

San Jose

Archaeologists tell us that people have been living in the Bay Area for about 12,500 years. They have evidence that the people we call Ohlone lived here for about 2,500 years before the Spanish came to San Jose.

There were tribes in the Bay Area when Luís Peralta and his family started building El Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe for their distant king. The people who lived closest to San Jose were called Tamien.

Spanish officers reported that the grasses grew tall and rich on the Tamien lands, the place the Spanish called llano de los robles, the plain of the oaks. They knew that this land would support their wheat and corn fields. Governor Don Felipe de Neve ordered that a pueblo (town) be built on these rich grass lands. On November 29, 1777 Lieutenant Jose Joaquin Moraga led settlers to the new site of El Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe; Alta California's first Spanish town.

This new pueblo had the all important job of feeding the king's soldiers at his presidios of San Francisco and Monterey. San Jose also had to feed California's governors and guests in Monterey, as well as Spanish sailors patrolling the Pacific. The fields were rich but the "farmers" were mostly recently retired soldiers and city folk who often did not know

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much about farming. Keeping them all working together was the work of the comisionado. The comisionado was usually a sergeant who served as a local royal military governor. He was in charge of everything.

San Jose had many comisionados but none lasted as long, or was as respected, as Don Luís María Peralta. He held his post until the kingdom fell to the Mexican rebels. He was rewarded for his good work with one of California's biggest land grants.

The people of San Jose took Mexican citizenship in 1825. By that time the Alcade (mayor) and the Regidors (councilmen) were in charge of San Jose. The new Mexican constitution was very popular in San Jose and many people took advantage of their new freedoms.

Under Spanish rule no one could do business with anybody but other Spanish citizens. The Mexicans let the Californios trade with anyone they wanted to and let them set their own prices. They also allowed other people to live in California. Soon San Jose had people from England, Ireland, Scotland, Italy, France, Canada, and America. If those foreigners learned Spanish, became Catholic, and swore allegiance to Mexico, they could become Mexican citizens. These were the days of the great ranchos.