

DANVILLE YESTERDAY

A TOWN IS BORN

For over 150 years Danville's history has been one of change and growth. Often called the heart of the San Ramon Valley, Danville was first populated by Indians who lived next to the creeks and on the foothills of Mount Diablo. They were Tatcans, a tribe belonging to the Bay Miwok linguistic group. Later the area was part of Mission San Jose's grazing land and a Mexican land grant called Rancho San Ramon Valle owned by Mariano Castro and Bartolome Pacheco.

Danville was settled and named by Americans drawn here by the California Gold Rush. Two of these men were Daniel and Andrew Inman who bought acreage in the Green Valley area with their mining earnings in 1854. In 1858 Dan purchased 400 acres of property at the county road and San Ramon Creek and sold plots for a blacksmith, hotel, wheelwright and general store. Soon the business owners wanted a post office and a name.



Daniel Inman

What should the community be called? In an article years later Dan Inman wrote that quite a number of names were suggested. He and Andrew rejected "Inmanville." According to the Dan the name was finally chosen out of respect for "Grandma" Sarah Young (Andrew's mother-in-law) who had been raised near Danville, Kentucky. Of course it also recognized Inman, who later became an Alameda County Supervisor and State Assemblyman.

The Danville post office opened in 1860 with Danville Hotel owner Henry W. Harris as the first postmaster. Harris reported in 1862 that there were 20 people living in the town proper and 200 ballots cast in the last area-wide election. Most new residents had been farmers and found that the valley land was fertile and the weather mild, altogether an ideal place to settle.



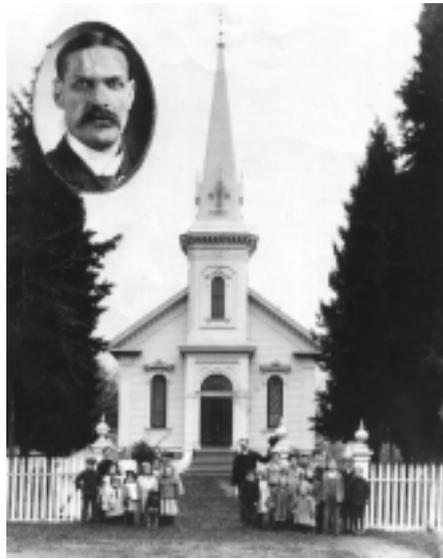
Front Street, c. 1910

Settlers acquired land from Mexican and other owners and founded ranches, farms and businesses although titles weren't securely established until 1865. The 1869 census reported nearly 1800 people in Township No. 1, a combined Danville and Lafayette area.

Initially they raised cattle and sheep and grew wheat, barley and onions. Later the farms and ranches produced hay, livestock, various fruit crops, almonds and walnuts. In the 1800s horses and wagons hauled these products north to the docks at Pacheco and Martinez, following County Road No. 2 which wound by the San Ramon Creek and which was almost impassable in wet weather.

THE COMMUNITY EVOLVES

Churches, schools, farmers unions and fraternal lodges were started as the community evolved. The Union Academy, a private high school begun by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at the border of Danville and Alamo, served valley families from 1859-1868. The Danville Presbyterian Church was dedicated in 1875, following a vote of Protestants regarding what denomination it should be. The new church was described as "the handsomest church building in the county", by one local writer.

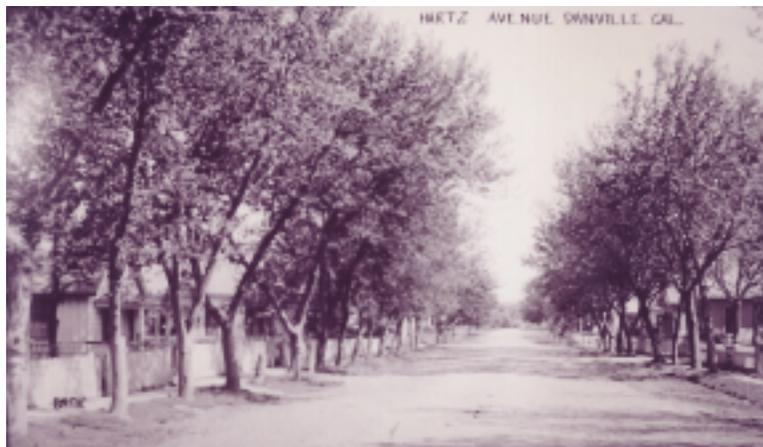


The Presbyterian Church with Rev. R. S. Symington

In 1873 Danville Grange No. 85 was chartered and Charles Wood of Sycamore Valley was elected to be the first Worthy Master. The Grange was a family farmers' organization and included all the valley's "movers and shakers." Its 1874 hall served as the focal point for community social, educational and political activity for decades. It still meets at a hall on Diablo Road.

Several early Danville buildings remain today. These include homes belonging to the Cohen, Boone, Osborn, Love, Young, Podva, Wood, Elliott and Hartz families and the second Danville Hotel (1892). Pioneer names appear on streets and schools such as Baldwin, Wood, Love, Hartz and Bettencourt.

When the Southern Pacific's San Ramon Branch Line came to the valley in 1891 and a depot was built, Danville grew to become the largest town in the valley. The farmers built warehouses and shipped crops by rail in any kind of weather, traveling to and from Danville with an ease they had not experienced before.



Hartz Avenue, early twentieth century

John Hartz sold 8.65 acres of his land for the Danville railroad station. Then he then and sold small lots east of the station for homes. A decade later, downtown businesses began to shift from Front Street to Hartz Avenue. A bank, drug and retail stores, Elliott's saloon, the doctor's office and post office were established on Hartz. The Danville Hotel and McCauley house moved from Railroad Avenue to face Hartz Avenue in 1927.



The Danville Hotel on Railroad Ave.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the twentieth century Danville and California were affected by two world wars and changed by many new immigrants. The valley was a melting pot of Irish, German, Portuguese and Japanese immigrants who worked as cooks and on ranches, then bought land and opened stores such as the Danville Emporium.

Residents worked diligently to improve their community. In 1910 the San Ramon Valley Union High School was organized. A 104-book Danville library opened in 1913. St. Isidore's Catholic Church was established at Hartz and Linda Mesa in 1910; this Danville parish served the entire valley and Walnut Creek. The Danville Improvement League spearheaded getting electricity and paved roads by 1915. A modern electric train, the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway, ran from Saranap through Danville to Mt. Diablo Park Club from 1914-1924.



The Toonerville Trolley (Oakland, Antioch & Eastern Railway)

Danville continued to be agricultural well into the 1950s, by then primarily producing walnuts and fruits. The whole valley had 2,120 people in 1940, doubling to 4,630 by 1950. Developments such as Montair and Cameo Acres were built and water and sewer lines were extended to serve new populations. In 1964 the I-680 interstate freeway opened to Sycamore Valley Road, changing Danville and the valley permanently.

The San Ramon Valley population leaped from 12,700 in 1960 to 25,900 in 1970 to 57,300 in 1980. The 1980 census showed that eighty-two percent of Danville's 26,500 residents had arrived after 1970. The 2010 town population was 42,039. The days when everybody knew everyone else were long gone.

On June 8, 1982 Danville citizens showed their strong sense of identity by voting to incorporate their community, allowing themselves to shape future changes more directly. Today, Danville's Old Town is much admired for the sense of place it provides. The Museum of the San Ramon Valley in the original Southern Pacific Depot opened in 1999 and provides programs and exhibits focusing on the valley's history.



Museum of the San Ramon Valley

After 150 years, the small settlement on the banks of the creek has grown to become a thriving community --- still changing, still beautiful and still special.

-----DID YOU KNOW? -----

The builder of the Queen Anne cottage on Railroad Ave. just north of Linda Mesa (today's Sideboard Café) was a direct descendant of Daniel Boone.

The second floor of the Village Theatre on Front Street was once the original Danville Grange Hall (1874). In 1913 this building was constructed as a new Social and Fraternal Hall.

Tao House, on the western hills of Danville, was the home of Eugene and Carlotta O'Neill from 1937-1944. The home was built with the proceeds from O'Neill's Nobel Prize. It was here he wrote his final, great plays: "A Touch of the Poet," "A Moon for the Misbegotten," "The Iceman Cometh" and his masterpiece "Long Day's Journey Into Night."

*Produced by the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, 205 Railroad Ave., Danville
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