

SAN MATEO HISTORY

The Ramaytush Ohlone lived in settlements along San Mateo Creek and Laurel Creek, with settlements of about 100-250 people who relied on the land's natural resources.

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Many thanks to Mitchell Postel (San Mateo: A Centennial History), NBC Bay Area, City of San Mateo, San Mateo County and San Mateo Daily Journal!

Pre-1769

1776

Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza camped in the area and named it San Mateo after St. Matthew, marking the beginning of Spanish influence in the region.

"One of the reasons that San Mateo became a city back in 1894 was because of the lack of fire protection," said San Mateo historian Mitch Postel. "These services, whether it's fire, police or sanitation that we take for granted today, weren't at people's fingertips at all, and that was a big reason to [incorporate San Mateo as a city] and improve [it]."

San Mateo's first formal fire department was established, on the same day as a large fire broke out in Library Hall. The Redwood City Fire Department was summoned to stop the

Alvinza Hayward created the Crystal Springs Reservoir, allotting 300,000 gallons a year to San Mateans.

1922

Elsa McGinn reorganized the fire department, and San Mateans were able to avoid a fire in 1934 from spreading.

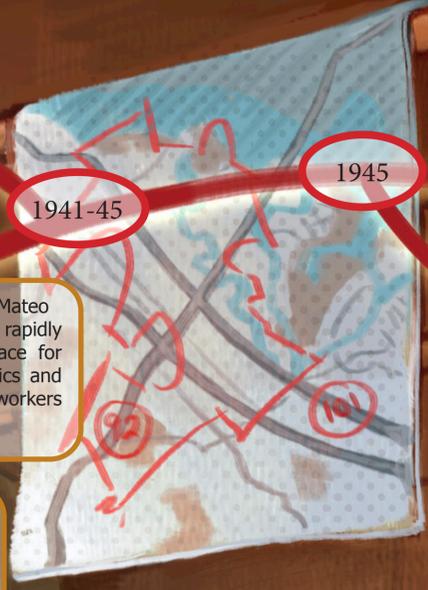
1922

The College of San Mateo was created, long before San Francisco's first community college.

1929-39

San Mateo grew rapidly as a place for electronics and steel workers to live.

1941-45



1945

After World War II ended, Japanese Americans returning from incarceration camps were generally received with more warmth and support in San Mateo than in other West Coast locations.

"A lot of those [San Mateo-based World War II] industries went from wartime missions to peacetime missions, especially in the electronics industry," Postel said. "[That] brought on a tremendous increase in the size of San Francisco Airport, and so a lot of San Mateans found jobs at the airport ... San Mateo benefited from being at the crossroads of two major highways, being the link to the East Bay and from San Francisco to San Jose ... in the middle of quite a bit of activity — economic, social, commercial."

1956

Hillsdale High School opened to help accommodate the massive influx of families.

"There's something to me about living so close to that big, huge Pacific Ocean," McClain said. "That has kind of given California its energy. My father came from Kansas during World War II. When he got to San Francisco in the army, he said, 'I live through this army, but if I survive World War II, I'm coming back to California. This is just gorgeous.'"

The Borel estate remained as the only original grand property left standing. The population boomed, with David Bohannon's Hillsdale project and other similar works transforming the landscape into a suburban hub.

1961

Aragon High School's opening soon followed (originally planned for 1960, but nationwide steel strikes delayed construction).

1963

Mayor Roy Archibald and Mayor Tasuku Fujito established a sister-city relationship between San Mateo and Toyonaka, Japan.

"We had a lot of Asian kids, and I remember I was in junior high [at] College Park," said Diane McClain, founding class alumnus of Aragon. "So many of my Japanese friends were born in the camps. I remember a teacher had us do a family project and bring in pictures when we were little, and those kids were bringing in what few pictures they had of being born in those camps."

"If you were Asian and trying to establish yourself in a place like Burlingame, ... the neighborhoods were restricted and you couldn't get in," Postel said. "San Mateo, from the beginning, [was less restricted and] always had Chinese, [Japanese, African American and Italian] communities [that were] very strong early on."

"Every Friday night, everybody went to the Y," McClain said. "We danced. It was rock and roll time, and you're with kids from all the schools. You were dancing, or you were in a big lounge where you were just sitting around talking, and there was another huge area that had basketball and volleyball. Once in a while, a boy might show up who had too much beer."

"I lived in Shoreview Parkside ... and the kids on that side of the highway had to go to Aragon way up there," McClain said. "There was no choice. I, to this day, believe it was economic. The rich kids got to stay at San Mateo. Hillsdale, Aragon, and Mills were all built at about the same time. How come one of those schools couldn't have been built on the other side of 101?"

"There's cultural exchanges, so our baseball and softball teams from our city have an exchange with their baseball and softball teams," said history teacher Jennifer Seif. "At our middle school feeder schools, Borel has a sister relationship and Japanese pen pals."

While San Mateo experienced less overt segregation due to developing as a relatively diverse region, the region still saw the emergence of de facto "Asian" and "Black" schools. The district enacted an administrative transfer plan to combat this, but the personnel still remained overwhelmingly white. The "Action Now" group formed in response to social pressure, and its goal was to improve the lives of East San Mateo low-income residents. Simultaneously, the College Readiness Program was established to provide minority students with financial aid and other assistance.

The arrival of the railroad, led by Charles Polhemus, helped establish downtown San Mateo and attracted wealthy San Franciscans who built their summer estates in the area.

1887

1888

San Mateo High School was founded with 24 students.

1865-1887

San Mateo was the only city to officially honor returning veterans with a parade.

1972

During the Vietnam War, Linda Patterson got a letter from her 19-year-old brother Sergeant Joe Artavia of the "Screaming Eagles," explaining that morale was low. San Mateo residents sent thousands of packages of cookies, candies and letters.

"Vietnam veterans were not applauded or thanked or given the same sense of heroism that was found during World War II and World War I and [the] Korean War and so on," Abrams said. "There was always a sense of, 'what were we really doing there? And did we accomplish anything? And did we help the world? Or did we just kill off 50,000 of our youngest and in Vietnam?'"

1980

10% Asian
6% Black
79% White
12% Hispanic

29.8% Asian
1.9% Black
36.1% White
25.0% Hispanic

2007

The last restrictive covenant in Cuesta La Honda Guild was officially removed, and the Federal Housing Administration encouraged redlining. 1988-2014: The county issued permits for only 34% of the required low-income housing, leading to significantly less affordable housing today.

"So many people today are looking at how can we afford things like medical coverage and housing," Abrams said. "My wife and I were able to buy our first house when we were 23 years old [and] our second house when we were 29. Young families like that now have such a difficult time buying in San Mateo."

2020

"There are office buildings now," Tobin said. "Everything was relatively low rise [before]. And on El Camino is what used to be the Bayview Federal Savings Building, which is maybe 10 stories. That and the Ben Franklin Hotel were the two biggest buildings in San Mateo. And then they built the Bank of Bank of America, which was a big building. But basically, there were office buildings, but none were very big."

