzo Grammar School

The first school building in San Lorenzo was constructed in 1859. Prior to that classes had been held in a portable room built on a wagon. The mobile classroom went back and forth between San Lorenzo and Hayward. The new school was near the "Four Corners" where all the local businesses were located. By 1902 a larger building was needed, so a two-story wood building was constructed on the same site. When an arsonist burned down the wood building, it was replaced with a brick

structure. That building was in use until 1952, when it was closed because it was not earthquake safe. Now the site of that school is the home of the school district office at College and Usher.

Population Boom Brings More Students

When some of the orchards were turned into housing tracts in the 1910s and 1920s, more schools were needed. Ashland Elementary School was built in 1923 and Sunset Elementary School in 1926.

San Lorenzo Library

The San Lorenzo library was the first official branch of the Alameda County library system. It was established in 1910. The first San Lorenzo library was in the Village Hall. It then moved to its own building at Hesperian and Sycamore around 1930. A new library building was constructed around 1945 next to the firehouse on Paseo Grande. A few years later the building was bought by a church and moved to Hacienda & Via Toledo. The current library is behind the Village Association building.



San Lorenzo High

San Lorenzo students had to travel to Hayward to go to High School until the 1950s. San Lorenzo High School had its ground breaking in 1950 and opened for classes in 1952. The first class to complete all four years at San Lorenzo High was the class of 1956. The school was originally part of the Hayward Union High District.

Public Services in San Lorenzo

Village Hall

For residents of early San Lorenzo the place to go for fun was the Village Hall on the corner of Lewelling Boulevard and Usher Street. The auditorium in the hall hosted travelling vaudeville shows. Dances were held in the hall. It was also used by local clubs, such as Woodmen of the World and Ladies Aid, for meetings and socials. The building was originally constructed for use as a fruit dryer, but that business failed. It was then adapted to use as a community center. The building remained standing until 1953, but its heyday as a community center was 1894-1924.



The Pavilion at San Lorenzo Grove

When San Lorenzo Grove opened in 1893, the *Hayward Journal* called it the "Picnic Paradise of California." The Grove featured picnic grounds, ball fields, an outdoor bandstand, and the oak grove for which it was named. The Grove was located at Tracy and Lewelling, a few blocks from the Oakland-San Leandro-Hayward Electric Trolley Line which ran along East 14th Street. Oakland residents would take the trolley down to San Lorenzo to spend a relaxing day in the country. Or they would stay in one of the hotels in San Lorenzo for an extended vacation. In 1895, the Grove was purchased by the trolley company, which then extended the trolley line all the way to the front gates of the Grove. They also built the dance pavilion. Business slowed down in the 1920s. The trolley company sold the Grove to M.S. Rodgers, but he had to close it in 1926. Rodgers used lumber from the dance pavilion to build a house for his daughter, Mary Videll. The home is still standing on the corner of Tracy Street and Lewelling Boulevard.

St. John's Church

The cornerstone was laid for St. John's Catholic Church in 1897, and construction was completed in 1901. It was originally a mission church, which meant that it did not have a regular priest of its own. Visiting priests came on Sundays to hold mass. St. John's became a parish church in 1925. This photo was taken around 1902. The people are (left to right) Mary Ellen (Faria) Silva with her bicycle, Mr. and Mrs. Enos Stanton at the gate, and Mr. Sampson, a carpenter who is believed to have built the church.

San Lorenzo Creek

The creek was important to the early development of San Lorenzo. It provided fresh water for horses and people at the stage stop. Captain Roberts was able to sail boats across the bay from the mouth of the creek. Before storm drains were built, San Lorenzo Creek used to flood regularly. There are newspaper accounts of a flood which peaked on January 23, 1862, when - following an inch of rainfall in 40 minutes - the water in the creek rose 7 feet, 2 inches in 58 minutes, washed two slaughterhouses downstream and then overflowed its banks and inundated the surrounding farmland.



Lorenzo Theater

No town in the 1940s was complete without its own movie palace. The Lorenzo served the community of San Lorenzo starting in 1947. The interior was painted with beautiful murals, which are still there. This theater is on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Although it is still standing on Hesperian Boulevard, its future is in question.

Oakland Speedway

Even though it was named "Oakland Speedway" the auto race track was located in San Lorenzo at the corner of Hesperian Boulevard and E. 14th Street.

Village Recreation

When San Lorenzo Village was planned, Bohannon left spaces among the houses for parks. Tennis courts, playgrounds, and a library were built in 1951 on land donated by the developer. The playground equipment pictured above was purchased in 1952. The San Lorenzo Village Community Center was used for parties sponsored by the Village Association.

Little League Ball Park

The San Lorenzo Village Homes Association Board of Directors bought land on Grant Ave for a park. In 1958 the land was leased to the San Lorenzo Little League "whose volunteers built the diamonds, fences, restrooms, and nursed the grass fields before opening day 1959. The rent: \$1.00 a year, an arrangement that lasted some twenty years."

Clubs in San Lorenzo

Americans joined clubs after World War II, and San Lorenzans were no exception. A Boy's Club started in 1953, and soon had 350 members. The Earl Bowers Memorial Scout Cabin was dedicated 1952. At first it was used by Boy and Girl Scouts, and then the Girl Scouts got their own building, the Ophelia Bohannon building in 1954.

San Lorenzo Transportation

Street Cars and Trolleys

The first trolley in town was powered by a large horse. It traveled down the streets along its own rail track. The horse-drawn trolley was removed in 1908. An electric trolley replaced the horse-drawn. According to Dorothy Gansberger, retired Principal of Village School: "When the [electric] trolley cars first operated in these rural area the farmer's horses became very frightened at this new means of transportation. They would run away, many times overturning the buggies and spilling out the occupants. Country people were very much upset and did not welcome these new contraptions. There were so many accidents with runaway teams, injuring people and animals and breaking harness and wheels that the county court calendars were crowded with damage suits against the Traction Company" [which owned the trolley].

Railroad Arrives

A train station along the Southern Pacific line allowed farmers near San Lorenzo to get their crops to market much faster and easier. It also made it possible for people to travel a longer distance in a single day.

Automobile Age

By the 1910s automobiles were common in the East Bay. But roads were still just dirt trails, and cars often got stuck in the mud after rainstorms. The California legislature passed a gasoline tax to be used for road maintenance and construction in 1923, and the ease of auto travel increased. Gus King remembers

one particular flood around 1916: "I was coming home from high school and the creek had flooded, covering the road at East Fourteen and Mattox Road. Cars were stalled, so I hurried home, hitched up a team of horses and earned some money by offering to pull them out."

Eventually, better roads brought more cars. The ability to travel easily to jobs in Oakland allowed homes to be built on former farmland in San Lorenzo. Traffic lights were installed on Hesperian in mid 1950s. Freeways were built to accommodate the increased traffic.

Buses Provide Alternatives

Alameda County Transit provides bus service to those residents of San Lorenzo who do not own a car, or who want to leave the driving to someone else.



Bay Area Rapid Transit(BART)

BART trains do not stop in San Lorenzo, but the station at Bayfair Mall in San Leandro is nearby and has plenty of parking.