

California Nursery Company History

The site of the California Nursery originally formed part of the vast grazing lands of Mission San Jose. Following Mexican Independence in the 1820s the missions were closed and their lands disposed of as private ranchos. Between 1836 and 1846, four ranchos were carved out of former Mission San Jose property in the area that became Washington Township- Rancho Agua Caliente (1836), Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda (1842), Rancho Potrero de Los Cerritos (1844) and the Ex-Mission San Jose Lands (1846). ON June 1, 1842 Jose de Jesus Vallejo petitioned Governor Alvarado for Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda, receiving title to the property in 1842. The rancho spread west from Alameda Creek between the hills and the bay, covering an area of foursquare leagues (17, 705 acres). The Niles district of Fremont and much of Union City are located within the historic boundaries of the rancho.

For many years the California Nursery was one of the state's leading nurseries. Established in 1884 by John Rock the nursery originally covered 463, 380 acres. Through constant experimentation Rock made a major contribution to commercial fruit production in California. Under the ownership of Landers and Roeding families in the 20th century, the nursery continued to play a leading role in California horticulture, though its grounds were diminished as tracts of land were partitioned off and developed. After the nursery closed in 1972, most of the site was developed; the remaining 20.1 acres was acquired by the City of Fremont.

California Nursery: A Forgotten Part of Fremont History Written by Joyce Blueford for Tri-City Voice, June 25, 2013

The Niles district in Fremont was known for its agricultural contributions in the newly formed State of California. This land of plenty had unlimited water, fertile land, and a protected area from the winds. It was home to many orchards and nurseries but one of the most successful in North America was the 500-acre California Nursery Company, which started in San Jose in 1865 and moved to the Vallejo Rancho (Niles) in 1884. The California Nursery Company story in Fremont starts with John Rock, a German immigrant, who served in the Civil War as a decorated hero. He developed new methods of plant propagation, which was an evolving science in the late 1800's and consulted with the renowned plant breeder, Luther Burbank.

Agriculture during the 1890's was California's new gold rush. The demand for trees that produced food for consumption encouraged development of many nurseries devoted to their production. New techniques on hybridization and grafting to create new varieties of fruit were creating demand all over the country and new methods to transport trees and fruit evolved throughout the nation. Machinery to pick, dry, and package plants was being invented. The California Nursery Company was a lucrative business and mercantile bankers saw an opportunity to make money. During the William Landers period (father and son) at the turn of the century, the business flourished.

George C. Roeding Sr., of the very successful Francher Creek Nursery in Fresno, purchased the California Nursery Company in 1917 to create one of the largest chains of nurseries on the West Coast - from Washington State to South America. His son, George C. Roeding Jr. took over at the beginning of the depression and expanded the nursery into a successful retail and mail order business.

Exotic Bulb Festivals with local "tulip girls" brought hundreds of thousands of people to tour the nursery and trees from this nursery were used to landscape the 1915 Panama International Exposition in San Francisco as well as the 1939-40 World's Fair on Treasure Island.

During the 1940's, the public looked to home food gardens as a way to help the war effort. California Nursery Company transformed its image, helping people to learn about horticulture. Today, Bruce Roeding still owns California Nursery Company and sells peach pits, used to grow seedlings as grafts for other stone fruit.