

WRITING NOTES

Most written history about San Francisco is about downtown events and people. Neighborhood history is too often overlooked and disregarded leaving San Francisco neighborhoods undervalued except for their capacity to charm tourists. Taking neighborhood history seriously, Mae Silver discovered a gold mine of history in her own backyard. A native of New Jersey, she was intrigued when she learned her property was once part of a Mexican land grant called Rancho San Miguel. Sharing historical treasures with her neighbors resulted in three books: *The Last Mexican Alcalde of Yerba Buena*, *José de Jesus Noe*, *Old Corbett Road*; and *Rancho San Miguel*. *Riding Through San Francisco's Historic Rancho San Miguel* is her latest, but not last work, about the Rancho she loves. To arrange for history talks, slideshows, book orders, call or write: 260 Corbett Ave., SF 94114, (415) 626-1072.

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Rancho
 San Miguel



RIDING THROUGH
 SAN FRANCISCO'S
 HISTORIC

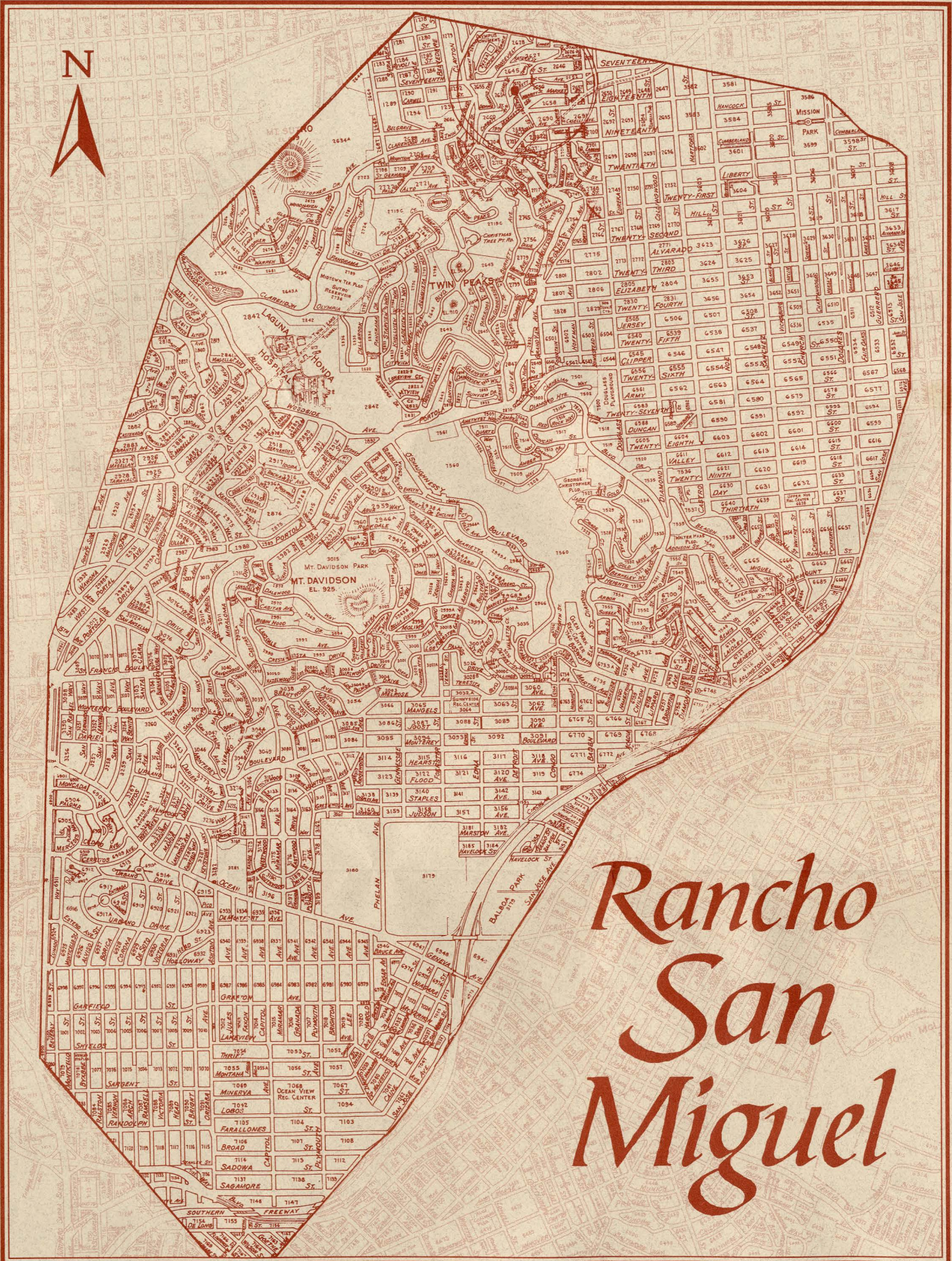
Rancho San Miguel



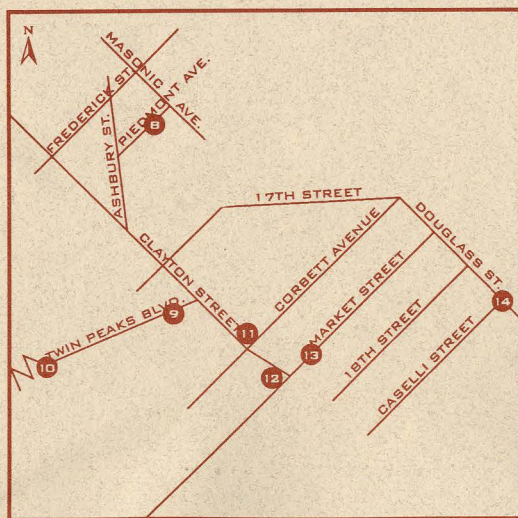
By Mae Silver

FOUR SELF-GUIDED TRAILS
 INTO RANCHO SAN MIGUEL
 NEIGHBORHOODS

Noe Valley, Eureka Valley,
 Castro Village, Upper Market,
 Glen Park, Fairmount Heights,
 Forest Hill, Sunnyside,
 St. Francis Wood,
 Ingleside Terraces, Miraloma,
 West Portal, Twin Peaks,
 Diamond Heights,
 Westwood Park, etc.

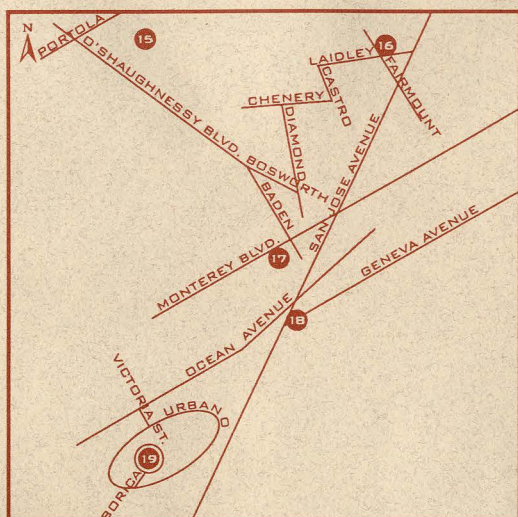


Rancho San Miguel



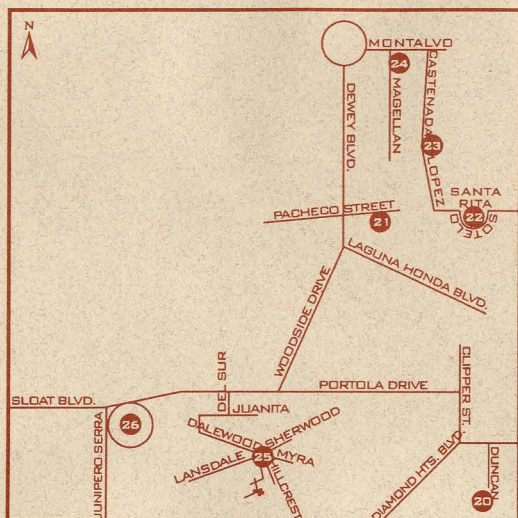
TRAIL 2

8. 11 Piedmont Ave.: A farm house built ca. 1870, possibly moved from original downslope site.
9. 196 Twin Peaks Blvd.: Built in 1917 for Miss Alice Gay for "no more than \$4000," by famed architect Bernard Maybeck.
10. Twin Peaks (elevation 922 ft.) is the second highest hill in San Francisco and Rancho San Miguel.
11. Corbett Ave.: An old farm road probably built by L.L. Robinson, builder of California's first railroad, ca. 1867.
12. Clayton Switchback: This sharp turn from Clayton to Market was not negotiable by early streetcars so operators would "switch" the backs of the passenger seats at Market Street, thereby "switching" the streetcar in the reverse direction.
13. The Miller-Joost House: 3224 Market Street, built by Adam Miller ca. 1868 and later also owned by Behrend Joost, builder of San Francisco's first electric railway (1892). The oldest house on Twin Peaks.
14. "Nobby" Clarke's Folly: 250 Douglass at Caselli. Built by Alfred Clarke, Eureka Valley's "Emperor Norton" in the Gay Nineties. Joost and Clarke waged a daily neighborhood feud for years.



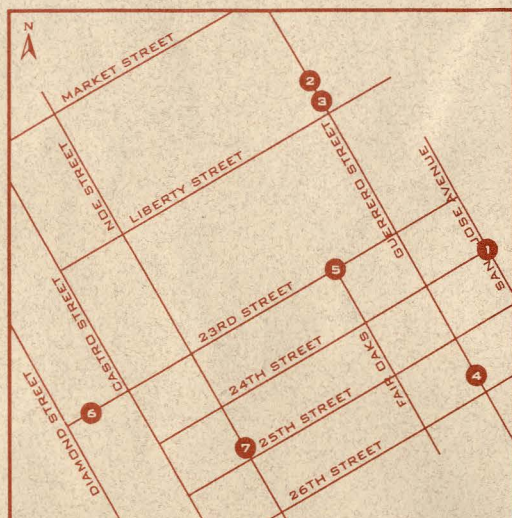
TRAIL 3

15. Glen Canyon today is a reminder of Glen Park's Gay Nineties name, "Switzerland."
16. Poole-Bell House: 196-98 Laidley St. A house with a mysterious past linked to a controversial triangle: Thomas Bell, Teresa Bell and Mary Ellen Pleasant, an early Black activist and shrewd businesswoman. John P. Poole, an attorney, first owned the house, then his widow Annie and later Teresa Bell were owners.
17. Stargazer: 220 Monterey Blvd. H. Taylor, a railroad worker, bought this land from Behrend Joost, owner of Sunnyside Land Co., in 1891. In 1898, W.A. Merralls, a mining engineer and inventor, bought the house and erected the Conservatory, housing rare plants and birds, now called the Stargazer.
18. Spreckels' Car Barn: 2301 San Jose Ave. at Geneva. After Behrend Joost built San Francisco's first electric railway, he sold the company to John Spreckels, who extended the railway line and built this car barn in 1901.
19. Sundial: Entrada Court, Ingleside Terraces. The original site of a Gay Nineties race track, Ingleside Terraces is a residential urban park with reportedly the world's largest sundial, ca. 1913.



TRAIL 4

20. Diamond Heights: The last large portion of Rancho San Miguel developed. Completed 1978.
21. Grand Stairway in Forest Hill, the first urban park developed on Rancho San Miguel land.
22. 51 Sotelo Ave.: Architect Bernard Maybeck created this house in 1914.
23. 270 Castenada at Lopez: Another Maybeck creation, 1916.
24. "The Clubhouse": 381 Magellan: A commonhouse for community events, designed for the residents of Forest Hill by Maybeck in 1919.
25. Mt. Davidson (elevation 938 ft.) is the highest peak in San Francisco and Rancho San Miguel. Named for Dr. George Davidson, famous astronomer and geographer. Yearly site of sunrise Easter Services since 1923. The surrounding urban park, Miraloma, dates from 1918.
26. St. Francis Circle: The famed landmark of this urban residential park noted for its beauty and elegant countrylike character. 1914.



TRAIL 1

1. Possibly Alcalde José Noe's "Old House" where his son Miguel lived well into the 1870s: 3502 24th Street at San Jose Avenue.
2. McMillan House: 827 Guerrero Street. Built by John McMillan, a noted contractor, in 1881.
3. Kershaw House: 845 Guerrero Street. Built by Marsden Kershaw, part owner of a coal yard, in 1871. *NOTE: Liberty Street has many houses built at the same time period.*
4. Edwards House: 1366 Guerrero. Built by Frank G. Edwards, decorator, importer, realtor and publisher, in 1883.
5. Oakley Residence: 200-202 Fair Oaks at 23rd Street. Built by William and Jennie Oakley in 1886. William was a bricklayer/contractor, Jennie, a dressmaker.
6. Lewis House: 4143 23rd Street. Built by David Lewis, a cabinet maker and stair builder, in 1892.
7. Axford House: 1190 Noe Street. Built in 1877 by William Axford, owner of Mission Iron Works.

UNDER THREE FLAGS

Before the United States added California to the Union in 1850, two other nations, Spain and Mexico, had called California theirs. During each's regime, *ranchos*, or land grants were given. Overshadowed by the stories of the great Gold Rush and the earthquake, San Francisco's early rancho history has been forgotten. Just as ranchos existed all over California in the early nineteenth century, they covered San Francisco as well. Owned by Alcalde José de Jesus Noe, Rancho San Miguel, one Spanish league, 4,444.34 acres, sprawled over one-sixth of *Yerba Buena* (San Francisco). Noe, who came with the Hajar and Padres Colony from Mexico, served in many civic capacities in those early days: police chief, first secretary to the town council (*ayuntiamiento*), justice of the peace, and the last Mexican *alcalde* (mayor) of Yerba Buena.

WELCOME TO THE RANCHO

Noe owned the Rancho from 1846-1851 when he sold it to John M. Horner, a Mormon from New Jersey. Called "California's first farmer," Horner demonstrated a prodigious capacity to farm and sell his produce. A financial panic that caught him dirt rich and cash poor forced Horner to mortgage the Rancho. He and his family moved to Hawaii. Rancho San Miguel went through the hands of many successful developers: François L.A. Pioche, Lester L. Robinson, Behrend Joost, Adolph Suto, and the Residential Land Company. Today the boundaries of the Rancho lie buried in old map books and historical chronicles.

RIDING THROUGH THE HISTORIC RANCHO

The use of the Ranch land changed from that of Noe's cattle ranch, to dairy ranches, small produce farms, light industry, stores and residences. Touring the Rancho with special attention to old houses and sites, one can see this change of land use. The houses on these trails are privately owned and not open for visitors. Please respect their owners' privacy when riding by. When John Horner bought Noe's Ranch, it was largely open range land where cattle, horses, mules, and sheep grazed. Horner put some 600 acres under cultivation and named the area *Horner's Addition*, now known as Noe and Eureka Valley. He created roads and homesites as well. Immigrants from European countries chose to settle there. The Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, Slovenians, and Italians moved in wave after wave. They brought to the city their craft skills such as carpentry, smithing, tailoring, housebuilding, baking, housecleaning, and millinery, that formed the blue-collar working class.

BLUE-COLLAR NEIGHBORHOODS

Noe and Eureka Valley became the working-class neighborhoods housing the workers who daily left for downtown to keep big business going. The household staffs of the best and finest houses in the fancy parts of San Francisco came from Noe and Eureka Valley. Many houses in this area often were boarding houses but there were also working-class rowhouses and occasional grand houses of the neighborhood millionaires.

The blue-collar population spread to Glen Park, Fairmount Heights, and Upper Market areas where dairy and produce farms, light industry and individual homesites developed in the 1860s. Corbett Avenue, an old farm road, was the route of choice for loaded horse-drawn wagons. In the Gay Nineties, Glen Park was known as San Francisco's "Switzerland," connoting its Alpine beauty and Bavarian settings.

URBAN RESIDENTIAL PARKS

As the population moved south into the Twentieth Century, urban housing parks contained elegant residences for populations of the professionals and successful business people. Using some of the best contemporary architects, developers produced unusual settings of fashionable dwellings. Forest Hill, St. Francis Wood, Ingleside Terraces, Westwood Park, and miniature versions of these such as El Portal, Balboa Terraces, and Miraloma, still sparkle as unique and unexpected jewels surrounded by the bustling, commercial life of San Francisco.

The last large portion of Rancho land for development was Diamond Heights, produced by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. Its conception aspired to be "a city within a city," housing many conveniences necessary for everyday living within its boundaries, yet surrounding this business/social center with residences of many varieties, e.g., apartments, condominiums, townhouses, and homes. The idea mixed a range of socio-economic and age populations compatibly.

This is a "quick" story of Rancho San Miguel from its early history as a cattle ranch to its urban parks. Mt. Davidson and Twin Peaks, the two highest points of the Rancho, are also the two highest points of San Francisco and command dazzling and breathtaking views of the Bay. Riding through historic Rancho San Miguel today is as spectacular as it was in José Noe's time.

Enjoy!