

The Early Pioneers

FOCUS:

- To introduce the events that caused an end to the San Ramon Ranchos when California became a state.
- To introduce the students to some American pioneers who first settled in our valley.
- To have an understanding of how the villages of Alamo, Danville and San Ramon began.

MAIN IDEA:

To use the information provided to learn that:

- In 1848, the war between Mexico and the United States ended and, in 1850, California became a state.
- In 1848, the Gold Rush brought people to California and many passed through the valley.
- Pioneers purchased land from Rancho families or squatted on valley land and started small villages.

VOCABULARY:

squatters
blacksmith
general store

Gold Rush
fertile
treaty



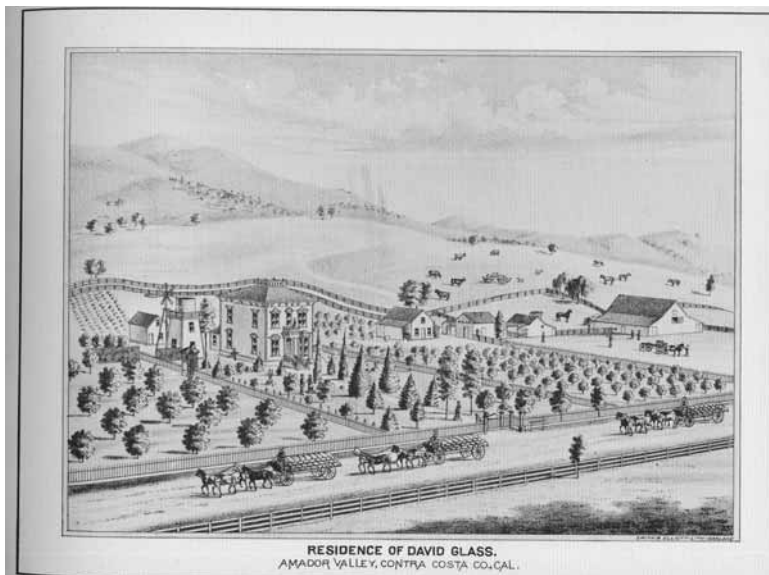
Student pages

The New State of California

In January of 1848, there was an important event that brought large numbers of people to California. This was the discovery of gold. This discovery brought people from all over the world to California with hopes of becoming rich. This event was called the **Gold Rush**.

One month later the Mexican American War ended and a **treaty** was signed. As a result of this war, the United States gained control over all of California.

Many of the Americans who settled in the San Ramon Valley came to California originally because of the **Gold Rush** but stayed when they saw how **fertile** the land was in our valley. **Fertile** land has the nutrients and water needed to produce food. They also saw how few people lived here. The families of the northern Rancho San Ramon did not have their homes on the rancho, preferring to live closer to large towns. Without rancho homes in place, many Americans saw the valley as vacant land, available for settlement and improvement.



The Mexican rancho owners were unable to keep people from settling on their lands. Many of them sold part or all of their land to get money to live. Americans who settled on land by fencing, farming, grazing cattle and building houses -- but who didn't pay for the

land -- were called **squatters**. This was a method used to acquire land in other parts of the western United States.

Thus the two San Ramon Ranchos were broken into smaller land holdings in two ways: by sale and by **squatting**.

Most of the new American families in our valley raised barley, wheat, and other crops. Their cattle grazed on the hills. The pioneers' farms and ranches increased in number and people were eager to make the valley their home. Post offices, **general stores**, **blacksmith** shops, churches, and schools were started as the population grew.

Small villages began where Alamo, Danville and San Ramon are today.

Kathie Petrie, 2004



Teacher Pages

Student Activities

- **Critical Thinking**

What were the two events that brought the American settlers to the San Ramon Valley?

What were the two ways that settlers made the land their own?

Can you name two of the founding families who first settled in your area?

- **Show What You Know**

- 1. Reading Advertisements - Early businesses in the first villages**

Pass out to students samples of business cards and advertisements from the Yellow Pages. Point out the similar information in both. Explain that the cards and Yellow Page ads may help spread the word about a business.

Discuss with the students what businesses were necessary in an early village. What business would they feel important to have in a new village, and how would they advertise, using only important information about their business? Students create business cards or advertisements for their business

- 2. Draw a Picture.**

Draw a picture of what a pioneer in your area would see. Perhaps this would be a follow up to any of the story books you have read that are related to pioneer life in the 1880s. What might the pioneer have dressed like? How might the pioneer live (house, ranch, farm orchards etc.)?

- 3. Make a Comparison Chart or Picture**

How might your life be different than that of a pioneer in your area? Write on one side of a paper how life was in the 1880s and, on the other side, write how that aspect of life is different now. (Or fold a piece of paper in half. On one side of the paper put "1880" and write about one aspect of living in the 1880s like cooking or clothes washing. Illustrate. On the other half of the paper write the date and tell how we cook our food or wash clothes today. Illustrate.)

Or, divide a paper in half. On one side draw a picture of your house today and, on the other side, draw a picture of a pioneer's house.

- 4. Writing/Photo Project on Alamo, Danville or San Ramon.** (See activity page)

- 5. Cooking/ Crafts**

Create butter, corn bread, taffy or make candles

- 6. Create a Patchwork Quilt**

Cut white medium size paper squares, and have each student draw part of the early pioneer history for your town. Put these square drawings and alternate with colored paper squares to create a patchwork quilt to display on the wall.

7. Venn Diagram

Using a Venn Diagram, compare life as it was then and is now. What is still the same?

8. Create a Travel Brochure

- Brainstorm with partners, small groups or class the pieces of information that are needed in a travel brochure.
 1. List the best features of your area or what it was like in the early village.
 2. Draw pictures that show the best features of your early village.
 3. Create a travel brochure advertising why your early village should be visited.
- As the group or partners create their travel brochure, they should:
 - appoint a Materials Manager to collect the supplies needed.
 - plan a design for the brochure.
 - consider what features will be most appealing to visitors.
 - outline the information they want to include about each feature.

Field trips (See field trip pages in the back.)

- **Family field trips:** Museum of the San Ramon Valley, Forest Home Farms Historic Park, Oakland Museum of California
- **Passport Opportunity:** Alamo Cemetery (on El Portal east of Danville Blvd.) is the final resting place of many pioneers.

Reading and Social Studies

Davis, Kenneth, *Don't Know Much About Pioneers*. This book explores the hardships faced by the American Pioneers using a question and answer format.

Hayes, Joe, *Juan Verdades*. This book tells about a rancher who almost loses his ranch in the pioneer times.

Josephson, Judith Pinkerton, *Growing up in Pioneer America*. This book shows what life was like for young people moving to and living on the western frontier.

Morley, Jacqueline, *You Wouldn't Want to Be An American Pioneer*. This is a light-hearted look at some of the difficulties of traveling by wagon to settle in the west.

History/Social Science Standards

- 3.a Develops and demonstrates respect for the uniqueness of individuals and their differences.
- 3.b Understands and knows how to analyze human and chronological relationships and patterns.
- 3.e Interprets historical events.
- 3.3 Draws from historical and community resources to organize the sequences of events in local history and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

Additional Resources

Activity pages

- Social Studies Project (Writing/Photo) for Alamo, Danville and San Ramon
(Read about communities, do the project)
Being a child in 1850

Essays

- Early American History in the San Ramon Valley*
- Pioneer Communities in the San Ramon Valley*

Websites

- www.californiahistory.net
- [www.californiahistory.com/ Gold Rush](http://www.californiahistory.com/GoldRush)
- www.calgoldrush.com
- [www.huntington.org/Education/Gold Rush](http://www.huntington.org/Education/GoldRush)
- www.library.ca.gov/goldrush
- www.museumca.org Online Resources, Gold Rush

Books and papers

- *Alamo, Danville, Diablo, San Ramon – one-page community histories, published by the Museum of the San Ramon Valley*
- G. B. Drummond, ed., *Recollections, Early Life in the San Ramon Valley as related by Prof. James Dale Smith, Headmaster, Livermore College* (Oakland: GRT Book Printing), 1995
- Jacob Wright Harlan, *California, 1846-1888*, Published 1996 (first published by Bancroft in 1888)
- Richard Orsi, *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* (California Historical Society: Univ. of Calif. Press), 2000
- Mary Ann (Harlan) Smith, *Recollections of a Pioneer Mother* (Livermore: Camino Press), 1995. From the Livermore Heritage Guild.

- Pioneer families in 1860s as told by Laura Ingalls Wilder

W Little House in the Big Woods

W Little House on the Prairie

W Farmer Boy

W On the Banks of Plum Creek

W By the Shores of Silver Lake

W The Long Winter

W Little Town on the Prairie

W These Happy Golden Years

W The First Four Years

Early American History in the San Ramon Valley

The Americans Arrive

Americans began coming to California in large numbers in 1846. That year several of the Valley's first settlers arrived, including Joel Harlan and his future wife Minerva Fowler, Leo and Mary Jane Norris, and Mary Ann and John Jones. They experienced incredible hardships in getting to California and all lived in San Jose before they came to the Valley.

After the Gold Rush, settlers used their earnings from the gold mines to establish themselves in the Valley, either by buying land or grazing rights from the owners or by squatting. Most of them were farmers or had been trained with skills to support a rural economy. They felt the land would provide an excellent living and didn't see any major problems in purchasing or squatting on the enormous Rancho lands throughout the state.

Dry Farming

One example was Robert O. Baldwin, who bought land in Danville with his gold earnings in 1852 and married Mary Cox whose father owned land just south of him. He and other early transplants from the mid-West learned to dry farm by taking advantage of the mild, wet winters and grow crops in the spring and summer. Although John Marsh had grown wheat on his ranch for years, Elam Brown of Lafayette and Baldwin were credited with being "the first to prove the wonderful adaptability of California soil to wheat culture in our county." (p. 56 Munro-Fraser)

For farmers the weather was a constant concern. 1861-2 was a very wet year, with San Ramon's George McCamley writing in his farm diary, " rain all ," "rained all day and all last night. Creek very high. The whole county flooded." Like other Valley ranchers, he produced a wide variety of crops, including wheat, potatoes, peas, beans, cabbage, squash, spinach, apple trees, and hay.

Post offices, stores, churches and schools were started as the population grew. Alamo's post office was established on May 18, 1852 with John M. Jones as postmaster, Samuel Russell became San Ramon's postmaster on November 20, 1852 (it closed later) and on August 31, 1860, Danville's post office was established with hotel owner Henry W. Harris as postmaster. David Glass started a trading post in northern Alamo in 1852, the first recorded store. The Diablo post office was established in 1916.

Schools

Schooling for Valley youth began with home schools. The Stones, Norrises and Harlans had these schools. One rancher in Tassajara near Alamo Creek hired a young man, Bret Harte, to tutor his four boys in 1856. Settlers hired and boarded teachers for both home and the one-room schools which were built. To go beyond grammar school, students needed special tutors or went to Oakland or San Francisco.

For a brief period from 1859 to 1868 a high school, the Union Academy, existed in the Valley. Sponsored by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Academy was a boarding and day school which provided an excellent education based on the San Francisco School Department's curriculum and prepared students for college as well. A two story building with basement, it was important to the Valley residents both in the education it provided and in its physical dimensions. It burned down during school vacation in 1868.

The Valley settlers were very involved in making a living as farmers and ranchers in this period, but they were concerned beyond their ranches as well. Several helped to found and run the Contra Costa Agricultural Society in 1859. Topics of conversation included the need for a railroad, well-celebrated Fourth of July parties with speeches and land title controversies in Alamo and Danville. Finally, in 1866, the residents of those communities bought their land free and clear from Horace Carpentier, with many of them bitterly complaining that they had paid for it twice.

The 1868 Great Earthquake ended this period with a shudder. Estimated at 6.8, it destroyed the adobe church at Mission San Jose, awakened John Muir in Yosemite and damaged brick buildings in Alamo and Danville. Charlotte Wood's mother told her "the branches of the old oak swept the earth with its force... and chimneys turned half way around."

Conclusion

The decades between 1850 and 1870 were years of challenges and satisfaction for the Americans of the San Ramon Valley. Their laws, cultural expectations and numbers eclipsed those of the Mexican Californians. Fortunately many of these early settlers, both Mexican and American, are still remembered and honored with their names on streets, communities and schools.

From Yesteryear in the San Ramon Valley Beverly Lane

Major Sources

Contra Costa Gazette, articles 1860 (April 28, May 5, June 23, July 21, Oct. 20), 1868 (July 11, 18).

Virgie V. Jones, *Remembering Alamo*, Alamo: Morris-Burt Press, 1975.

J.P. Munro-Fraser, *History of Contra Costa County*, Oakland: Slocum & Co., 1882, p. 56.

George McCamley diary, Jan. 9, 1862. In Museum archives.

PIONEER COMMUNITIES IN THE SAN RAMON VALLEY

After the California Gold Rush, several small communities were founded in the San Ramon Valley. It was a lovely valley and immigrants moved here, eager to start new lives. They soon learned to “dry farm” by planting in the mild winters and harvesting in the spring and summer. In early years they grazed cattle and sheep and planted, cultivated and harvested hay and grains.

Each 19th century community had grammar schools and downtowns with blacksmithies, boarding houses and general stores.

Alamo is named for the poplar (cottonwood) trees which grew there in profusion when the first settlers arrived. The valley's oldest continuing post office began in Alamo in 1852. In 2000 it had a population of 15,626.

Blackhawk and the **Tassajara** area are part of Contra Costa County and, in 2000, had a population of 10,048. Tassajara had a post office from 1896 to 1922 and a volunteer Fire Department from 1969 to 1990. Picnics at the Tassajara School House (built 1889) were a traditional way of drawing the community together for many years. The name derives from an Aztec word meaning “a place where the meat is cured”.

Blackhawk is now a gated homes community in the foothills of Mt Diablo. The Blackhawk Ranch was established in 1917 by Ansel M. Easton. Originally the name is derived from the Sauc and Fox Indian warrior, Black Hawk; his name was given to a famous Irish race horse which the Easton family imported to California in the nineteenth century. Their original Hillsborough ranch was called the “Black Hawk Ranch,” a name they later gave to their purchase in the San Ramon Valley.

Danville's post office first opened in 1860. The name came from Daniel Inman, an early downtown landowner, and probably from Danville, Kentucky (the hometown of early settler “grandma” Sarah Young). When the S. P. train came in 1891, the town grew in size and had several stores, boarding houses and saloons. This community was the largest in the San Ramon Valley until late in the twentieth century. It incorporated as the Town of Danville in 1982. 2000 population: 41, 715.

The community of **Diablo** (named for the mountain) was one of California's first country clubs. Robert Noble Burgess developed what was first called the Mt. Diablo Park Club beginning in 1912; he owned 50,000 acres at one point, including the Mt. Diablo summit and the Blackhawk ranch. Its post office opened in 1916. During the early twentieth century it was a significant San Ramon Valley community, drawing

visitors during the summer and providing jobs for valley residents. It is governed by Contra Costa County. 2000 population: 988

San Ramon had several names in its early years: Brevenville (for blacksmith Levi Brevin), Lynchville (for 1850 settler William Lynch) and Limerick (for many early Irish settlers). Although a post office existed in the 1850s, one was permanently founded in 1873. After 1891 when the San Ramon Branch Line of the Southern Pacific arrived, the name San Ramon was applied by all to this small community. Because the village was a half-mile from the San Ramon depot, the arrival of the railroad did not affect the village's growth to speak of. The Bishop Ranch was the largest ranch in the area and grew pears, walnuts and other crops. San Ramon was incorporated in 1983. 2000 population: 44,722.

Beverly Lane, 2004

Being a Child in 1850

Student's name _____

For one night, see if you can live like a child in 1850. We are not going to ask you to give up electricity, but we are going to ask you to give up television, computers, radios, and any other mechanical game. You can read or you can play games with your family. Write and tell us how it felt not to have television and all of the other entertainment that we are use to.

Describe how you spent the evening.

How did it feel to live like a child in 1850?

Parent Signature _____

The Village of Alamo

American pioneers passed through the Alamo and admired it from the beginning. One pioneer wrote:

On every side, the valley and surrounding hills were covered with thick, velvety clover and wild oats standing waist high, waving and rippling in the summer breeze. (From the diary of Mary Ann Jones, 1847)

Alamo means poplar (or cottonwood tree) in the Spanish language; there were many of these trees shading the land. Its mild weather and fine location caused Alamo to grow early. A road ran through Alamo all the way from Mission San Jose to Martinez. Alamo had the first permanent post office in the valley beginning in 1852, with John Jones as the first postmaster. A general store was founded by David Glass on the road from Alamo to Walnut Creek. Soon a hotel opened as well.

Mary Jones was very active in getting a school and church started in Alamo. She boarded the first grammar school teacher, Richard Webster, and founded a week-long religious camp meeting. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church began in Alamo. A high school which boarded students, called the Union Academy, was built south of Alamo and provided higher education from 1859 to 1868 when it burned down.

Eventually orchards and vineyards spread across the fertile land. Almonds, walnuts, grapes and many kinds of fruit trees were planted and grew in the mild climate.

Stone Valley Road is named for the Stone family, who were early settlers. In 1853, Silas and Susanna Ward Stone built a house in Alamo. They grew wheat and grazed cattle on their 1,000 acres. Their son, Albert Ward Stone, was a leader in the Valley.

Hemme Avenue was named after the Hemme family ranch. August Hemme worked hard to bring a railroad through Alamo. In 1891, a train depot was placed near today's Hemme Avenue. It was named for Hemme and later re-named the Alamo Depot.

When the San Ramon Branch Line came to the Valley in 1891, it helped all of the ranchers and farmers ship crops to market in all kinds of weather. Hemme was one rancher who shipped his pears in some of the first refrigerated rail cars. Passengers used the train to visit friends and go to Oakland or San Francisco to shop.

Social Studies Project -- Alamo

Student _____ Due Date: _____

In order to learn more about the area of Alamo, you need to become an explorer. You will do the following items to complete the project:

1. Go out and explore the town. Find a location in the town that you think is interesting.
2. Use the attached information to explore and select a site that you might want to know a little more about.
3. Take pictures of yourself at the location.
4. Call or visit the Alamo School Bell, historic plaques, Alamo Cemetery, or the Museum of the San Ramon Valley (at the Danville Depot) for additional information.
5. You need to write **3 paragraphs** on the site you have selected. The paragraphs should include the following:

Paragraph 1 – A detailed description of where you are.

Paragraph 2 – What additional information have you learned from your exploration?

Paragraph 3 – Why do you think this spot is important, special or unique to our town

6. Glue the pictures to a piece of paper and attach it to the end of the report.
7. Remember to check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
8. Illustrate the location you have chosen and glue that to the front cover of your report folder.
9. You will present your findings to the rest of the class, so be prepared to be the expert on the location you have chosen.
10. Sloppy work will not be accepted.

Remember to have fun!

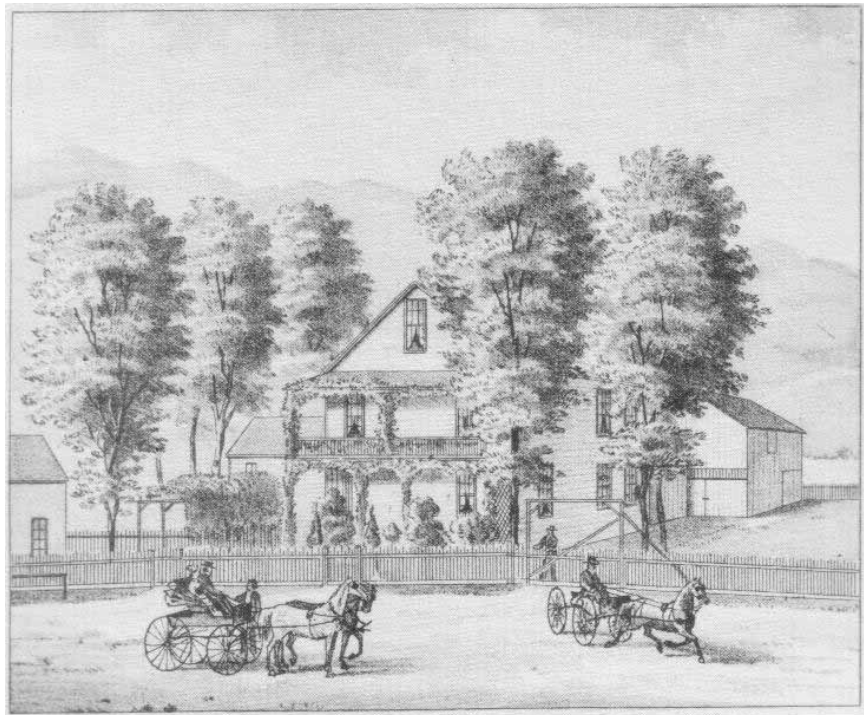
Early Alamo



Mary Ann Jones



Silas Stone



James Foster Residence, Alamo

The Village of Danville

Danville was settled and named by Americans drawn here by the Gold Rush. Two of those early settlers were Daniel and Andrew Inman who bought land in the center of town with their money from gold mining.

They built the first building on Front Street in Danville, starting a new village. The business they built was a blacksmith shop, which made horseshoes for the horses that the settlers rode; they made other useful things from the iron they melted. They would pour the hot melted iron into a mold to make the metal items used by the ranchers and settlers in the early days. Soon, a general store was built, which sold a variety of household items used in everyday life. The store sold necessities for cooking, making clothes and items for the house and family. A post office was also begun in 1860.

What should the community be called? One idea was that it should be called "Inmanville." "Grandma" Sarah Young suggested the town be named after her hometown of Danville, Kentucky and the energetic Dan Inman was later elected to the California State Legislature. So the town was named Danville.

The Danville area was fertile and great for farming and ranching. It was a great place to live! More and more people came to the village. Farmers raised cattle and sheep and grew wheat, barley, onions, fruit and nuts. These products were hauled to other towns by horses and wagons.

As more and more people came to the Danville area to live, more services were needed. A school, church and stores were built on Front Street. The Grange Hall was created as a place where people could meet in 1874. Front Street became the main business street. Many older buildings can still be seen in downtown Danville.

The Southern Pacific railroad was built through Danville, and this made it easier for people to come to Danville and live. This made shipping crops or livestock easier too. The Danville Hotel was built across from the railroad depot on Railroad Avenue to house business men as they came into the valley.

Rancher John Hartz sold some of the Danville land he owned to the Southern Pacific for the railroad station. He subdivided his land (between the station and Front Street) and sold land for homes and stores. Later downtown Danville shifted from Front Street to Hartz Avenue. A bank, drug store, saloon, doctor's office and laundry were built on the new Hartz Avenue.

Take a walking tour of downtown Danville and see the buildings that still remain here.

Social Studies Project -- Danville

Student _____ Due Date: _____

In order to learn more about the Town of Danville, you need to become an explorer. You will do the following items to complete the project:

1. Go out and explore the town. Find a location in the town that you think is interesting.
2. Use the attached information to explore and select a site that you might want to know a little more about.
3. Take pictures of yourself at the location.
4. Call or visit the Danville Town Hall, Danville Library, or the Museum of the San Ramon Valley (at the Danville Depot) for additional information.
5. You need to write **3 paragraphs** on the site you have selected. The paragraphs should include the following:

Paragraph 1 – A detailed description of where you are.

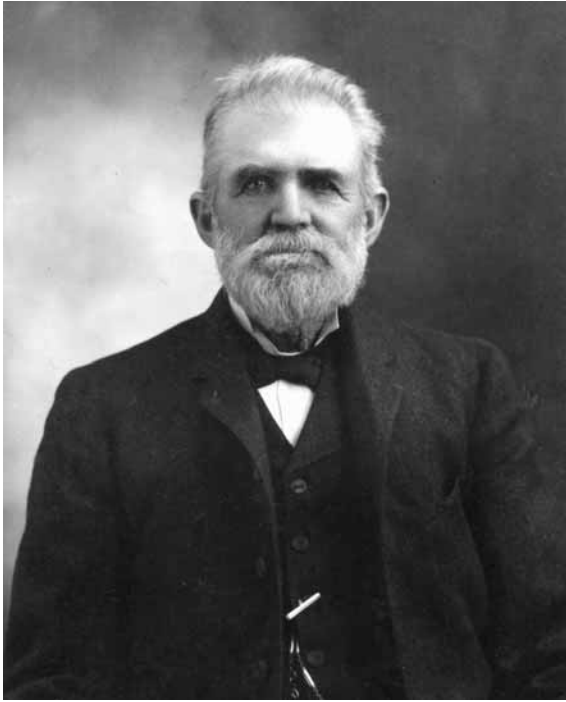
Paragraph 2 – What additional information have you learned from your exploration?

Paragraph 3 – Why do you think this spot is important, special or unique to our town?

6. Glue the pictures to a piece of paper and attach it to the end of the report.
7. Remember to check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
8. Illustrate the location you have chosen and glue that to the front cover of your report folder.
9. You will present your findings to the rest of the class, so be prepared to be the expert on the location you have chosen.
10. Sloppy work will not be accepted.

Remember to have fun!

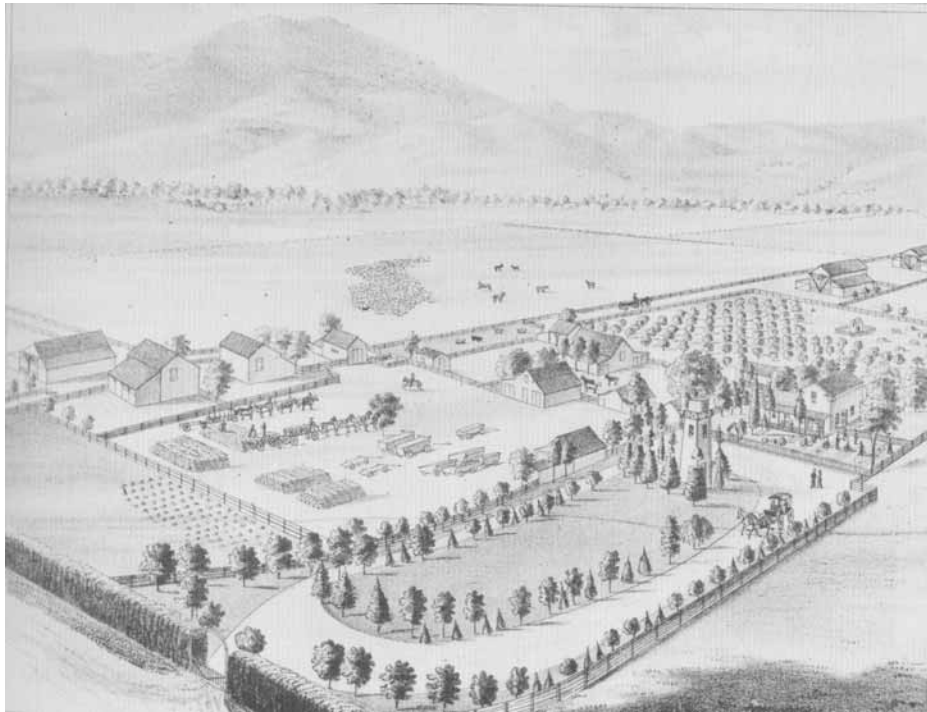
Early Danville



Dan Inman



Charlotte Wood



Robert O. Baldwin Residence, Danville

The Village of San Ramon

San Ramon is not the name that was given to the first village in that area. In the 1880s, some families that settled here called it “Limerick,” because many families were Irish settlers. This first village developed near the corner of today’s Deerwood Road and the San Ramon Valley Boulevard when a post office was put in the general store. Soon after, many pioneers built homes, farms and ranches near Limerick.

Many of San Ramon’s founding families are remembered today because their names appear on streets or canyons. Some pioneer names include Norris (Norris Canyon), Bollinger (Bollinger Canyon Road), Harlan (Harlan Drive), Crow (Crow Canyon Road), Meese (Meese Circle), and Dougherty (Dougherty Road). Some of the early settlers’ houses still may be seen in San Ramon -- the Glass House and Boone House (Forest Home Farms Historic Park) at 19953 San Ramon Valley Boulevard and the Harlan House at Westridge and San Ramon Valley Blvd. The original Wiedemann house is not far from Norris Canyon Road, west of San Ramon.

The Boone family ranched and farmed their land beginning in 1900. Today part of their ranch has become Forest Home Farms Historic Park. They raised tomatoes, sugar beets, grain, barley and walnuts. Until the 1950s, walnuts were Contra Costa County’s major agricultural product. For years the Boone family ran several crews and harvested walnuts for ranchers all over the San Ramon Valley. Travis Boone invented new ways to knock down walnuts from the trees and had a large walnut processing factory that took the hulls off walnuts and dried them. Take a field trip to Forest Home Farms and see how a farm was run in the 1900s.

With families populating the area, a general store, a church, and a grammar school were established along with a laundry, saloons, a jail, and blacksmith shop. The name of the village was permanently changed to San Ramon when the Southern Pacific Railroad came in 1891. For years San Ramon was the end of the line and the railroad tracks stopped here. San Ramon boasted a two-story depot, engine house and turnaround for the locomotive in the early years.

After 1891 passengers could travel in and out of the area easily, no matter what the weather was like. The crops that grew in the fertile San Ramon area were carried to other villages and towns to be sold faster than by wagon. Most of the land in the San Ramon area was ranched with cattle grazing or farmed with fields of wheat or fruit orchards. In the twentieth century walnuts, tomatoes and pears were primary crops.

Social Studies Project – San Ramon

Student Name _____ Due Date: _____

In order to learn more about the City of San Ramon, you need to become an explorer. You will do the following items to complete the project:

1. Go out and explore the city. Find a location in the town that you think is interesting.
2. Use the attached information to explore and select a site that you might want to know a little more about.
3. Take pictures of yourself at the location.
4. Call or visit the San Ramon City Hall, San Ramon Library, or the Forest Home Farms Historic Park for additional information.
5. You need to write **3 paragraphs** on the site you have selected. The paragraphs should include the following:

Paragraph 1 – A detailed description of where you are.

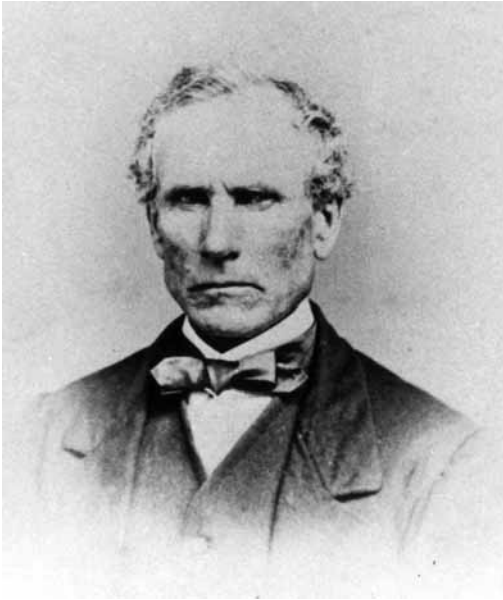
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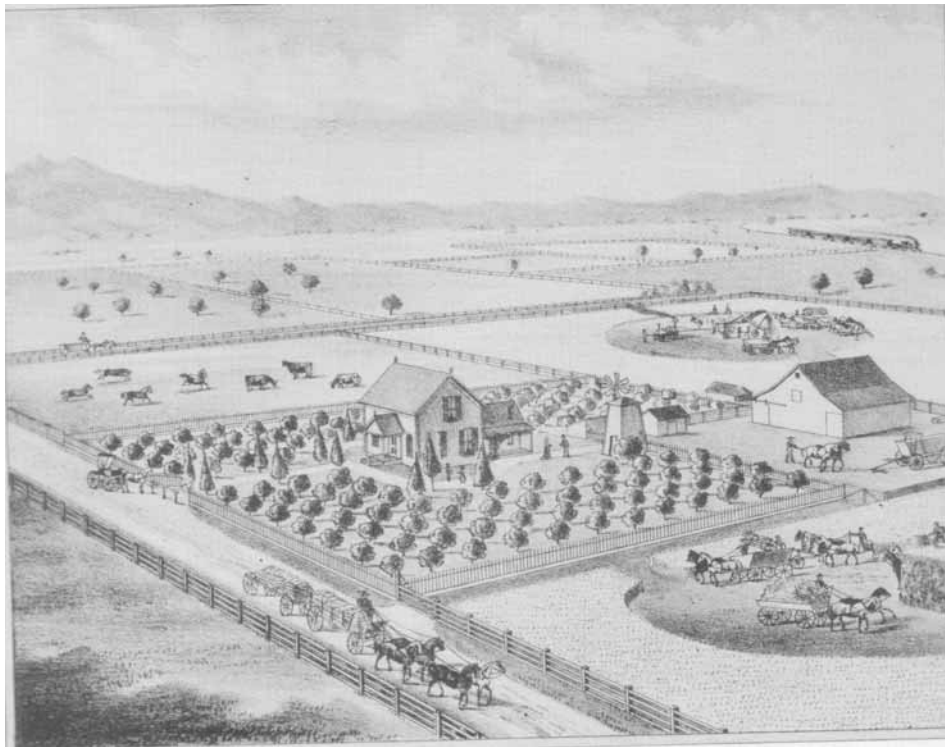
Early San Ramon



Leo Norris



Minerva Harlan



George McCamley Residence, San Ramon