

HISTORY OF VISITACION VALLEY

1775 The first white men rowed a long boat from the Spanish ship San Carlos into Seashell Point (now known as Hunters Point) and set foot on the beach along the Bay shore. This first report of the area stated that the only settlers the Spanish explorers met were a few Indians from villages to the south in locations that are now Visitacion Valley and Brisbane. These early inhabitants fished in the bay and hunted game in the hills ... and today an occasional Indian artifact can be found -- generally in the area of the two quarries that were later excavated in the valley.

1776 Juan Bautista de Anza was probably the first white man to walk along the shore in Visitacion Valley. Under order of the Viceroy of Spain, he was on his way from the Mission at Monterey to select a location for the little settlement that was to become San Francisco ... a map of the route of his journey shows that he turned inland from the ocean and traveled along the west shore of the bay as he came up the peninsula.

1777 The official date of the discovery of Visitacion Valley was July 2, 1777. According to tradition, a number of soldiers and grey-robed Franciscan Friars were traveling along the King's Highway from San Diego to the Presidio in San Francisco when they became lost in a heavy fog and wandered into the hills east of the highway where they spent the night. In the morning when the fog had cleared, they gazed down upon a beautiful valley with the bay at its feet and called the locality "Visitacion Valley" -- as this was the date the Church celebrated the anniversary of the great feast of the Visitation. The Valley was used as a pasture for longhorn cattle, horses, mules, sheep, pigs, and goats belonging to the Mission Dolores and the Presidio until 1835.

The next event of great importance to the Valley -- during the Mexican period -- was the release of Mission controlled territory for private enterprise; now people could apply for grants of land.

1839 Jacob Primer Leese, an American from Ohio, applied for some 9,500 acres that approximated the area of Brisbane and Visitacion Valley. He named his grant the Rancho Canada Guadalupe, La Visitacion y Rodeo Viejo; he took possession by putting cattle on the land and building two houses -- one of which was located in Visitacion Valley where his majordomo and Indian herders lived. Several years later when the United States government had become established in California, this land title was confirmed.

1850 The Valley acquired its most illustrious citizen. Shortly after completing this term of office as first Governor of the State of California (1849-1851), Peter H. Burnett built a large home on Sunnysdale Avenue where the present Catholic Church of the Visitation is located.

By 1860, the ancestor of the present Bayshore Boulevard came into existence as the "San Bruno toll road"; it connected with El Camino Real at San Bruno. At that time the toll gate was at the Seven-Mile House, which continues to be a landmark just south of Geneva Avenue. However, the main traffic consisted of milkers who worked on dairy farms in Brisbane and South San Francisco; the vehicles were horses and wagons, and the road was so narrow that a driver had to pull his wagon into the deep grass to let another wagon pass.

1876 Industry came into the Valley in 1876 and about this time cattlemen were ordered to remove a number of fences that blocked roads used by residents.

1896 The first school in the Sunny Vale Public School District opened in September, 1896; a few years later it was given the name of Visitacion Valley School -- after a session in court when it was decided that the Valley should retain its old Spanish name of "Visitacion".

1905 The "finest building sites" could be purchased for as little as \$125.00 -- one dollar down and one dollar a week.

1906 The great San Francisco fire and earthquake occurred on April 18, 1906. Damage was minor in the valley, and refugees from the center of San Francisco crowded into the small houses of relatives and friends or lived in shacks in the area until they could build new homes.

1910 During the next 15 to 20 years, Visitacion Valley as we know it today was developing. By 1910 the Valley was serviced by two streetcar lines that soon acquired the assorted nicknames of "Toonerville Trolley", the "Galloping Goose", the "Molasses Special", and "The Dinky". And the Valley was called "Hesitation Valley" because of the long wait while streetcars were switched on the single track - as well as long delays at transfer points. The fare was five cents.

Children hiked through the hills and picnicked on all the scenic ridges, and it was always great sport in the spring to slide down hills over the slippery grass in a large cardboard carton. They waded and swam in the bay, watched the dismantling of old ships from the "ships" graveyard" at the Johnson-Brown wharf, and took pride in showing off the local curiosity - a private home called "the boathouse", as its paneled walls were made of doors salvaged from ships. They earned extra spending money by catching frogs and gathering watercress which they sold to the local restaurants and by peddling bouquets of wild flowers from door-to-door.

1971 The new Visitacion Valley Junior High School, located at 450 Raymond Avenue, opened February 2, 1971.

1978 Visitacion Valley Junior High School was changed to Visitacion Valley Middle School -- opened September 6, 1978.