

Background and History of Los Gatos

LOCATION

The Town of Los Gatos is nestled at the base of the Sierra Azules, and is located approximately 60 miles south of San Francisco, in the southwestern portion of Santa Clara County where the Santa Clara Valley meets the lower slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Los Gatos is bounded by the City of San Jose to the north and east; the City of Campbell to the north; the Cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga to the west; and unincorporated County of Santa Clara and the County of Santa Cruz to the south.

The Los Gatos Planning Area encompasses a wide variety of terrain, ranging from flat topography at the edge of the valley floor to densely wooded hillsides. Both the valley and hillsides are interspersed with creeks, streams and riparian habitat. The sharp contrast between the valley floor and the hillsides provides the Town's picturesque background.

HISTORY

Los Gatos is one of Santa Clara County's oldest communities. In 1840, the Mexican government granted a land patent for a 6,600 acre rancho to Sebastian Peralta and Jose Hernandez. Los Gatos was originally named *La Rinconada de Los Gatos* (Cat's Corner) by early settlers due to the screams of mountain lions prowling in the night. In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho was selected as a town site. The Town was incorporated in 1887, and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,652. When the first General Plan was adopted in 1963, the Town had grown to an area of approximately 4,000 acres, or 6.3 square miles, with a population in excess of 11,750.

At the time the first General Plan was revised in 1971, the Town had grown to an area of 9 square miles with a population of 24,350. In 1984, Los Gatos covered approximately 10 square miles and had a population of 27,820 persons. Today, the Town population is estimated to be 30,274 in a 14 square mile area. While most of the growth through the 1970's was due to new development, most of the growth in the 1980's and 1990's was due to annexations, in-fill development and changing demographics.

The Town originally developed at a distance from other population centers and therefore evolved as an independent community having residential, commercial and industrial areas. The economics of the Town have changed from the wheat farming, milling, logging, orchard, and cannery businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the suburban, "high tech," visitor destination businesses of today. The railroad also played a major role in the growth and development of the Town. Los Gatos was either the terminus of the railroad or the transition point from standard to narrow gauge at more than one time during the railroad's operation. The climate and easy access by rail from San Francisco made Los Gatos an early tourist destination. Today, the Town is situated within the largest metropolitan area of northern

California, and is closely tied to Silicon Valley and its fast paced economy. Los Gatos, however, retains a mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses, still attracts visitors, and continues to retain its small town image.

Los Gatos prides itself as a “self-contained community.” Over 300 businesses serve the residents and act as a destination point for visitors who are attracted to its restaurants, hotels, and variety of shops within a pedestrian oriented downtown setting. The Town is also an “inclusive” community with the full mix of ages, family sizes, and incomes. Los Gatos has many parks and greenbelt areas, as well as a vibrant downtown area. Downtown Los Gatos is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the model of what communities strive to achieve in a downtown.

Historical Reading Material

- Bennett, Mardi, ed. - *Images of Long Ago: A Century of People, Places and Progress in the Town of Los Gatos*
- Bloomfield, Anne - *Los Gatos Toll House: Historic Structures Report*
- Bruntz, George, G. - *History of Los Gatos*
- James Alexander Forbes, builder and owner of the Santa Rosa Flour Mill on the Rancho Rinconada de Los Gatos. (Author Unknown)
- Wulf, William A., *A History of the Santa Cruz Mountains and early Los Gatos.*

* Source: Town of Los Gatos General Plan