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Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

St. James Square

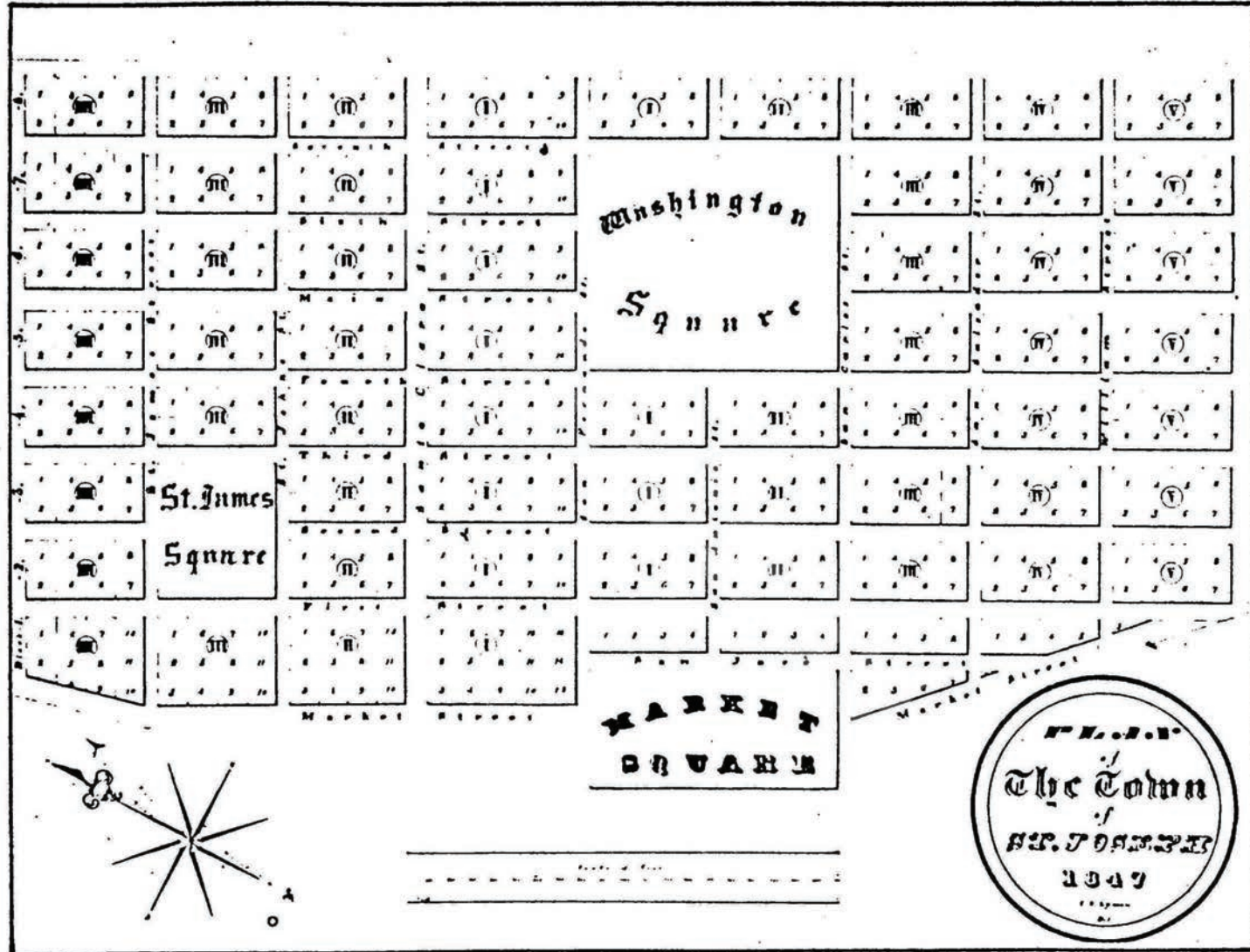
by Charlene Duval

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June 2015

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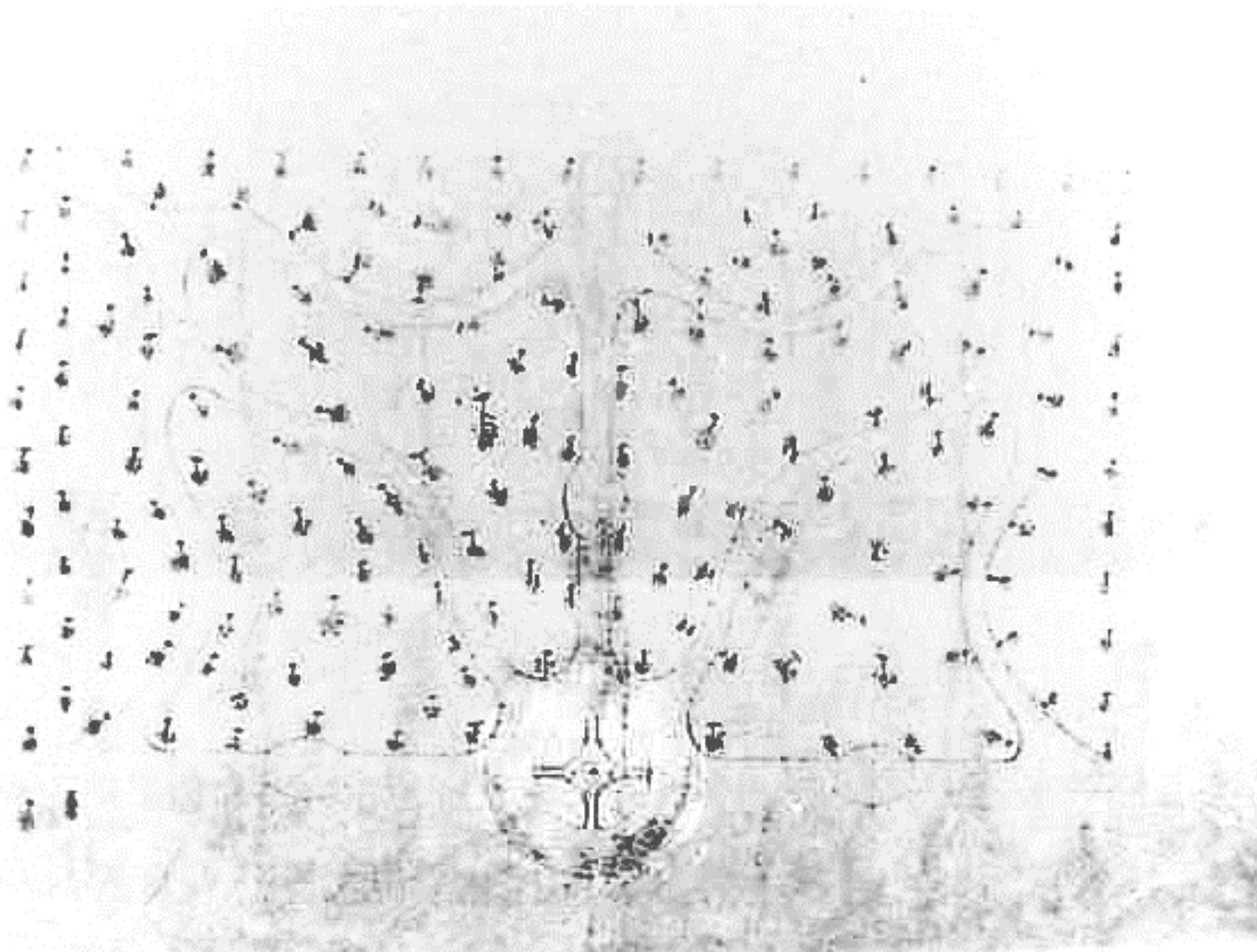
[58] **Lyman Map 1847** . St. James Park, also historically known as St. James Square, was first established as one of three public squares in San José prior to California’s admission as the thirty-first state. The Square was outlined as two square blocks (7.7 acres) of open space, bounded by First, St. James, Third and St. John Streets, on Chester Lyman’s survey of the “Town of St. Joséph” in 1847. It was the smallest of the three that also included the existing Market Square (the historic Plaza of Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe, and now known as Plaza de Cesar Chavez) and Washington Square (the original core site of San José State University).



[59] **St. James School, 1866.** St. James Square remained undeveloped during the first two decades of its existence although a portion of the site was home to Public School #2, called the St. James School until 1869. In 1866, the square was fenced as seen running along the south side of St. James Street.



[60] **Trinity Episcopal Church.** The 1860s brought a building residential building boom around St. James Square. The first major non-residential building was Trinity Episcopal Church, constructed in 1863. City efforts to fully utilize the site began in earnest in 1866 with an unsuccessful proposal to locate the State Normal School within the square.



[61] **William O'Donnell Plan for St. James Park 1867.** In 1867, William O'Donnell, a landscape designer and proprietor of a local nursery called O'Donnell's Gardens, provided a design for St. James Square -- a perfectly symmetrical design of pathways with the exact locations for all the proposed trees. O'Donnell also designed San Jose's Market Square.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
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[62] **Santa Clara County Courthouse and O'Donnell Landscaping.** In 1868, the building that was to become the Santa Clara County Courthouse was constructed facing the square, in hope of luring the California State Capitol back to San José. You can see that the trees planted by O'Donnell are still quite small.

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[63] **Southeast View from the Courthouse across St. John and Second Streets c1871.** By 1870, the City awarded a competitive contract to O'Donnell to fully develop the park, which included a botanical style garden layout of 250 trees, lawn, and pathways. In the distance, the new Normal School built in Washington Square can be seen. The church with the tall steeple was First Presbyterian Church on Second Street.



[64] **Ulrich's Landscape Design, c1892.** An additional refinement of the design occurred in 1887 following a failed attempt to bisect the park with North Second Street. The park was redesigned by noted landscape architect Rudolph Ulrich who also further embellished Market Square. Ulrich also designed the gardens of the Hayes Mansion at Edenvale, the State Normal School, the Stanford Estate, the Phelan Estate in Santa Cruz, and the Kearney Mansion in Fresno, but is best known for his gardens at the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey. It appears that Ulrich most likely designed or planned the central fountain. In the past, Frederick Law Olmsted was thought to have been the landscape architect, but that turned out to be erroneous as no evidence has been found in newspapers of the time or in Olmsted's papers that he ever was involved in the design of the park.



[65] **St. James Hotel on First Street and McKinley Monument, c1900.** By the end of the century, the square had become a robust Victorian-style urban park, and major urban uses began to develop at the perimeter, including additional churches, lodge halls, and hotels. As a center of civic life, the park became the home to a number of memorials, including monuments to President McKinley, General Henry Morris Naglee, Senator Robert Kennedy, and more recently the Fireman's Bell memorial.



[66] **Mob breaking down the door of the jail, November 26, 1933.** During the 1930s, a number of significant events occurred within the park boundaries, including two strike rallies by cannery workers, and the infamous lynchings related to the Brooke Hart Kidnapping in 1933.



[67] The appearance and status of the park began to change in the 1950s, when the fountain was removed and North Second Street was routed through the park, to be followed with light rail in 1988. On March 23, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy made his well-known speech in the park, and later a podium was placed in the park to commemorate his presence there. The existing St. James Community Center, designed by the local architectural firm of Higgins and Root, was constructed in the park as an interim use in 1968; the building was designed with the intention of easy relocation in the future. By this time, the Victorian-style landscape was gone. Community efforts began in 1976 to remove the North Second Street intrusion from the original square and to re-introduce the central fountain in an attempt to resurrect the 1880s square design. The park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 as a part of the St. James Square Historic District, and was designated in 1984 as a contributor to San José's St. James Square Historic Landmark District.



[68] A 1985 master plan proposed to unify the park by reducing the impact of Second Street. This plan was not fully implemented due to the introduction of the light rail, although a new fountain was constructed on the west side of Second Street reminiscent of the earlier fountain. Other recent changes have occurred including a removal of the Fireman's Bell Memorial, and the installation of a new children's playground in the southeast quadrant of the park.



[69] **St. James Park, early 1900s.** As we reflect on the history of St. James Park from its inception in 1847 until today, it is important to remember that this place is a priceless jewel in the center of San Jose. It is the duty of the citizens of the city to recognize its importance to our history and continue to restore and maintain its beauty as we move forward into the future.