

City-Wide Historic Context

Prior to European settlement, Nisenan (Southern Maidu) and Plains Miwok Indians lived in the Sacramento area. Similar to other California cities, the earliest recorded European exploration of the area was by Spanish explorers and missionaries.¹ In 1808, Gabriel Moraga became the first recorded European to visit the Sacramento Valley while searching for suitable sites for a future mission. Although Moraga did not settle in the area, he named the valley and river Sacramento, after the Spanish word for the Holy Sacrament, and opened up new possibilities for discovery. At this time, the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers consisted mainly of an oak-studded grassland, which frequently flooded.²

For the next two decades, various travelers explored the Sacramento River and its surroundings but did not establish any permanent settlements. Finally in 1839, John Sutter, along with a few Hawaiian and European settlers, established a fort on the land known as New Helvetia, which was given to them as part of an agreement with the Mexican government.³ Sutter's Fort served defensive as well as commercial purposes due to the ever-increasing number of immigrants arriving in the area.⁴ In addition to raising herds of horses and cattle, Sutter introduced the first horticultural enterprises to the area by planting

- 1 Thor Severson, *Sacramento, An Illustrated History: 1839-1874, From Sutter's Fort to Capital City* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1973), 17.
- 2 Albert L. Hurtado, "John A. Sutter and the Indian Business," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 20-21.
- 3 Severson, 21-31.
- 4 Kenneth N. Owens, "River City: Sacramento's Gold Rush Birth and Transfiguration," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 42.

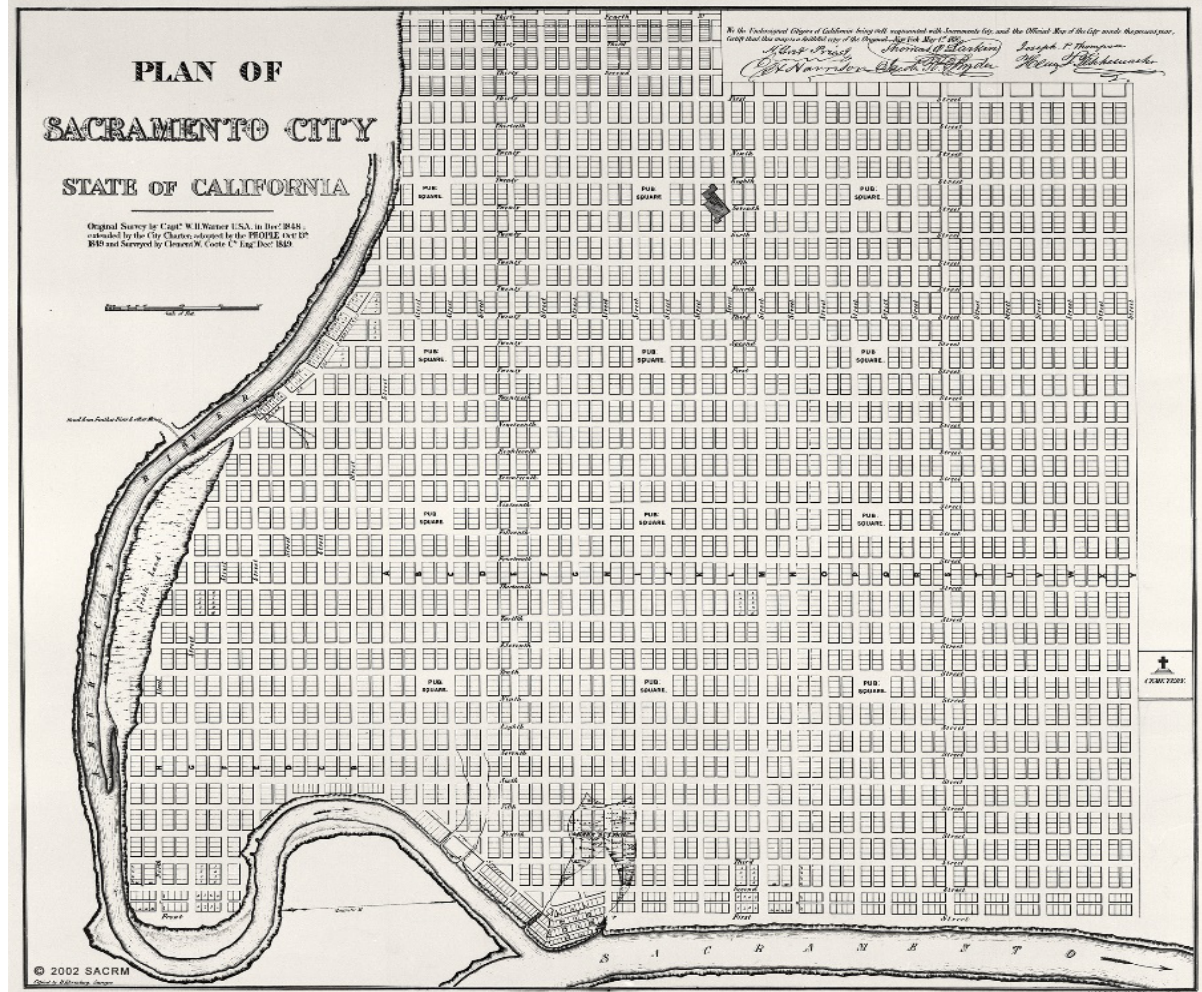


Figure 1. Facsimile copy of Captain W.H. Warner's 1848 survey map of Sacramento with 1849 extensions (1849). Source: Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.

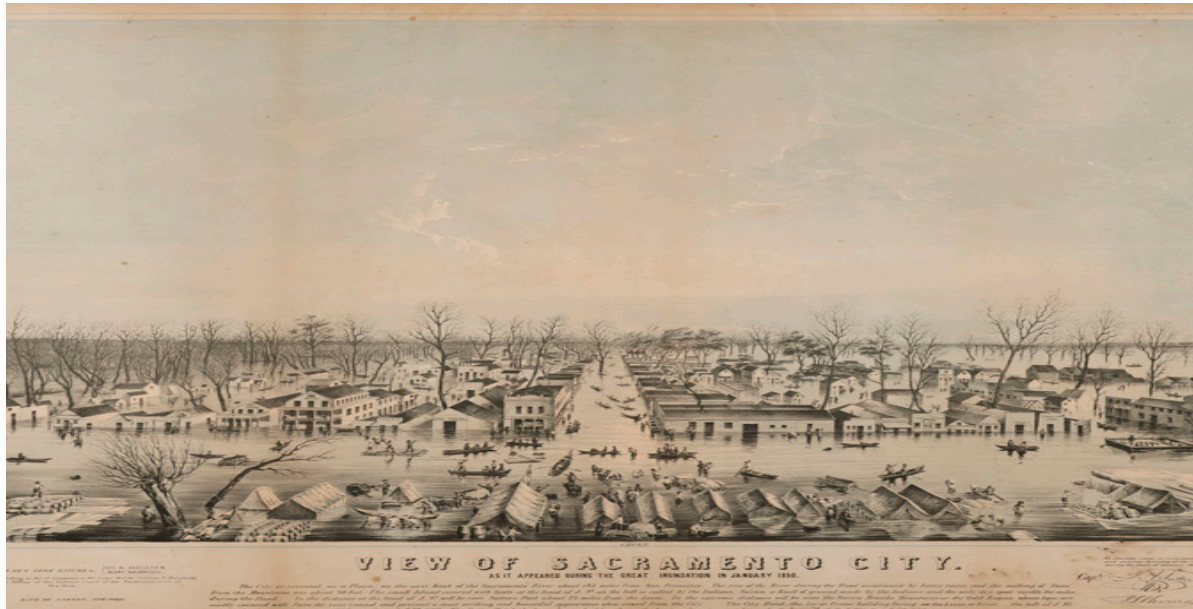


Figure 2. View of Sacramento during the flood of 1850 (1850). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

fields of grain and corn.⁵ In an attempt to expand his valley empire, Sutter erected a sawmill at Coloma, which led to the accidental discovery of gold in the area in 1848. The subsequent Gold Rush brought a massive influx of miners and other immigrants. This event quickly overturned the ranch economy and led to Sacramento's rapid growth into a city.⁶ The proximity to the mouth of the American River made Sacramento an ideal port for goods coming upriver from San Francisco en route to the gold fields.⁷

5 Severson, 36.

6 Hurtado, 26.

7 William Burg, *Sacramento's K Street: Where Our City Was Born* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 18-20.

By 1848, Sutter had amassed substantial debts and was at risk of losing his rancho. His son, John August Sutter, Jr., commissioned the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers to survey and plat the land between the embarcadero and the fort into lots that he could sell off to repay his father's debts. The plan worked and established the gridiron plan.⁸ Eighty-foot-wide streets traveling east to west were named for the letters of the alphabet, while those traveling north to south were numbered from one to 31. Each

8 Nathan Hallam, "We Must Give the World Confidence in the Stability and Permanence of the Place: Planning Sacramento's Townsite, 1853-1870," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 64.

block measured 320 feet wide by 340 feet in length and was bisected by a 20-foot-wide alley.

The lots sold quickly, and the city's population rose rapidly from 150 in 1849 to 9,087 in the following year. In 1850, California was admitted to the Union, and for the first several years of statehood, the state government moved from city to city as various municipalities - including San Jose, Vallejo, Benicia, and Sacramento - vied to become the new state's capital. Sacramento emerged as the logical choice because of its rising population and potential as an economic and transportation hub; it was chosen as the permanent capital city of California in 1854.⁹ But while the city's location offered many advantages, it also exhibited a host of problems that threatened the city's success and position as the state capital. Between 1850 and 1893, ten major floods devastated the city.¹⁰ Fires were a constant worry as well. The most devastating fire occurred in 1852 when 55 blocks of the city's business district, approximately 70 percent the city's building stock, went up in smoke. Another fire in 1854 destroyed 12 city blocks. These conflagrations led to the reconstruction of much of the city using fireproof brick or stone.¹¹

As a result of such disasters, early development centered around flood and fire protection. The establishment of the city's first volunteer fire company and the construction of its first levee occurred in 1850.¹² Looking for a more permanent solution, the

9 Hallam, 68-69.

10 Karen Wilson, *A Century of Protecting Natomas: The History of Reclamation District 1000, 1911-2011* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 2011), 9-14.; Owens, 56.

11 Owens, 50; Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library, *Sacramento's Alkali Flat* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 7.

12 Severson.



Figure 3. Sacramento's second county courthouse being raised (ca. 1870). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPM02400.

city raised the street levels of the business district after back-to-back floods in 1852 and 1853, and again after particularly devastating floods in the winter of 1861-1862. These efforts ultimately raised the city's grade to approximately 10 to 12 feet above the natural topography. First stories became basements, and "hollow sidewalks" were created in the process of filling and rebuilding streets up to the new grade.¹³ The undertaking was funded by taxes on property owners, who realized that stabilizing the city was a shared investment that would protect and benefit their personal fortunes.¹⁴ From 1864 to 1868, the city undertook the even more impressive feat of rerouting the American River through dry slough beds to a

¹³ Hallam, 66-68, 75.
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

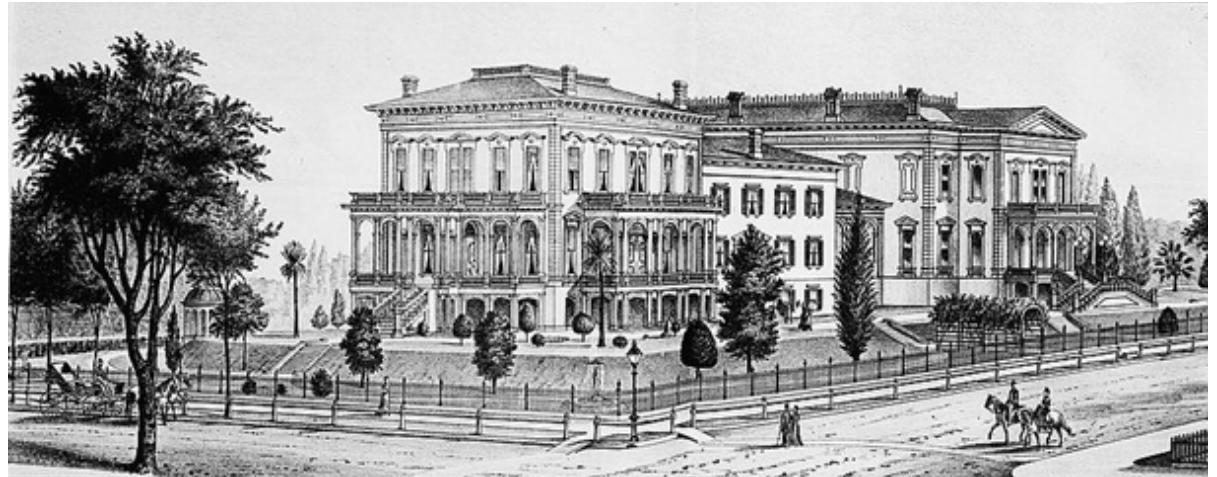


Figure 4. Drawing of the Crocker Residence from Thompson and West's Illustrated History of Sacramento Co. (1880). Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS CAL,34-SAC,20--1.

location approximately a mile north of Sutter Lake. The project improved the flow of the river and took pressure off the levees to the north of the city that had been repeatedly breached by floodwaters.¹⁵

On the domestic front, the 1852 and 1854 fires had created a blank slate for new building within the young city.¹⁶ From the late 1850s onward, new buildings in the city reflected the current trends in architecture that were imported from East Coast pattern books and the influx of new architects that arrived during the Gold Rush. While ethnic minorities and seasonal workers often lived near the factories and railyards in the West End neighborhood—roughly the area west of the Capitol to the Sacramento River between I and

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.
¹⁶ Owens, 50.

R streets—houses for more established residents were constructed in the fashionable designs of the times just north of the downtown business district in the elite residential neighborhood of Alkali Flat.¹⁷

Like other California cities, Sacramento became filled with homes in a myriad of styles that reflected the latest architectural trends. Initially, residential architecture in Sacramento favored the older Classically-inspired Greek Revival style. In the 1870s and 1880s, Italianate became the most popular style for new houses in the city, as reflected in two of the city's largest architectural homes, the Crocker mansion (now the Crocker Art Museum) and the Fogus-Stanford mansion (now Leland Stanford

¹⁷ GEI Consultants, Inc., "Mid-Century Modern in the City of Sacramento Historic Context Statement and Survey Results" (2011), 2-1.

Mansion State Historic Park), both by architect Seth Babson. At the end of the century, the Queen Anne style dominated residential construction.¹⁸ Architects and designers adapted these styles to Sacramento's unique environmental challenges, creating a characteristic "floodplain" or "Delta" architecture in which long flights of stairs led to the primary living or business quarters on a raised first story built above a high basement. This arrangement allowed houses to be inundated by 10 to 12 feet of water with little damage during floods.¹⁹

In the late nineteenth century, the increasing industrialization of Sacramento's downtown, influx of low-income laborers into the central city, and introduction of streetcar service led to the development of new residential neighborhoods on the fringes of Sacramento's original 1848 city limits. Affluent middle- and upper-class residents migrated to these new neighborhoods, many of which incorporated modern urban planning principles and landscaping to create clean, orderly, and parklike living environments. By the early twentieth century, these new neighborhoods featured "modern homes" constructed in the new Craftsman and Prairie styles that appealed to middle-class families along tree-lined streets and near parks. Many neighborhoods followed a common pattern of development in which large homes for affluent residents lined major east-west streets, while more modestly-sized houses were located on numbered streets. Stables and cottages for servants and laborers, meanwhile, were

frequently built facing the alleys.²⁰ Crucially, these new neighborhoods—such as Boulevard Park, Winn Park, Bungalow Row, Capital Mansions, Oak Park, and Newton Booth—were situated along streetcar lines that gave residents access to workplaces downtown and east of the city.²¹ The emergence of Sacramento's streetcar suburbs coincided with a national trend at a time when transit-focused residential development flourished in cities across the country. New transportation infrastructure radically improved urban residents' mobility and allowed middle- and upper-class households to build houses in the suburban periphery, where land was cheaper, while still having access to urban amenities. Streetcar suburbs around the country developed in outward extensions from the urban core, as developers expanded city grids to parallel new streetcar lines.²² Sacramento's turn-of-the-century streetcar suburbs were the beginning of a trend that continued throughout the course of the twentieth century as the city's continuous growth and the rise of the automobile spurred the relocation of residents to ever-newer and more modern suburbs at increasing distances from the city center.²³ The twenty-first century has experienced a reversal of this pattern, as more people move back into Sacramento's central neighborhoods to take advantage of its walkable streets, historic architecture, and cultural amenities.²⁴

The City of Sacramento's 2035 General Plan included historic context statements for four primary themes that have influenced Sacramento's development: the agricultural industry; the railroads; state government; and World War II, transportation, and redevelopment. In 2017, a Mid-Century Modern historic context statement was also completed. The following sections offer an expanded discussion of those five historic contexts.

¹⁸ Donald S. Napoli and H. Ruth Todd, "Central City Historic Structures Inventory, Part I: Findings and Recommendations" (1996), 3-1.
¹⁹ Owens, 58.

²⁰ Evaluation Committee of Sacramento Heritage, Inc., 307.

²¹ Nathan Hallam, "The Evolution of Sacramento's Central City Street Grid," (master's thesis, Sonoma State University, 2003), 63-64.

²² Linda Flint McClelland, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: Historic Residential Suburbs in the United States, 1830-1960. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2002, 18-20.

²³ William Burg, Sacramento's Streetcars (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 7-8.

²⁴ Central Core Design Guidelines, 2nd Edition (2018), 2-2.

Agriculture

Sacramento is located in the Sacramento Valley, the northern portion of the California's Central Valley, which contains approximately 500 miles of some of the richest agricultural land in the world. When John Sutter arrived in 1839 and established the settlement of New Helvetia, he tended wheat fields on the rancho and expanded Sutter's Fort so that it could accommodate herds of cattle and horses. Grain cultivation and grazing continued to dominate land use in the Sacramento area until the turn of the twentieth century, when commercial crops – such as citrus fruits, olives, almonds, figs, tomatoes, and more – took over. The frontage along the Sacramento River, meanwhile, developed into a nearly continuous line of orchards. The shift reflected evolving and growing demands from people across the U.S. for produce from the Sacramento Valley.²⁵

The city's proximity to the state's rich producing regions, rivers that could provide an unlimited supply of water, transportation options, and a rapidly growing population quickly transformed Sacramento into the commercial and manufacturing hub of California's agricultural industry. Goods and products were shipped between Sacramento and San Francisco and the wider region by steamboats that plied the Sacramento River daily, and, with the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, transported by train from Sacramento to

²⁵ Winfield Davis, "Sacramento County," in *Transactions of the California State Agricultural Society during the Year 1901* (Sacramento: Office of State Printing, 1903), 322-334.



Figure 5. California Almond Growers Exchange nut shelling plant (ca. 1914). Source: Center for Sacramento History, 1981/06/6212.

markets across the United States.²⁶ Manufacturers quickly took advantage of the city's location. Canneries, dairies, flour mills, breweries, and packaging manufacturers were constructed along the

²⁶ "Railroads and Agriculture," California State Railroad Museum, accessed 10 December 2012, <http://www.csrmf.org/explore-and-learn/railroad-history/california-calls-you/railroads-and-agriculture>.

Sacramento and American rivers and rail lines that traversed the city to make the packing and shipping of produce as efficient as possible. Employment opportunities in the city's burgeoning agricultural industries and railyards attracted large populations of laborers from the eastern U.S. and countries around the world. Workers from China, Mexico, Ireland, Germany, and other countries established

ethnic communities throughout the city, largely determined by their proximity to available work and discriminatory housing covenants that prevented them from settling elsewhere. Alkali Flat evolved into a predominately Mexican neighborhood, while St. Rose of Lima Church, now part of the Merchant Street Historic District, was the center of Sacramento's Irish community. A vibrant Chinatown developed along the I Street banks of Sutter Lake between 2nd and 6th Streets. Many other ethnic communities were located in areas of the West End that were razed during the redevelopment projects of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁷

Because of its prominence in the agriculture industry, Sacramento was chosen as the permanent home of the California State Fair in 1861. The decision necessitated the construction of dedicated fairgrounds. The first state fairgrounds were located in what is today the Boulevard Park neighborhood, with other facilities scattered throughout the central city.²⁸ In 1909, the fairgrounds were relocated and consolidated to an area at the city's southeast corner, near Stockton Boulevard and 2nd Avenue.²⁹

Since 1968, the fair has taken place at the Cal Expo grounds, located on a previously undeveloped 356-acre tract of land north of the American River.³⁰

Themes

The primary historic themes and events which characterize the history of agriculture in Sacramento include:

- "Changing land uses and agricultural production and transport methods reflected the demand for Sacramento Valley produce from the nation and beyond;
- Sacramento's prominence in agriculture and related industries made it the permanent home of the California State Fair;
- Sacramento became home to many important agriculture-related manufacturing and shipping operations, and the agriculture industry was a major force in the city's economic and population growth; and
- Influx of laborers who worked on farms and in packing plants in the area and operated manufacturing plants in Sacramento established ethnic communities."³¹
- The transportation of agricultural goods via the railroad resulted in a common development pattern in the Central City in which industrial buildings with utilitarian design were clustered around railroad lines.

²⁷ General Plan Technical Background Report, Appendix B (2013), 6.3-13-15.

²⁸ Severson, 131-134.

²⁹ Marty Relles, "Walking to the Old California State Fair," Valley Community Newspapers, 19 May 2011, accessed 8 January 2013, <http://www.valcomnews.com/?p=4108>.

³⁰ Debbie Arrington, "State Fair builds on 160 years of fun, learning," *Sacramento Bee*, July 8, 2013.

³¹ General Technical Background Report, 6.3-29.

Railroads

Before the arrival of the railroad, steamboats traveling on the Sacramento River and wagon trains from the east were the primary means of transporting goods and people to and from Sacramento.³² The city's first steam railroad and common carrier railroad west of the Mississippi River was the Sacramento Valley Railroad, which began construction in 1850.³³ Its tracks ran from a ticket counter on the waterfront, south along the river, and then east along R Street for 22 miles to Folsom. Competing companies soon emerged. The Central Pacific Railroad, owned by four businessmen who became known as "the Big Four," surpassed them all when it was chosen in 1862 to construct the western portion of the transcontinental railroad with its western terminus located in Sacramento.³⁴

The completion of the transcontinental railroad and competition between the railroad companies was one of the most important factors in the development of Sacramento. The railroad companies constructed buildings and infrastructure throughout the city that were an integral part of their operation, including passenger depots, tracks that crisscrossed the city, and complexes of industrial shops where railcars were manufactured and repaired. They also altered the natural landscape. The Central Pacific and Southern Pacific railroad companies dumped railroad refuse

³² Severson, 166-170.

³³ "The Railroad Stations of Sacramento," *California State Railroad Museum* (2011), accessed 10 December 2012, <http://www.csrnf.org/visitor-information/other-california-state-park-sattractions-in-old-sacramento/central-pacificrailroad-passenger-station/the-railroad-stations-of-sacramento>.

³⁴ Library of Congress, "Pacific Railway Act," *Primary Documents in American History*, 30 July 2010, accessed 23 December 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/PacificRail.html>.



Figure 6. A Central Pacific Railroad locomotive travels through Sacramento (1865). Source: Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.

into Sutter Lake, a swampy lake on the northern edge of the city nicknamed "China Slough" because of Sacramento's Chinatown that was located on its south bank. As part of the expansion of the Southern Pacific rail yard, and because of complaints about its polluted waters, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company filled

in Sutter Lake in 1908.³⁵ The railroad companies also constructed and maintained levees on the rights-of-way that the city had granted to them. The railroads

³⁵ "City of Sacramento, "Early Site History," accessed 26 July 2018, <https://www.cityofsacramento.org/Public-Works/Sacramento-Valley-Station/Background/Early-Site-History>.

became a catalyst for the development of agricultural and industrial businesses throughout the city.³⁶ Many factories, canneries, and manufacturing plants were strategically situated along rail lines where fresh produce could be easily shipped in for processing and packaging and then transported directly to market.³⁷

The railroads played an instrumental role in the migration of people into and out of the city. When they were first constructed, the railroads attracted large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds to Sacramento with the prospect of work. The workforces who constructed the first railroads in the 1850s and 1860s were almost entirely made up of Irish and Chinese immigrants.³⁸ Mexican immigrants began arriving in large numbers around 1910 and again during World War II in response to labor shortages in the railroad and agricultural industries.³⁹ Many of these groups remained in Sacramento and settled near the rail yards where they had easier access to employment opportunities.

By the late nineteenth century, streetcar lines proliferated across the city, leading to the creation of the first residential subdivisions and the migration of residents outside of the city. Starting in the early twentieth century, Sacramento also had four electric interurban railroads that provided passenger service

and contributed additional railroad buildings and infrastructure to the urban landscape. The interurban railroads were cleaner and cheaper, with more frequent trains and stops than the steam railroad and faster and heavier than city streetcars. They allowed people living in small towns or rural areas to visit businesses in Sacramento's downtown core.⁴⁰ The migration of residents further from the city center accelerated over the course of the century as the automobile replaced trains and streetcars as the primary mode of transportation and enabled people to live further from their workplaces.⁴¹ Although streetcar service ended in 1947, the railroads persisted.⁴² In the 1970s, the majority of rail passenger service was transferred to Amtrak, which is operated by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation. In 1987, the Sacramento Regional Transit District began light rail service, portions of which continue to operate on historic railroad corridors.⁴³

Themes

The primary historic themes and events which characterize the history of railroads in Sacramento include:

- Urban growth spurred by the completion of the transcontinental railroad and competing railroad companies
- Development of industrial areas within the city as a result of railroad construction
- Expansion of railroad service to agricultural and industrial facilities
- Electrification of the railways, for both freight and passenger/commuter services⁴⁴
- The movement of people and creation of new residential neighborhoods spurred by the expansion of streetcar lines and interurban railroads

³⁶ Huffman, The Placerville Branch of the Southern Pacific.

³⁷ William Burg, "The Big Tomato," *Midtown Monthly* (11 March 2011), accessed 10 December 2012, <http://www.midtownmonthly.net/life/the-big-tomato/>; C.W. Geiger, "Libby, McNeill & Libby's Sacramento Cannery," *Canning Age* (January 1921), 12.

³⁸ Dawn Emord and David Bushong, "The Workers of the Central Pacific," *The Transcontinental Railroad: Different Faces Behind "The Work of the Age"*, accessed 10 December 2012, <http://bushong.net/dawn/about/college/ids100/workers.shtml>.

³⁹ Armando Navarro, *Mexicano Political Experience in Occupied Aztlan: Struggles and Change* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 375.

⁴⁰ William D. Middleton, *The Interurban Era* (Milwaukee, WI: Kalmbach Publishing, 1961), accessed 10 December 2012, http://libsysdigi.library.illinois.edu/oca/Books2009-06/interurbanera00midd/interurbanera00midd_djvu.txt, 12.

⁴¹ Center for Sacramento History, *Images of America: Old Sacramento and Downtown* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2006).

⁴² William Burg, *Sacramento's K Street: Where Our City Was Born* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 107.

⁴³ General Plan Technical Background Report, 6.3-75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.3-75.

State Government

The City of Sacramento was chosen to be California's capital in 1854 after growing rapidly during the Gold Rush into the new state's transportation, agricultural, and manufacturing hub. Although devastating floods and fires repeatedly threatened the city's success and newfound political status, large-scale flood control projects—such as the construction of levees, decision to raise the grade of the city above the floodplain, and rerouting of the American River—brought stability to the city that solidified its position.⁴⁵ Initially, government services took place in boats docked along the embarcadero, but as the state government grew, these services were relocated to buildings near the waterfront.⁴⁶ Among them were the B.F. Hastings building, where the first State Supreme Court met, and the county courthouse, which served as the first State Capitol building.⁴⁷

The state's present Classical Revival style Capitol Building was constructed between 1860 and 1874, but the state government quickly outgrew it. To accommodate the growing government, a Capitol Area was developed with supplementary state and federal office buildings concentrated on the blocks surrounding the Capitol. In 1872, the four blocks of land that the city had initially allotted for the Capitol were expanded to ten to allow for the creation of a landscaped park that would provide a suitably grand entrance to the new building. As the government continued to grow in the early decades of the twentieth

⁴⁵ Barbara Lagomarsino, "Early Attempts to Save the Site of Sacramento by Raising its Business District," (master's thesis, Sacramento State College, 1969), 15, 28.

⁴⁶ Hallam, 62.

⁴⁷ General Plan Technical Background Report, 6.3-40-43.



Figure 7. The California State Capitol Building in Sacramento with railroad tracks of the Central Pacific Railroad in the foreground and Agricultural Hall in the background (ca. 1880). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

century, additional state buildings and offices were constructed to the west of the Capitol along M Street (Capitol Avenue). Meanwhile, new civic and private buildings were constructed downtown, many in the Beaux-Arts and Neoclassical styles that were part of the popular City Beautiful Movement of the time.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Sacramento Heritage, Inc., "Sacramento's City Hall Area Walking Tour," 2011, accessed December 2013, http://www.sacramentoheritage.org/files/Downtown_Tour_City_Hall_Area_Writeup_booklet.pdf.

Construction projects and city improvements continued at a slow pace during the Great Depression thanks to federal funding and the construction of military facilities at McClellan Field, Mather Field, and the Sacramento Army Depot. In the 1930s and 1940s, state and federal building projects shifted to the parcels surrounding Capitol Park. The state government's continuous growth accelerated during

the post-World War II boom. In 1949, the East Annex was added to the Capitol Building and planning for the Capitol Mall began with an urban redevelopment plan created by architects Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander. Although their plan was never realized, it prompted the City to create a Civic Improvement District around Capitol Park and the mall from 7th Street to the river.⁴⁹

Starting in the 1950s, state government buildings and functions, which had previously been concentrated around the Capitol and Capitol Park, began to shift to the blocks adjacent to the Capitol Mall and later became dispersed throughout the city.⁵⁰ In the 1960s and 1970s, a desire to clean up Sacramento's blighted downtown and present the city as a beautiful and well-planned capital city spurred large redevelopment projects. Redevelopment around the Capitol began with the 1960 California State Capitol Plan, which proposed purchasing 42 blocks of city streets and demolishing the existing buildings to create seven pedestrian superblocks. As a result, large swaths of housing around the Capitol were demolished to create high-rise office buildings and parking structures that dramatically reduced the downtown residential population from 4,000 to 1,000. Ronald Reagan's election as governor in 1967 curtailed the plan before it could be fully implemented, leaving the city with blocks of razed, empty lots. Rather than construct new buildings according to the 1960 plan, Reagan encouraged the State to lease existing properties for state use, a practice that expanded with the relocation of several regional offices to Sacramento. Recognizing the need to ensure "smart growth" around the

Capitol, in 1978 the Department of General Services (DGS) and the Capitol Area Development Agency (CADA) were chosen to administer the residential elements of an updated 1977 Capitol Area Plan, with the goal of attracting residents back to the city center by rebuilding cleared areas and introducing mixed-use properties. Although the recession in the 2000s slowed further expansion, the California State Government remains the largest employer in Sacramento and occupies approximately ten million square feet in the downtown area. The city's 2035 General Plan encourages the implementation of sustainable practices in future development projects.⁵¹

Themes

The primary historic themes and events which characterize the history of state government in Sacramento include:

- "State governmental buildings followed developmental trends in the city: businesses and services migrated from the Sacramento River Embarcadero to structures in immediate proximity to the river and were subsequently relocated to more permanent, purpose-built structures.
- Building infrastructure (e.g. flood control plan) and maintaining services (e.g. fire department) were crucial for Sacramento to remain the State Capital.
- Development of a Capitol Area – concentrating state office buildings around the State Capitol building, Capitol Park and, later, Capitol Mall, and providing new residential communities – driven by urban planning concepts including the City Beautiful movement, mid-century redevelopment, and more recent sustainable development efforts."⁵²

⁴⁹ General Plan Technical Background Report, 6.3-45.
⁵⁰ "Sacramento's City Hall Area Walking Tour."

⁵¹ General Plan Technical Background Report, 6.3-47-50.

⁵² General Plan Technical Background Report., 6.3-50.

World War II, Transportation, & Redevelopment

World War II had a profound impact on the development of Sacramento. It shifted the focus of Sacramento's economy, which had been founded on the agricultural and railroad industries, to one based on state and federal government, military bases, and transportation. Sacramento's population expanded rapidly during the Depression and World War II as new residents, attracted by the availability of jobs in agriculture and at the nearby military bases, flowed into the region. At the same time, the increasing popularity and availability of automobiles allowed workers to live farther from their place of work, leading to an exodus of people from the city center and the development of new suburban communities.⁵³

The war also had a profound impact on the cultural landscape and demographics of the city. Over the course of the war more than 7,000 Japanese residents from Sacramento were forced to abandon their homes and businesses and sent to internment camps; only 59 percent returned to the city after the war. Many African-Americans, whose population in Sacramento swelled to 1,500 even as segregation continued at the region's military bases, moved into the homes and businesses that the Japanese had left behind. Meanwhile, the U.S. Government established the Bracero Program in an effort to fill job vacancies left by enlisted Americans and interned Japanese residents with "guest laborers" from Mexico. As a result of the program, Mexican workers made up 40 to 45 percent of the labor force at Sacramento's



Figure 8. A demolished area of the West End as a result of the Capitol Mall and West End redevelopment project (1960). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Frank Christy Collection, 1998/722/1480.

canneries in the 1940s and a Mexican community was established in the Alkali Flat neighborhood and around 12th Street.⁵⁴

By the 1970s, cities around the country, including Sacramento, had become sprawling metropolises.⁵⁵ The influx of new residents and rise of "car culture" stressed the city's infrastructure and created traffic

⁵³ Ibid., 6.3-82.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.3-90-92.

⁵⁵ CalTrans, Tract Housing in California, 17 -8.

congestion that further deterred people from traveling downtown. Businesses also began to relocate outside of the central city where larger parcels of land were available for cheaper prices. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the ongoing issue of traffic congestion prompted Sacramento to construct freeways and interstate highways through the downtown core. While the freeways decreased traffic, they also redirected people from the downtown area and physically cut off some of Sacramento's oldest sections, such as Old Sacramento and the Pocket neighborhood, from the rest of the city.⁵⁶

Between 1950 and 1970, the population of the Central City dropped from 58,000 to 27,000 people. Virtually no new single-family houses were constructed during this period, because many downtown neighborhoods, which were typically home to ethnic minority communities and considered economically unstable, were "redlined" and, thus, deemed ineligible for postwar subsidized home loans. Meanwhile, thousands of older houses that were in redevelopment zones were demolished.

Even as the population of the Central City decreased, hundreds of small apartment buildings were built to replace older houses, many of which were intended for entry-level state government employees.⁵⁷ The City adopted planning programs and policies that would simultaneously address the need for more housing while eliminating deteriorated or "substandard" housing. Starting in the mid-1950s, City zoning codes encouraged higher density

residential uses in the Central City, the "Old "City," while maintaining newer neighborhoods outside the original city limits as areas for light density, single-family housing.⁵⁸ Neighborhoods that were located near the downtown business district or along commercial corridors—such as Washington, Washington School, Winn Park, Capitol Mansions, and areas around H Street—were zoned as high density residential areas, while neighborhoods located further from the downtown business district—such as South Side, Poverty Ridge, Newton Booth, Boulevard Park, Marshall School, Richmond Grove, and New Era Park— were zoned as medium density residential areas. These zoning codes resulted in the pattern of mid-twentieth-century apartment buildings located next to earlier nineteenth- and early twentieth-century houses that is visible throughout many neighborhoods in the Central City.⁵⁹

According to the city's 2035 General Plan, "The economic shift from the industries of agriculture and railroads to state government and freeways also led the city to obtain federal redevelopment money to address "slum" neighborhoods that bordered the Sacramento River in the city's West End."⁶⁰ As previously described in the State Government section, the West End in the 1950s was populated primarily by low-income minority communities and seasonal laborers who worked in the railyards, canneries, and agricultural industries that were located downtown. Hoping to beautify the entrance to the city and present Sacramento as a modern, clean, and well-planned

state capital, the city designated the West End as a blighted area and began buying up land, demolishing existing buildings, and displacing residents.⁶¹

Notable redevelopment projects that took place in Sacramento's downtown during the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the clearance of the West End include the creation of the Capitol Mall, K Street Pedestrian Mall, Downtown Plaza Mall, and Old Sacramento Historic District.⁶² In addition to the Capitol Area Development Authority projects that encouraged the preservation and development of mixed-use and residential projects around the Capitol, during the 1970s, the city also adopted redevelopment plans for the Alkali Flat and Oak Park neighborhoods in an effort to extend revitalization efforts to downtrodden neighborhoods outside of Sacramento's downtown core. In Alkali Flat, this resulted in the replacement of 62 substandard dwelling units and blighted warehouses on the blocks between 8th, 10th, D, and E streets with Washington Square, 143 new apartments for low- and moderate-income families. It also included site improvements around the new development, including new streets, curbs, and gutters. In Oak Park, City redevelopment efforts led to the rehabilitation of approximately 26 single-family residences in a three-block area in the northern section of Oak Park, bounded by 37th Street, 3rd Avenue, Santa Cruz Way, and the property alignment between 1st and 2nd avenues. Redevelopment also incorporated street and sidewalk improvements in a second target area between 14th Avenue, 16th Avenue, the South Sacramento Freeway, and 34th Street.⁶³

56 Ibid., 2-14.

57 William Burg, *Sacramento Renaissance: Art, Music, and Activism in California's Capital City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 20-21.

58 "The Sacramento General Plan, Section One," 1974, 2-5.

59 "General Plan, Sacramento, California," 1965; "A Community Plan for the Old-City," 1964.

60 Ibid., 6.3-82.

61 Idem.

62 Ibid., 6.3-119-120.

63 Ibid., 6.3-111-112.

The loss of many of Sacramento's historic buildings in the postwar period spurred the emergence of an active preservation community in the 1970s. In particular, the demolition of the 1927 Moorish style Alhambra Theater in 1972 became the catalyst and rallying cry for the mobilization of Sacramentans who sought to preserve the city's built heritage. That year, the City appointed a Historically Significant Buildings Committee, Charlene Rasmussen wrote a report on the "Factors affecting Historic Structures in the City of Sacramento, and the Sacramento Old City Association (SOCA) was founded. SOCA began its efforts to preserve Sacramento's architectural heritage by purchasing and rehabilitating historic houses throughout the Central City, saving many important historic buildings from demolition.⁶⁴ Sacramento Heritage, Inc., a nine-member board appointed by the City, was founded in 1975 with the charge to "promote the preservation and rehabilitation of significant historic buildings in Sacramento."⁶⁵ Both SOCA, renamed Preservation Sacramento in 2015, and Sacramento Heritage, Inc. continue to advocate for the protection of Sacramento's historic places.⁶⁶ The City of Sacramento's preservation program was formally established in 1975, resulting in the creation of the Preservation Board and adoption of the Preservation Ordinance, Sacramento's primary implementation mechanism for preservation. The City established a separate Preservation Office, led by a full-time Preservation Director and preservation planning staff, in 1996.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ City of Sacramento General Plan, 1988, 10-31 – 10-37; Avella, 151-152.

⁶⁵ City of Sacramento General Plan, 10-34.

⁶⁶ Preservation Sacramento, accessed November 8, 2018, <http://www.preservationsacramento.org/>.

⁶⁷ City of Sacramento General Plan, 10-31 – 10-37.

Themes

The primary historic themes and events which characterize the history of World War II, redevelopment, and transportation in Sacramento include:

- "The shift from an economy focused on agriculture and railroad industries to one founded on state and federal government offices, military bases, and highway/freeway-based transportation;
- The influx of people from outside California who were drawn to Sacramento by available jobs;
- The exodus of people and businesses from the city center to newly developed suburban communities and annexed districts;
- Large-scale clearance and new construction projects funded by federal monies, including federal redevelopment programs;
- The increasing popularity and availability of automobiles, the "car culture," influenced how and where people lived, worked, and shopped, and led to the construction of a network of highways that reshaped the city's design;"⁶⁸
- The emergence of Sacramento's preservation community as a result of the loss of historic buildings.

⁶⁸ General Technical Background Report, 6.3-116.

Mid-Century Modern

Residential and commercial development across the United States slowed during World War II, including Sacramento, but it also initiated a period of unprecedented growth to the region. The reopening of two local airbases, Mather Field and McClellan Air Force Base, to aid the war effort encouraged large numbers of people to relocate to the Sacramento area in search of employment at the bases and related industries. The military bases continued to be one of Sacramento's main employers in the postwar period. Meanwhile, the transition to a full-time state legislature, centralization of state agencies in Sacramento, and overall expansion of the California state government also generated new employment opportunities that attracted more people to the city. The annexation of developing neighborhoods in surrounding areas further increased the city's population.

Sacramento's growing population created a housing shortage. While a scarcity of building materials initially slowed new residential development, federal programs, including the GI Bill and the Federal Housing Authority's (FHA) insurance of private mortgages, stimulated the construction of single-family houses and housing developments in the postwar period and paved the way to homeownership for thousands of Americans.

Many of the houses that were built to meet the immediate postwar demand for housing favored the one-story Minimal Traditional style, which featured small, compact gabled or hipped roofs and stud construction. As the demand decreased and the

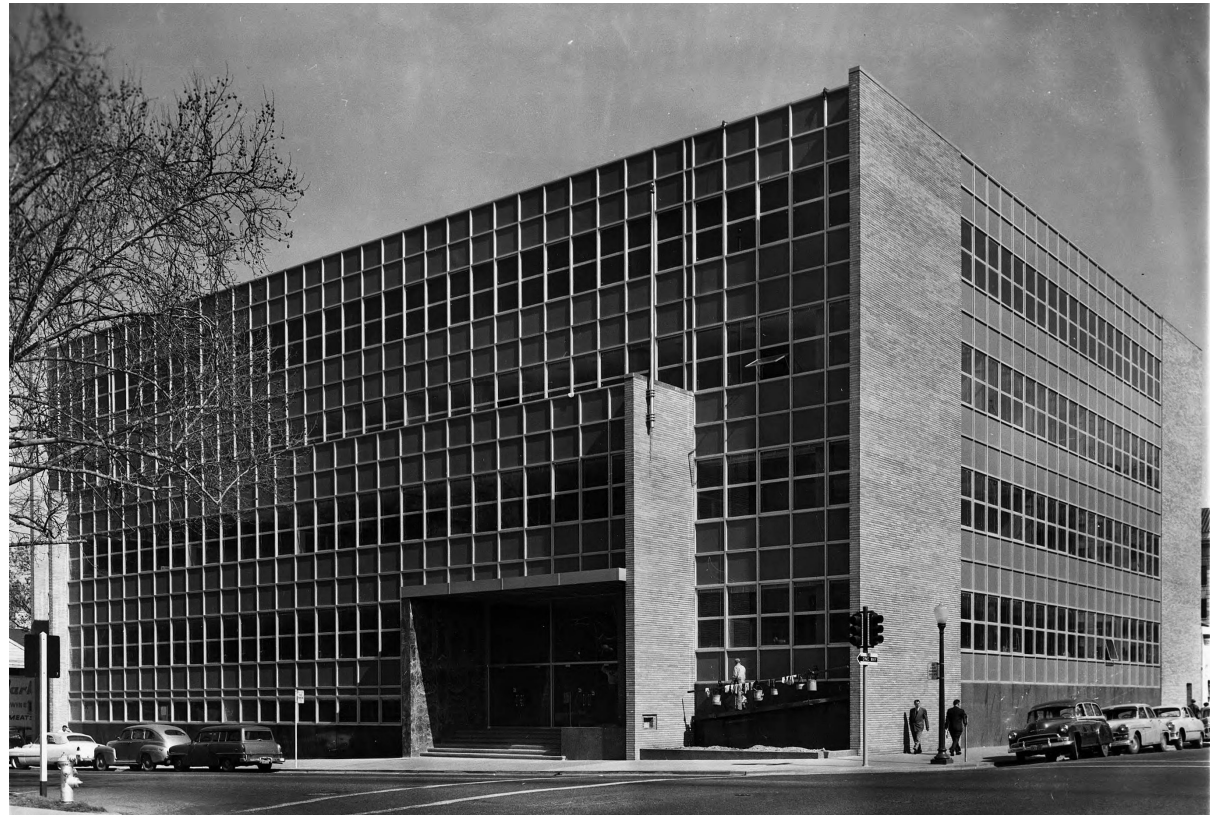


Figure 9. County of Sacramento Administration Building, designed by Harry Devine (1956). Source: Sacramento Public Library, Sacramento Room.

national economy took off, however, many people began to trade up for larger houses that were built more for comfort and affordability than style. New suburban housing developments full of houses built in new Mid-Century Modern styles emerged in the areas surrounding Sacramento.

While much of the Mid-Century Modern residential

development in the Sacramento area took place outside of the Central City, Mid-Century Modern architecture was introduced to the Central City, most often in the form of commercial properties—such as office buildings, motels, banks, gas stations, and stand-alone restaurants and shops—that were built along major roadways and as part of redevelopment

or infill projects between the 1940s and 1970s.⁶⁹

Businesses competing for the attention of drivers passing by on the busy roadways frequently looked to eye-catching features such as neon signage and decorative exteriors to attract potential customers.⁷⁰

The strict standards that the FHA required for its housing mortgages, however, also led to the “redlining” of many older neighborhoods near city centers that were considered less desirable and economically unstable, including Sacramento’s West End.⁷¹ Redlining contributed to racial and socio-economic segregation in the Central City, as many of Sacramento’s older neighborhoods were also typically home to the city’s most ethnically diverse populations, which had been prevented from buying homes in newer residential suburbs by racial covenants. Over time, the practice of redlining neighborhoods led to the widespread divestment and arrested development in urban centers across the country and the redevelopment of the West End in the mid-twentieth century, as described in the World War II, Transportation, and Redevelopment context in the previous section.⁷²

Themes

The primary historic themes and events which characterize the history of Mid-Century Modern architecture in Sacramento include:

- Sacramento’s growing population during and after World War II created a demand for new housing that was addressed by federal programs;
- These federal programs, such as the GI Bill and Federal Housing Authority loans, accelerated residential development in the Sacramento area but also led to widespread divestment from and redevelopment of older, ethnically diverse Central City neighborhoods;
- Mid-Century Modern architecture within the Central City was most common in commercial properties, as the majority of residential growth shifted to new outlying suburban neighborhoods.

⁶⁹ GEI Consultants, 5-4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2-15-17.

⁷¹ The term “redlining” refers to the practice of withholding home-loan funds from neighborhoods considered poor economic risks. Meriam-Webster.com.

⁷² Ibid., 2-3-3.