



Broadway in 1904



Santa Maria Waterworks early 1900s



First Businesses arrived around 1880

**SANTA MARIA  
VALLEY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

AND

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# Santa Maria Valley

In the beginning, there was only the land stretching its barren slopes to the sea; no tree, only the occasional shrub. There was nothing to suggest that any but the hardiest of sagebrush and weeds would flourish on this desolate site. Up the slopes, in the moisture gathering canyons, there were oaks and sycamores, and it was here that the first men of the valley settled. Doubtless, many tribes passed this way, but it was the Chumash who settled here. When the first Spanish explorers penetrated the area, it was the Chumash who greeted them.

The winter of 1769 found the Portola Party journeying through the area of present day Santa Maria in pursuit of the elusive Monterey Bay.

Eventually, sites were chosen to the north and southwest of the Santa Maria area. The mission padres did their work well, and the missions flourished; however, in 1821 Spain granted Mexico independence, and soon after the missions were secularized. Their lands were broken up, and individual citizens were granted land ownership for the first time.

When William Benjamin Foxen purchased the Rancho Tinaquic in 1837, he and his dark-eyed bride, Eduarda Osuna, built a small adobe on the property. He was called "Don Julian" by the Indians. The Foxen family lived for many generations on the rancho. One of Foxen's daughters, Ramona, married the Englishman Frederick Wickenden. Their early adobe still stands. Ramona, whose family had been steadily increasing, longed for a nearby church, the long drive to Santa Ines Mission with small children proving to be quite the task. The death of her father provided the incentive to build a church with a graveyard, and today, at the mouth of Foxen

Canyon, stands the historic landmark, San Ramon Chapel, built in 1875. It has been dedicated as County Landmark No. 1 and also as State Landmark No. 877.

The first town in the area, called La Graciosa, was located near the present site of Orcutt about 1868. The first store, first post office, and first school in the area were established in this region. However, in 1877 H.M. Newhall auctioned off the land on which La Graciosa was built, and summarily ejected one and all. The demise of La Graciosa did not spell the end of development in the valley.

The area soon began to take on a multi-ethnic character as Swiss dairymen and Danish, Portuguese and Japanese farmers joined the already established Spanish, English, Irish and Scottish settlers. Dry land farming, cattle and oil became major local industries. Agriculture in the valley continued to prosper. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Union Sugar Company had come to the valley and farming became big business.

## SANTA MARIA

Four men were responsible for donating the four quarter sections of land that became the intersection of Broadway and Main streets and form the nucleus of present-day Santa Maria. Rudolf Cook located on the southeast corner in 1869. John Thornburgh, who migrated west with his family in 1871 because of ill health, took the southwest corner. Arriving from Missouri by wagon train, Isaac Fesler purchased the northwest corner. The fourth party, Isaac Miller, settled the remaining corner. In 1874, these four men donated forty acres of land where their properties adjoined and laid out Central City, destined to become Santa Maria in 1905.



**SANTA MARIA VALLEY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
*MEMBERSHIP INVITATION*

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# SANTA MARIA HISTORY

The township was surveyed in the fall of 1874; the surveyor’s map was accepted and recorded at the county seat on April 12, 1875. By the 1870s stagecoach and fright lines serviced the valley on a more or less regular basis, holdups not being an unusual occurrence. As the local water table began to be tapped for fields and orchards, new immigrants flocked to this valley from across the country, around Cape Horn and across the Isthmus. Droughts, plagues and market reverses drove them to their knees. Some died, some left, but many persevered, and their descendants remain in the valley.

The arrival of the narrow gauge Pacific Coast Railroad from San Luis Obispo in 1882 coincided with the official change of name from Central City to Santa Maria, as mail meant for the township had a way of showing up in Central City, Colorado. Several stores, markets, saloons, and hotels had sprung up in Santa Mari when the fires of 1883 and 1884 wiped out part of the downtown area. Undaunted, the merchants rebuilt, and new business came to town.

In the early days of the huge ranchos, the rancheros, along with their vaqueros, friends, and neighbors gathered frequently under the oaks of the serene little valley for Spanish-style barbecues. The present Santa Maria Style BBQ grew from this tradition,

and achieved “style” when local residents began to string beef on skewers and cook it over the hot coals of a red oak fire.

In 1894, the Southern Pacific Railroad reached San Luis Obispo from the north; it wasn’t until 1901 that the trains traveled through the lower part of our valley in route to Los Angeles. The Santa Maria Valley Railroad began operating in 1912, linking the rich oil fields at Roadamite to the Southern Pacific at Guadalupe. On September 12, 1905, Santa Maria was incorporated as a Municipal Corporation of Sixth Class.

Santa Maria is a busy place, but beneath the bustle of today’s business, the quiet town of Central City still lingers. Cattle still browse the foothill pastures and red-winged blackbirds frequent the marshes. When the summer marine layer softens her silhouette, the Santa Maria Valley is not unlike the peaceful valley Benjamin Foxen overlooked in 1838.

The museum is administered by the Santa Maria Valley Historical Society. It is open to the public free of charge Tuesday through Saturday from 12-5pm. The museum is closed Sundays, Mondays and major holidays. Call for dates, times or groups of more than 12 at 805-922-3130.