

Mapping Belmont's Story

A Record of Belmont: Then and Now

2018



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Girl Scout Troop 33004
Gold Award Project

Foreword

Every story deserves to get told. When we hear the stories of others, we grow empathy, pride, and an overall connection to the world. From this booklet, I hope you learn how this land has evolved into the wonderful town that you now call home, and that the work that you put into the world never truly fades as it continues to live in the everyday lives of others you've touched.

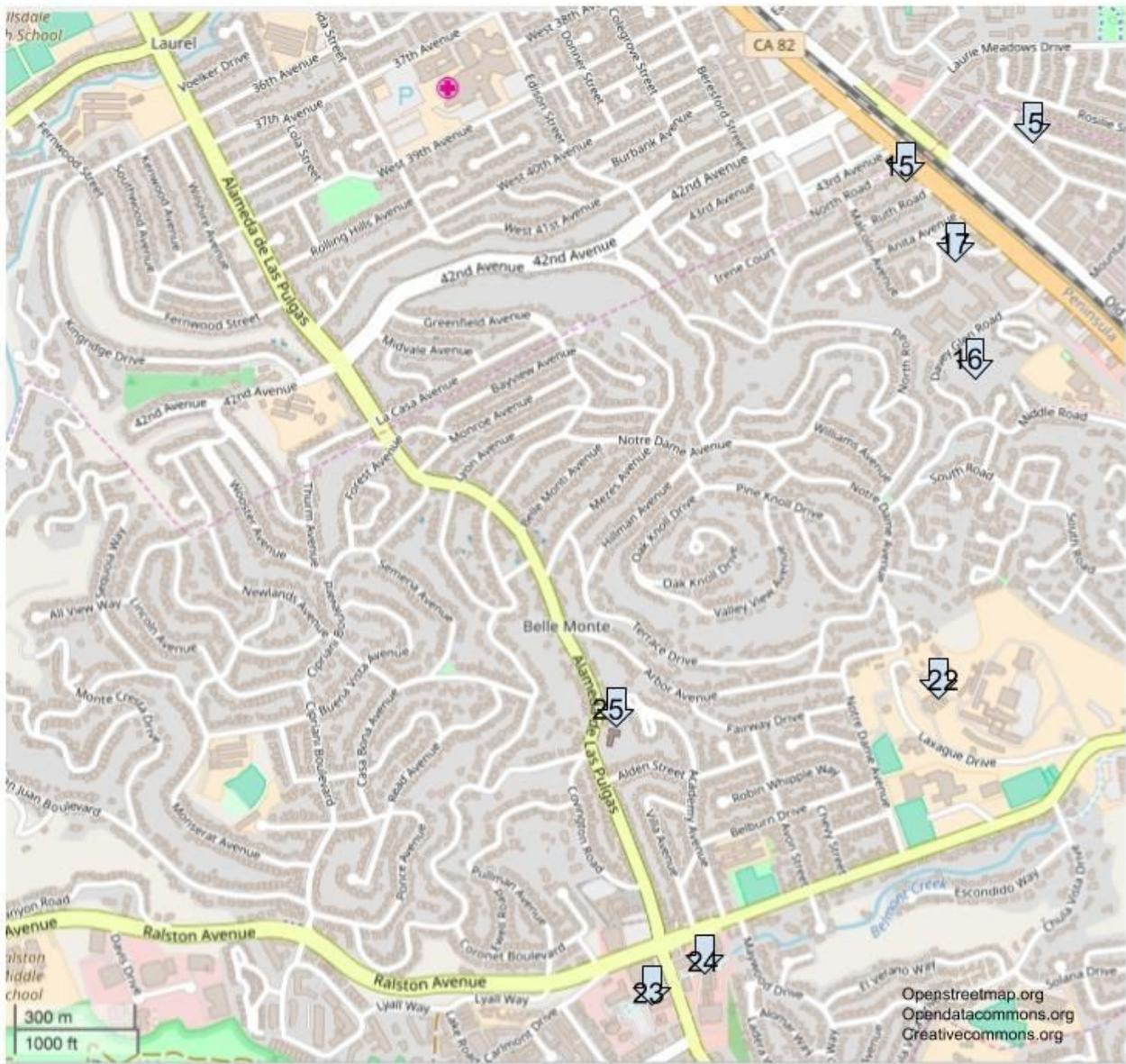
Thank you to everyone at the Belmont Historical Society, Karin Saltzherr, the GSNorCal council, and an extra special thank you to the wonderful Denny Lawhern who truly is the spirit of Belmont and whom without, this project would absolutely not be possible.

“There’s no such thing as an uninteresting life, such a thing is an impossibility. Beneath the dullest exterior, there is a drama, a comedy, a tragedy.”

-Mark Twain



1. O'Neill's Slough	2. O'Neill's Landing	3. Shanty Town	4. Bayshore Highway	6. Camp Belmont
7. OCR/Ralston (North)	8. OCR/Ralston (South)	9. OCR/Ralston (Marine View)	10. Angelo's Corners	11. Chanticleer's Ice Cream
12. Belmont Train Station	13. Iron Gate	14. Lariat	18. Ohlone/Costaños Village	19. Emmett House
20. The George Center Home	21. Janke's Biergarten			



5. Belmont Airport	15. Belmont Theater	16. Ross Home	17. The Van's
22. Ralston Hall	23. Belmont Academy	24. Jack London	25. Belle Monti

MAP LOCATION #1: O'Neill's Slough
Located just north of the Belmont Sports Complex, East of 101
 Then



Captain Owen O'Neill was an Englishman who brought passengers to and from England and San Francisco on his ship the *Hell and Mariah* by means of journeying around Cape Horn in South America in the mid 1800s. After his retirement from traveling to and from Europe, O'Neill used the lumber he brought with him around Cape Horn up Belmont Creek from the Bay to build a house and dock in the Belmont marshland to bring people between Belmont and San Francisco. That house he built for him and his family was located along Old County Road and what is now O'Neill Street. Today, some of O'Neill's descendants still live and work in the Belmont area; and this area is the last remaining wetlands area preserved from development in Belmont where native wildfowl, migratory birds, and spawning fish can nest and feed.

Now



MAP LOCATION #2: O'Neill's Landing

Located on Belmont Creek at the intersection of O'Neill's Slough between Oracle and the car dealership

Then late 1850s



Now

During the 1870s, the oyster business developed watch houses to protect the mollusks from pirates along the outer shoreline. However after 1900, the oyster business collapsed partly due to pollution from fuel oil from ships. Morgan and his competitors sold their shoreline holdings. Most of the acreages were taken over by the Pacific Portland Cement Company which used the oyster shells in cement production. In fact, it is a major ingredient in the cement used to build the original San Mateo Bridge in 1929.



Map Location #3 Shanty Town

Located on the south end of O'Neill's Slough next to the current Belmont Sports Complex

Then Late 1800s to 1953



In the late 1880s Captain Owen O'Neill's son Eugene O'Neill (unrelated to playwright Eugene O'Neill) built two rustic shelters in the marshes to rent out to duck hunters. In the town, Belmonters built a community bathhouse for the town to enjoy. By the early 1900s San Franciscans had built cabins of their own in the area (\$5 a year for permission to occupy the land) for weekend getaways, creating a community that became known as Shantytown, even having its own unofficial mayor, Ed Hooper. Eventually, Shantytown had to make way for the widening of the Bayshore Freeway so by 1953, the Belmont Fire Department set fire to the small community, demolishing the small town.

Now



MAP LOCATION #4: Bayshore Highway

Located about 50 yards south of the current interchange and was controlled by stop signs and then signals

Then



The Bayshore Highway was marked as a bypass of US 101 by 1939. Before that, the Dumbarton and San Mateo-Hayward Bridges were built across the San Francisco Bay in the 1920s. El Camino Real was the only reasonable alternative to the ferries for crossing the bay. Skyline Boulevard was built to be added to the state highway system in 1919. The Bay Shore Highway became a second route in 1927, but only from San Francisco to where the Dumbarton Bridge would begin, opening with the first two lanes through the Belmont area. The state legislature extended the highway in 1925 to San Jose. The new highway was officially dedicated to San Mateo on October 20, 1929, changing drastically from the two lane roads in 1939 to eight lane roads today.

Now



MAP LOCATION #5: Belmont Airport

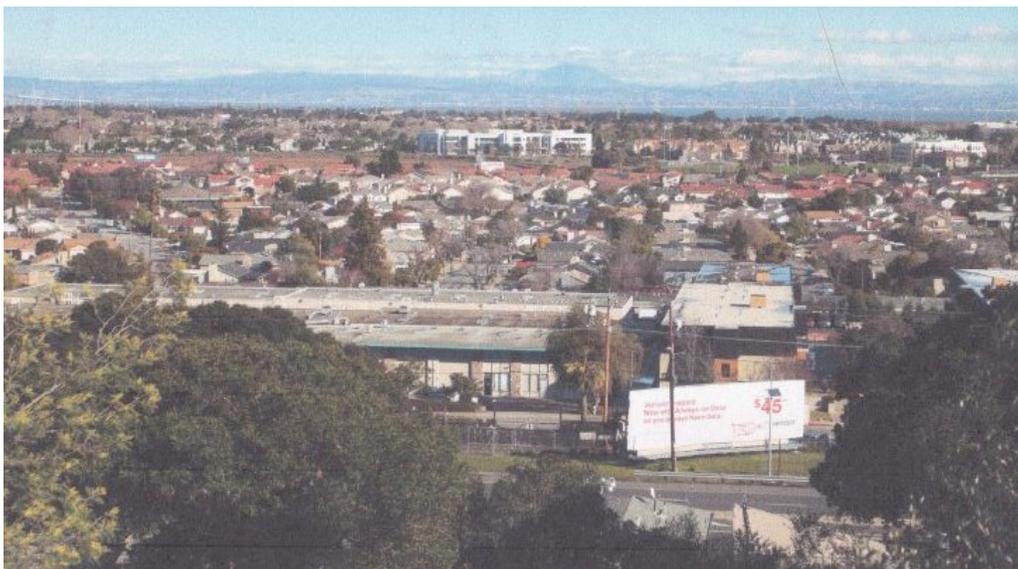
Located north of Ralston Ave and east of Old County Rd where the Sterling Downs neighborhood is now located

Then 1939-1949(picture from 1941)



The Belmont Airport, used by troops from the United States Army during the Second World War, used to extend from Old County Road to east on Marine View Street, the dirt runway on Hiller Street and Chesterton Avenue.

Now



MAP LOCATION #6: Camp Belmont: Belmont Army Camp

Located in current location of Nesbit Elementary School and the shopping center

Then 1941-1945 (picture taken 1942)



Camp Belmont was installed along the Pacific Coast during the Second World War to guard against attacks from Japan. In 1942, the 76th Field Artillery Battalion was transferred to Camp Belmont as temporary headquarters.

Now



Map Location #7: Old County Road North at Ralston

Then Early 1900s



1880s



When railroad tracks were set along the what was then called the San Francisco-San Jose Road but what is now called Old County Road, most of residential Belmont clustered east of it meaning that when the tracks were finally laid in 1863, all of the businesses lay to the east and most were situated along Old County Road.

The old American House Hotel can be seen on the left side of the picture to the right this time with the woodworking shop across from it on the right. This picture was taken shortly after Belmont first got electricity as landlines can be seen along this road. At this time, sidewalks had begun to be installed as well.

Now



Map Location #8 Old County Road South of Ralston

Then 1915



This location sat on the original Angelo's Corners, Belmont's original center of trade. On this part of the square, the old American House Hotel can be seen on the right side with the balcony and the carpenter woodworking shop can be seen on the left, across from it. In 1999, most older buildings, including these two, were taken down to make way for grade separation.

Now



Map Location #9 Old County Road North At Marine View

Then Early 1940s



Looking into the distance of this view of Old County Road, the OCR auto repair shop can be seen on the right side, and can still be seen in the same spot today. The turnoff heading to the left would lead to the Belmont Airport.

Now

Looking North on Old County Road at Marine View Avenue



Map Location #10 Angelos Corners

Then 1850



What is now Wendy's at Ralston and Old County Road was once the location of the Four Corners of Angelo's Corners where Angelo established the first roadhouse, the first business in Belmont. From this, many small businesses have grown to today.

Now



Map Location #11 Chanticleer's Ice Cream Parlor

Then



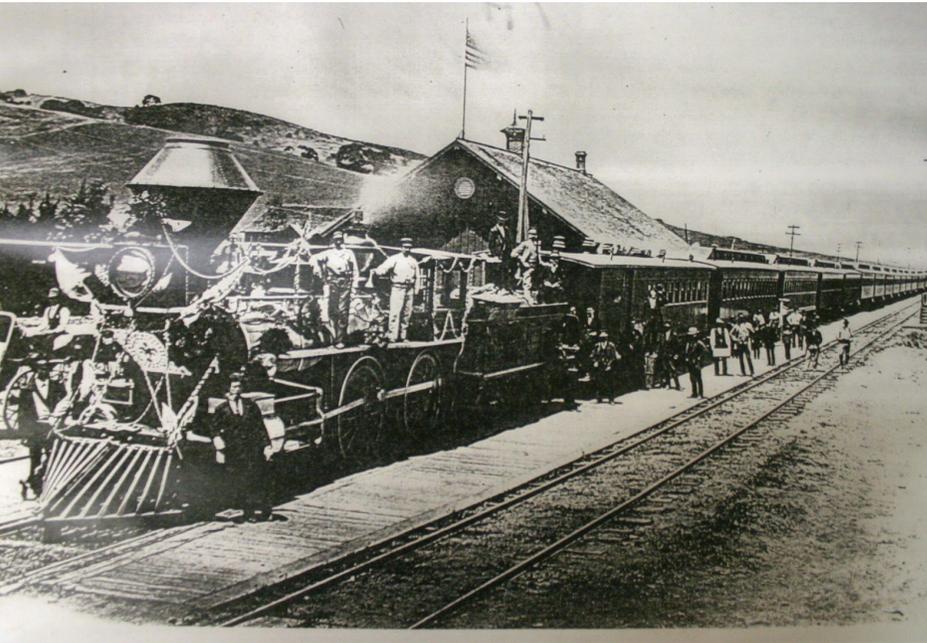
Bert Johnson remembers first visiting the establishment in 1910 when he began grade school just down the road. A widow named Barrett operated the facility which catered to the local population as well as students from the Reid School for Boys. She went out of business in the early 1920's when Columbus Messner, owner of the local taxi cab company, established a competing business west of El Camino on Ralston Avenue. This was a product of the Belmont's commercial core west of the new highway.

Now



Map Location #12 Belmont Train Station

Then 1860s



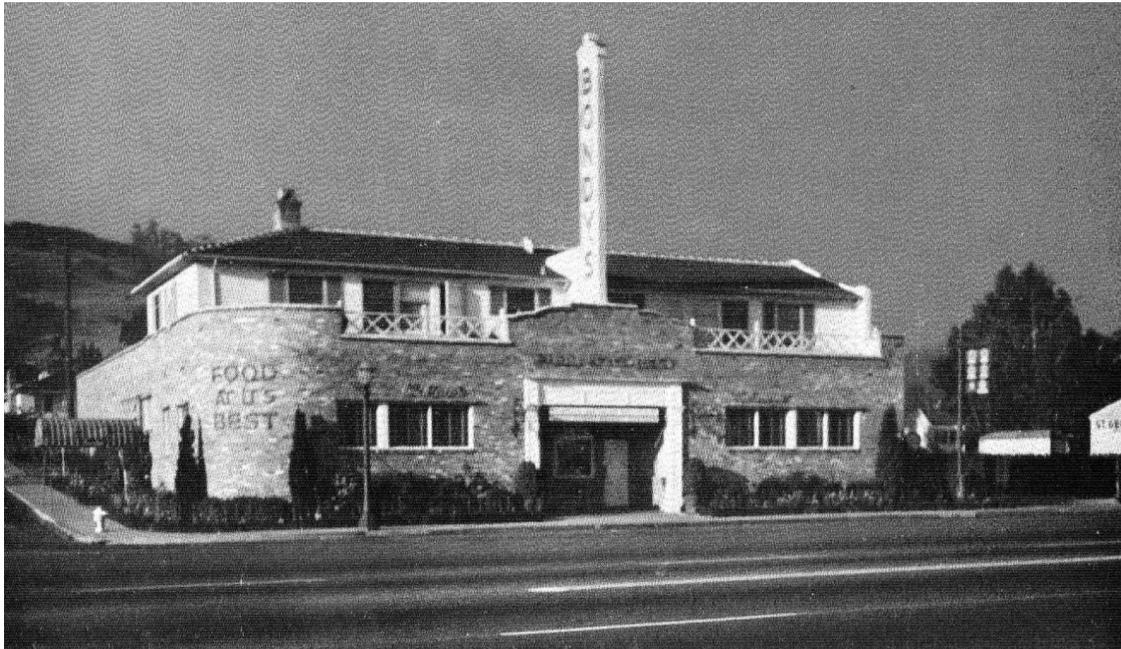
After the line was completed in 1864, the train made one round trip daily. To go from San Francisco to San Jose took three and a half hours, as compared to the stage line's 8 hours. The Southern Pacific Railroad of California was formed and it consolidated San Francisco to San Jose. Although the trains stopped at Belmont from the beginning, the railroad did not place a depot there until August 1867. From 1860 until 1900 the railroad also supplied special trains to Belmont Park, one of the best picnic places on the Peninsula. These pleasure grounds were the idea of Carl Janke, a native of Germany who got influence for Belmont Park after a Hamburg biergarten. The picnic grounds were a favorite spot for San Franciscans out for a good time. By the early twentieth century, the gardens had gone, but the depot itself remained until 1952. From 1860 until 1900 the railroad also supplied special trains to Belmont Park, one of the best picnic places on the Peninsula.

Now



Map Location #13 The Iron Gate

Then 1950s “Bondy’s”



First built in the 1950s, this building remains one of the oldest fine dining establishments on the Peninsula. Mentioned in some motel postcards, Bondy's host E.O. "Bondy" Bondeson was deemed "one of the West's truly outstanding restaurants." In the 1960s, Ed's Chuck Wagon took over. According to an ad, the restaurants had an all-you-can-eat deal for \$2.85 per person. Then in the 1990s, the Iron Gate was finally established. The restaurant has been noted for its "distinctive redwood and flagstone interior, its raised hearth fireplaces, its gracious and attentive service, its attractive lounge and bar"

Now



Map Location #14 The Lariat

Then Opened in October 1931



Opened and managed by Hankinson in approximately October 1931 as the Blue Lantern Cafe, then later sold to Pat O'Neil who reopened the place as Pat O'Neil's on November 4, 1937, the restaurant was twice renamed the Belmont cafe, once by Hankinson and once by O'Neil in September 1939. In the early 1940s, Loring "Mac McCarth" opened Boot's and Saddle's, also opening in several locations around the Bay Area including in La Honda where in 1949, Neil Young plays, hangs with Ken Kesey, and meets the Beatles. The bar is opened and renamed the Lariat in the early 1950s by Ray Summers and James Scharff. In 1943, the building was purchased by Gus Holland and turned into the Holland Apartments. Today, the building is back as the sports bar the Lariat Tavern.

Now



Map Location #15 Belmont Theater

Then 1960s



This photo was taken in about 1965 outside of what was then the Bel-Art Movie Theater. Children line up outside for Donation Day, an event in which community members can donate cans of food in exchange for movie tickets. Today, the theater has been replaced by the Planet Granite rock climbing gym.

Now



Map Location #16 The Ross House

Then 1890



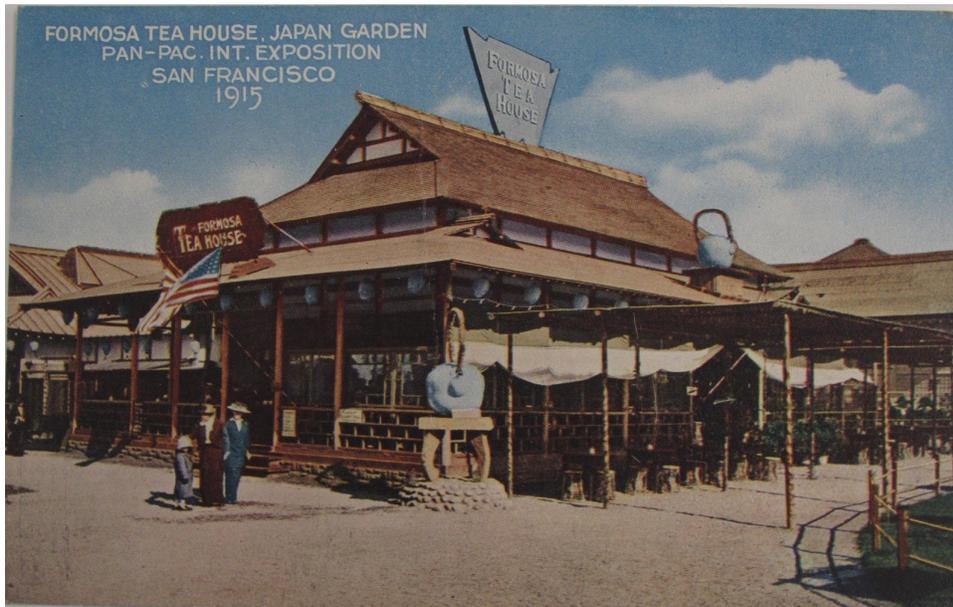
In 1876, George Ross, born in Illinois in 1854 and graduated from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, came to Redwood City, California to practice law. In 1888, Ross and a few others joined together in planting 10,000 trees throughout Belmont with the goal “to make it one of the most attractive spots in San Mateo County.” On June 21, 1890, “In excavating for the foundation of Ross’s new dwelling, the bones of deceased Natives were found...” Some of Ross’s other accomplishments included the “organization of the Sequoia Union High School District, of which he was president for the first ten years...he conducted all of the proceedings for the original incorporation of the City of San Mateo, and acted as the first city attorney of San Mateo”(Richard N. Schellens Collection, History Room, Redwood City Library). Many of the trees you see today can be credited to him.

Now



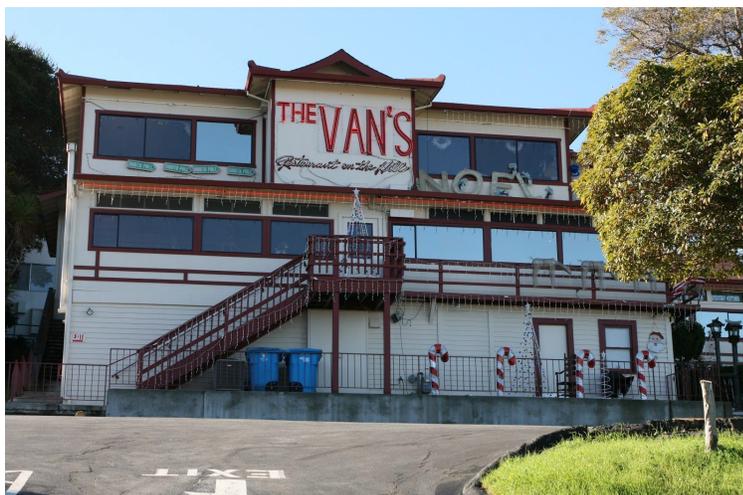
Map Location #17 The Van's

Then 1915



The building of what is now known as The Van's Restaurant is one of two remaining buildings from the 1915 Japanese Exhibition at the Panama Pacific International Exposition held in the San Francisco Marina District in commemoration of the opening of the Panama Canal; the other building being the Palace of Fine Arts. Land Baron E.D. Swift purchased the building and sent it down the Bay to Belmont. In 1921, it was transported by horse and mule to the top of the hill, where it is today. In 1933, Elsie Smuck bought the building and renamed it "Elsie's" where it became a speakeasy that was rumored to have had slot machines and dice games. When Prohibition ended, Elsie turned it into a legalized saloon. Elsie left the saloon to a Burlingame citizen who sold it to two gentlemen who opened a restaurant called "Gevan's". After ten years of partnership, the two parted and one shortened the name to "The Van's"

Now



Map Location #18 Ohlone/Costaños Village

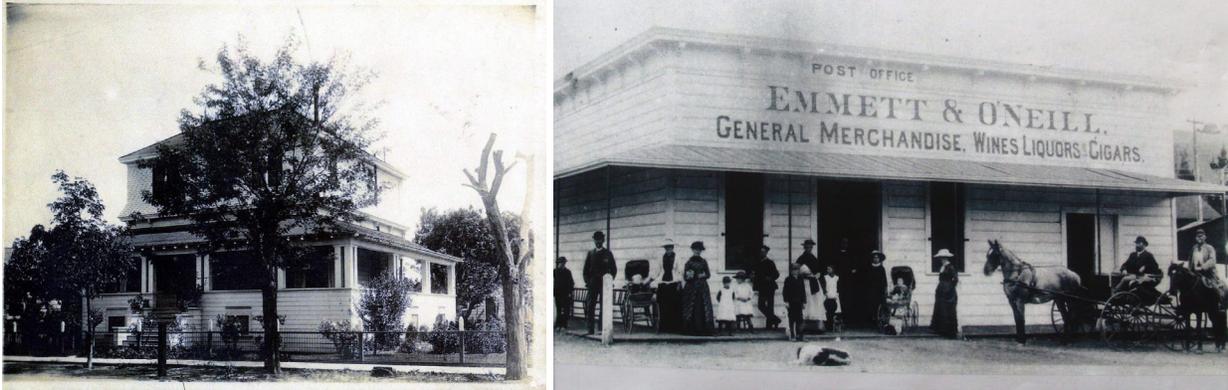


Called Costaños or “Coast Dwellers” by Spanish settlers, the Native American group can be estimated to have been on the San Francisco Peninsula 7,500 to 40,000 years prior to Europeans who had come in the late 1700s. It is likely that the Costaños influenced the name “Devil’s Canyon” in Belmont. One theory is that Spaniards spotted a mysterious shimmer (from discarded seashells from the Costaños) coming out of the canyon. A second theory says that the Spanish considered religious ceremonies done in the canyons by the Natives to be satanic.



Map Location #19 The Emmett House

Then 1880s



The Emmett House was the principal residence of Walter Alfred Emmett during his years as Belmont's leading merchant. Emmett owned a general store on Old County Road from 1880 and acquired the Belmont Soda Works from William A. Janke in 1892. He also held his reputation as a long-time Belmont postmaster, and Emmett Avenue bears his name. The original one-story "cottage" was built in 1885. In 1899, the second floor was added, and the house was described as ranking "third among the fine residences of Belmont." Now, the Emmett House is considered one of the few remaining examples of 19th-century residential architecture.

Now



Map Location #20 The George Center Home

Then early 1900s



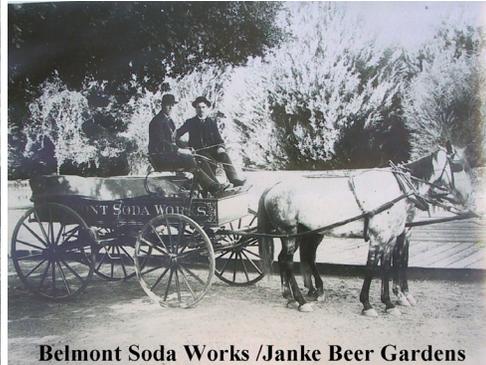
George Center, a principal at the Bank of California, had this home built not long after the 1906 earthquake with “the most up to date building construction technology in reinforced concrete”. After his death in 1923, the building became the Twin Pines Sanitorium run by Dr. William Rebec who was “largely responsible for the enactment of California’s progressive Humane Commitment Act”

Now



Map Location #21 Janke's Biergarten

Then late 1800s



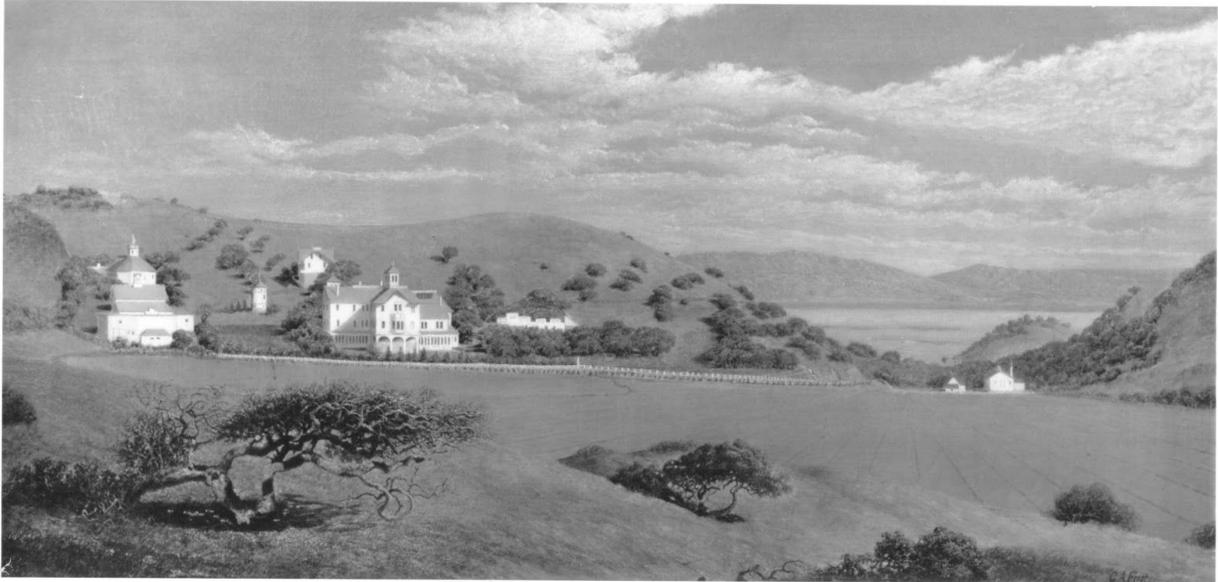
In the mid to late 1800s, what is Twin Pines now used to be Janke Park. People from all over the Peninsula would come by train to listen to music provided by brass bands and drink soda pop provided by Belmont Soda Works. Both the park and the soda company were owned by Mr. A. Janke.

Now



Map Location #22 Ralston Hall

Then mid 1800s



Ralston Hall, though currently named after William Chapman Ralston who co-founded the Bank of California(1864-1875), was an estate initially owned by Colonel/Count Leonetto Cipriani(an Italian nobleman) before William Ralston purchased it and remodeled it in 1864. Ralston expanded the estate into a 55,360 square foot, four-floor mansion with more than 80 rooms! Ralston was very important to the Bay Area's economic growth. Ralston invested in the formation of Golden Gate Park and is the mind behind the Palace Hotel.

Now



Map Location #23 Belmont Academy

Then 1885-1952 (picture taken in the 1890s)



At the location that is today's Carlmont Shopping Center, a minutes-walk away from several modern schools, used to be several different schools throughout history. In 1885, headmaster William T. Reid founded the Reid School for Boys wherein many of the boys who attended went on to prestigious universities such as Stanford, Yale, etc. or served in World War I. The school was purchased in 1918 by Catholic Archdiocese, then turned over to the Sisters of Mercy in 1932. It was renamed Saint Joseph's Military Academy. In 1952, part of the property transitioned to become today's Immaculate Heart of Mary's Church and school while the other part developed into the Carlmont Shopping Center.

Now



Map Location #24 Jack London

Then late 1890s-early 1900s



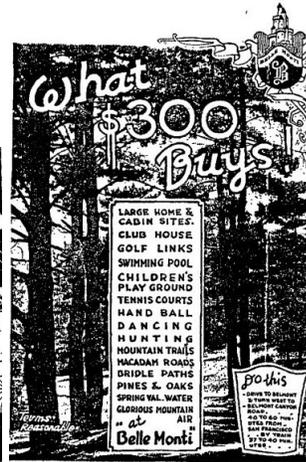
Around 1897 when he was 21 years old, during a time in which he would write 15 hours a day and buy stamps so he could eagerly send manuscript after manuscript to publishers, who would eventually become classic American novelist Jack London had run out of money. London's step-sister (Eliza)'s step-son (Herbert Shepard) got him a job working as a helper in the laundry of the Belmont Academy for the rate of 30 dollars a month. The school was sure that their new equipment could get through the work at twice the speed, so it hired only two men to do the job of four. The two constantly worked unpaid overtime and were always exhausted. London never got a chance to read the books he had hoped to read while there. London quit his job at Belmont Academy once the school year ended in June. His experiences working in the laundry can be seen reflected in the fictional, titular main character of his novel *Martin Eden*.

Now



Map Location #25 Belle Monti

Then 1920s



In 1924, in the midst of the roaring 1920s, land developers Monroe, Lyon, and Miller invested tens of thousands of dollars into developing the Belle Monti golf course and clubhouse. For \$300-\$1,000, families were promised to get a new house with all road work, water, electricity, and telephone accommodations, permanent membership to the Belle Monti Club House, access to the 9 hole golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, etc. However, the developers' plans were not able to be achieved when the stock market crashed in 1929. Though this plan failed, it played a very important role in establishing Belmont as a city. The land and facilities were used for several functions throughout history after that. During WWII, the clubhouse became an officer's club. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Kaiser used the facility to research and study radiation and cancer. In 1954, the clubhouse became the Congregational Church of Belmont that we know today.

And to answer the most important question of all: the little house across the street from the church that catches everyone's eye and fills children's minds with imagination was used as a real estate office to sell property and membership to families joining Belle Monti 😊



Bibliography

Images of America: Belmont

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Heritage of the Wooded Hills

Ria Elena MacCrisken

About Belmont

Compliments of the Belmont Jaycees

Hub of the Peninsula As We Remember It

Russel A. Estep

Jack London: An American Life

Earle Labor

The many documents provided by the Belmont Historical Society

“I believe that what we map changes the life we lead”
-John Green