

FAIR OAKS - "CROWN OF THE VALLEY"

The San Juan Land Grant

In the 1840s, the Mexican Governor of California issued large private land grants to American settlers. One of these grants, the twenty thousand acre San Juan Grant, bordered the lower American River. The earliest non-native settlers in the area were hunters, trappers and a few scattered gold miners.



In 1873 Crawford Clark purchased a portion of the San Juan Grant that would eventually become Fair Oaks. The land, promoted as a "Sunset Colony", was sold in five to twenty acre tracts beginning in 1895. Away from the flat river bottom lands of the Sacramento, this area, with its hills, magnificent oak trees, and beautiful river view, was extolled as "the Crown of the Valley." By 1897, three hundred permanent settlers resided in the colony.

Agriculture in Fair Oaks

Early residents were encouraged to clear the oak forests and plant orange groves, as well as other crops. Water was supplied by the North Fork Ditch, a diversion canal built during the gold rush. Produce had to be hauled by wagon either to Folsom or all the way to Sacramento to be loaded on trains.

Through efforts of a group of businessmen and investors, a bridge was constructed over the American River in 1901.



The Railroad

A spur was built up from the railroad tracks that ran south of the river, and a depot was built near the south end of the bridge. The train service enabled the budding fruit colony to grow and prosper. It was soon competing with Southern California as the citrus center of the world.

By the 1910s, Fair Oaks had become a typical small town and agricultural community. A series of devastating freezes in the early 1930s wiped out the area as a major producer of citrus fruit in California.

For more information on the history of Fair Oaks see www.amha.org/books/fobuff.html or www.fairoakshistory.org

The first Fair Oaks Bridge



A rock crushing plant helped to dispose of the thousands of acres of cobbles. The crushed cobbles were found to be an excellent material for road building. By 1910 over 15,000 railroad cars of crushed rock and gravel were shipped per year.

Unsuitable for farming and with few other productive uses, the acres of mounded mine tailings that remained south of Folsom Boulevard were determined to be a suitable site for the rocket testing activities of Aerojet Corporation after World War II. Aerojet became a major employer in the area. This in turn created a large housing boom in the surrounding communities, especially Fair Oaks and Orangevale.

Fair Oaks Today

Fair Oaks, with a population now nearing 30,000, has kept its flavor as a traditional small town. Many of the early homes and business structures still survive as part of the core of the town center known as "the Village" where, to the chagrin of some but the delight of most, feral chickens rule.

Narrow, hilly and tree-lined streets still meander through town, many without sidewalks, and some lead to the outlying areas where most of the agriculture has given way to homes for commuters and retirees - just as the early planners of the community envisioned.



A view of the 700 foot long bridge from the Bluff.



When the bridge washed out in 1907 a ferry was used to cross the river while it was being rebuilt.



Photo courtesy of Fair Oaks Historical Society

View down Bridge Street 1915



American River Parkway



This sign was sponsored by the Fair Oaks Historical Society.