



Charlene Duval, Executive Secretary

cduval@sourisseauacademy.org

Leilani Marshall, Archivist

lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org

Phone: 408 808-2064

Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

Waterways and Floods

by Michael Pearce

Les Amis (The Friends)

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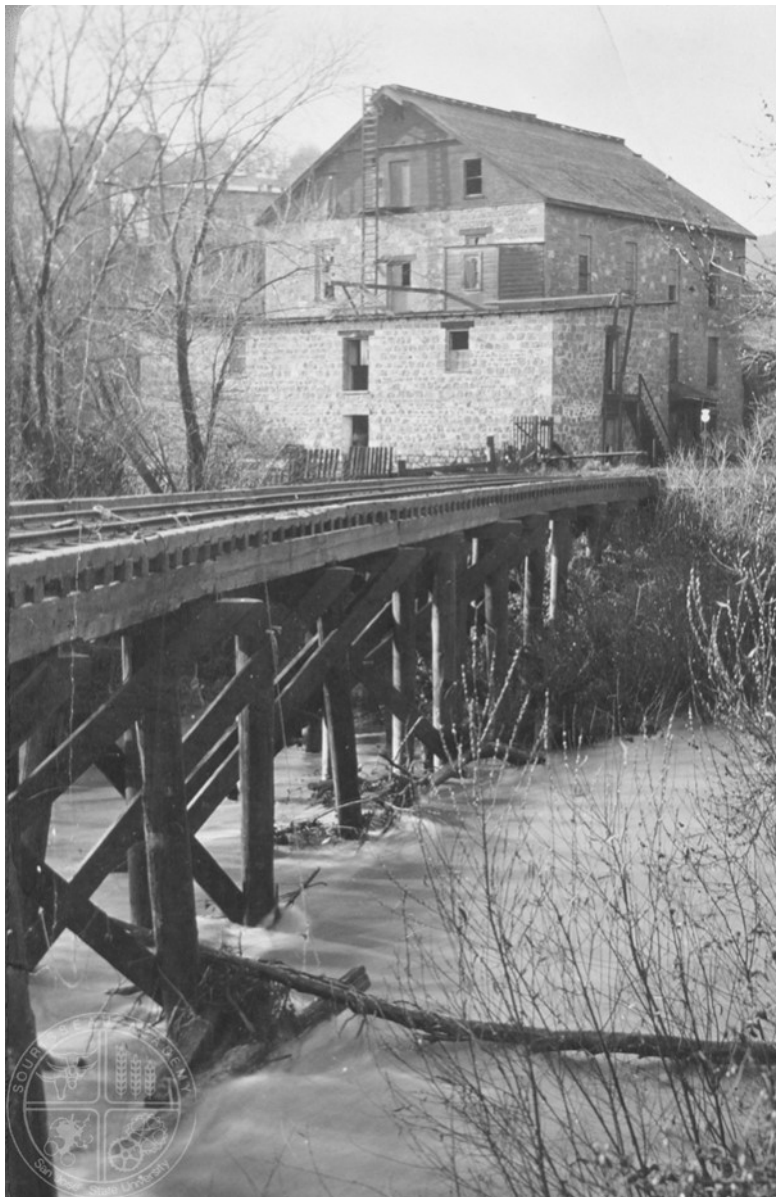
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[44] **The Guadalupe River** - The story of San Jose begins along the banks of a river. The Guadalupe River runs through the heart of Santa Clara Valley and is a central feature of the valley, as is its flooding. The original site of Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe, plagued by frequent floods, was moved one-mile south to present-day Plaza de Cesar Chavez in the late 1790s. The Guadalupe itself has been significantly altered over the centuries. In the 1870s, the river's channel was straightened and the mouth was rerouted a mile east to the Alviso Slough, which improved steamboat navigability.



[45] **Forbes Mill** - Los Gatos Creek played a significant role in the founding of Los Gatos when in 1854 James Forbes established the Los Gatos' first flour mill along its banks. Unfortunately, Forbes chose his location poorly. The creek only provided sufficient power to operate the mill during the wet winter months, and Forbes went bankrupt in 1858. However, the town of Los Gatos that had formed around the mill would go on to flourish. Seen here are Los Gatos Creek and Forbes Mill in 1905, when it was a power plant for local gas utilities.



[46] **Lake Monahan** - In 1915, the Guadalupe River was briefly dammed to create a small lake, located between Santa Clara and San Augustine (now St. John) Streets. Known as "Monahan's Lake," after Mayor Thomas Monahan, it featured boating and other recreational activities. Although the venture was short-lived, efforts to revitalize the downtown portion of the Guadalupe River as a place for recreation led to the creation of the Guadalupe River Park and Gardens.



[47] **Flood of 1890** - Throughout San Jose's history, floods have been a perennial challenge for Santa Clara Valley. In 1890, the Guadalupe River flooded much of the downtown area, as seen in this photo taken near West Santa Clara Street and what is now Almaden Avenue. Visible in the background to the right is the flooded campus of the College of Notre Dame.



[48] **Flood of 1911** - One of the most significant floods of the Guadalupe River occurred in 1911 when most of downtown San Jose was inundated. The flood remains the worst in San Jose's history in terms of the area affected. The flood provided local druggist and photographer James Webb with the perfect opportunity to capture scenes of the disaster and to create this staged photo taken on San Fernando near Vine Street, which he used for his postcards.

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[49] **Alviso Flooding 1938** - Located at the mouths of both the Guadalupe River and the Coyote Creek, and now thirteen feet below sea level, no area within Santa Clara Valley has had more experience with flooding than Alviso. San Jose's northernmost neighborhood, which was an independent city until 1968, began as the central shipping hub for the South Bay. It was home to the Bayside Cannery, the third largest cannery in the country during the early 1900s. The worker's cabins for the cannery at the intersection of Hope and Elizabeth Streets can be seen in this photo of the 1938 flood.

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[50] **Alviso Flooding 1958** - Alviso was hit particularly hard by continual flooding, including particularly severe ones in 1955, 1958, and 1983. Pictured here is the 1958 inundation of the town. Today, Alviso is a popular spot for bird watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts as it borders the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge. Although now protected by higher levees, the neighborhood confronts an uncertain future in the face of rising sea levels.



[51] **Coyote Creek** - Coyote Creek forms the eastern boundary of downtown San Jose. Like the Guadalupe River, the creek poses a continual flood risk to downtown, flooding repeatedly in the early part of the last century. During its most recent deluge in February 2017, Coyote Creek rose to its highest recorded level, breaking a record that had stood since 1922. Shown here is Coyote Creek flooding and damaging nearby railroad tracks in 1938.



[52] **Wells** - Our most significant source of water has always been right under our feet. This photo shows a well being drilled. Wells were the principle irrigation sources by the valley's farmers and orchardists during the heyday of the "Valley of Heart's Delight." By the 1920s, the once plentiful groundwater basin was being overdrawn, resulting in sinking of the valley floor by 13 feet. Recognizing the need to address this issue, voters approved the creation of the Santa Clara Valley Water Conservation District. The agency, now known as the Santa Clara Valley Water District, was given broad authority to regulate and manage both the surface and groundwater resources of the county .



[53] **Vasona Reservoir** -The oldest and smallest of the reservoirs along Los Gatos Creek is Vasona Reservoir, which was one of the original reservoirs constructed under the authority of the Santa Clara Valley Water Conservation District in the mid 1930s. The reservoir forms the center of a popular park near downtown Los Gatos and is among the most frequented reservoirs in the Santa Clara Valley's watershed. Along with a number of smaller percolation ponds and Lexington Reservoir, Vasona plays an important role in the replenishment of the valley's water table.

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[54] **Lexington Reservoir** - Concerns over the continued development of the valley's groundwater resources led to the need to dam Los Gatos Creek and create an additional percolation reservoir. The site chosen included the towns of Lexington and Alma, once important stagecoach stops for travelers to and from Santa Cruz. The population of the two towns had declined to only 100 persons by 1950. The construction of the dam was completed in 1952. During drought years, the remnants of these towns are still visible in the dry bed of the reservoir.



[55] **Stevens Creek Reservoir** - Stevens Creek Reservoir, shown here under construction in 1935, takes its name from the creek that ran adjacent to the Elisha Stephens homestead in what is now Cupertino. Stephens was a pioneer who arrived in 1844 after leading the first successful wagon train across the Sierra Nevada. Although his name is misspelled, it still commemorates a major road and this reservoir.



[56] **Coyote Lake** - The first and smaller of the two reservoirs along Coyote Creek, Coyote Lake was constructed between 1934 and 1936. Here we see the construction of the dam in 1935. The reservoir sits directly on the active Calaveras Fault.



[57] **Coyote Lake** - This image was taken of Coyote Lake after its completion. The possible failure of the Coyote Lake and Anderson Lake dams in a major earthquake would prove disastrous for much of southern Santa Clara Valley. The 2017 flooding of Coyote Creek brought renewed attention to these risks.



[58] **Anderson Reservoir** - Anderson reservoir and dam were completed in 1950, with a capacity greater than that of all of the other reservoirs in the county combined. In 1955, heavy rains sent water overflowing into Coyote Creek, captured in this dramatic image. A similar overflow in 2017 led to the disastrous Coyote Creek flood in downtown San Jose. Plans are currently underway to rebuild major portions of the dam to address the risk of overflow during heavy rains and earthquake damage. The construction of all these dams, meant to raise groundwater levels, helped to provide the necessary water resources to ultimately allow the extensive development of the Santa Clara Valley.