

The Shape of Santa Cruz

Historical Roots of the City's Evolution, From its Beginnings to 1845

By Carey Casey

This article aims to study historical factors that have shaped the physical environment of Santa Cruz, California, into what we see today, and to find what parts of the city's shape are inherited and retained from its early days.

Introduction

A variety of factors, operating over more than two hundred and fifty years, have worked together to shape the natural and man-made physical environment we see today in the City of Santa Cruz.

The original shaping factors were the geographical limitations imposed by the local topography and location at the northern end of Monterey Bay. Building on those initial conditions, the foundations of the populated place now called Santa Cruz were laid by decisions made during the Spanish-Mexican period.

The earliest changes to a settlement are often the most consequential, and changes wrought by new arrivals can be disproportionate to the actual numbers. The most extreme example of that phenomenon occurred when a few Spanish soldiers and missionaries first came to an area occupied exclusively by Native Americans. The Spanish newcomers didn't change the total population much, but completely upended the established way of life in native resident communities. Mexican independence mostly kept the Spanish system, with a couple of significant exceptions.

As a result, the shape of today's Santa Cruz owes much more to the relatively brief Spanish presence than to the previous thousands of years when only Native Americans lived here.

The Shape of the Land

Before recorded human history, the area that is now the City of Santa Cruz already possessed a unique set of geographical and geological characteristics that provided the base template for all that has followed. Most prominent are Monterey Bay, bordering Santa Cruz on the south, and the Pacific Ocean on the west. The ocean is a relentless shaper of the coastline. Other characteristics:

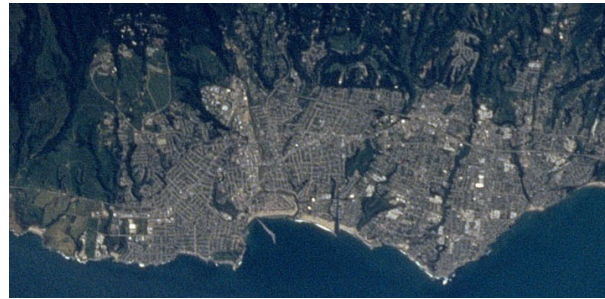


Figure 1: Satellite view of modern Santa Cruz and vicinity (*Wikimedia Commons*)

- A mild coastal climate with seasonal alteration of two conditions: wet (flooding, erosion) and dry (wildfire, drought)
- The San Lorenzo River, dividing the city, and with only a few spots shallow enough to ford (none at all when levels are high)
- River-adjacent areas subject to seasonal flooding (e.g. lower Branciforte Creek)
- Other perennial streams whose deep channels and steep banks (especially where they cut into the elevated terrace) were obstacles to travel, but also provided convenient property borders and livestock containment
- Neary Lagoon, its feeder Laurel Creek, and other wetland areas
- Coastal terraces that are relatively flat, but edged by abrupt elevation rises from the floodplain and from one terrace to the next,¹ making travel from one terrace level to another difficult.
- Steep sided hills/mountains inland from the flatter coastal terraces that limited and impeded early efforts to build roads into/out of Santa Cruz toward San Francisco Bay.

The Native Californian Legacy

Living in small communities, with no permanent infrastructure or written languages, local native Californians didn't leave much behind. In 1909, a researcher counted over four hundred large shell mounds at native settlement sites in the greater San Francisco Bay area. One mound in what is now Emeryville was thirty-two feet tall and at least three hundred ten feet in diameter.² Such a size undoubtedly made the mound a factor in the shaping of Emeryville. No such mounds, however, were found within modern Santa Cruz city limits.

The coastal terrace geography of Santa Cruz probably accounts for the lack of shell mounds. Periodic flooding of the San Lorenzo River would have prevented mound buildup in the floodplain, while the steep escarpment and substantial elevation gain required to escape the floodplain made even the first terrace problematic as a mound site.

Native land management practices were another factor that could have been a significant shaper of Santa Cruz (and could have saved a lot of later grief), but the Europeans and/or Americans who displaced the natives did not understand how the practice of controlled seasonal wildland burning protected human settlements from the raging wildfires that do so much damage today, and they abandoned the practice.

The one undeniable and all-important legacy native Californians bequeathed to Santa Cruz is the simple fact that *they were here*. If the Franciscan missionaries had not found substantial numbers of natives living in the area when they first passed through in 1769, they would not have recommended that a mission be established here. No mission = no Santa Cruz.

Arrival of the First Europeans

A brief digression will be helpful at this point, to explain the political and commercial forces and goals that brought Spanish explorers to California.

The main political goal was to discourage and/or counter exploratory efforts in the area by other powers (principally England and Russia) by "planting the flag" for Spain on stretches of the Pacific Coast previously unclaimed by non-native powers.

The main commercial goal was to find good natural harbors where the sailing ships of the Spanish Empire's maritime trade with Asia could stop for much-needed supplies on their way home.

Clockwise circular currents in the Pacific Ocean helped carry the Spanish ships (known as "Manila

galleons") west to Asia, then brought them back eastward across to North America. By the end of the long return, however, without any intermediate stopping points, shipboard food and fresh water supplies were nearly exhausted. Nearing the Pacific Coast, the treasure-laden Spanish ships were able to catch the southward-flowing near-coast current for a return to Mexico, but a long journey remained.

The first sightings of land were often along the rocky northern-California coast, an area lacking in natural harbors (the narrow and treacherous entrance to the world-class harbor inside San Francisco Bay had not yet been found by European mariners). A resupply port along the northern Pacific Coast would reduce the dangers of starvation and mutiny.

To avoid coastal hazards, however, those ships stayed too far offshore to see much of the coastline they passed, so the search for harbors required slower sailing up the coast from Mexico.

Spanish exploration of the *Alta* (upper) *California* coast began with an effort led by Juan Cabrillo in 1542, even before the first successful Acapulco-Manila round trip. However, the first explorer to identify Monterey Bay and report back on a potential safe harbor location was Sebastian Vizcaíno in 1602.

Vizcaíno named his discovery *El Puerto de Monterrey* (Port of Monterey), on the southern end of what he named *La Bahía de Monterrey* (Monterey Bay). After erecting a wooden cross to mark the spot (but without establishing a settlement), Vizcaíno continued sailing. But as with Cabrillo, Vizcaíno's reports on his explorations included no mention of the north end of the bay he named, so Spanish authorities remained uninformed about the area that later became Santa Cruz.

The Vizcaíno exploration was maritime only and, although the ships may occasionally have been seen and wondered about the coastline they passed, we have no conclusive evidence that any Spanish sailors ever landed on Santa Cruz shores, except perhaps unintentionally after foundering on rocks and reefs. No tales of such adventures ever made it back to the fleet's home port in Mexico.

By the time a follow-up exploration on land was dispatched to verify Vizcaíno's bay and harbor claims, more than 150 years later, the Manila galleons had found shorter routes that reached the southward-flowing coastal current far to the south of Monterey. The political impetus remained, however, to establish a permanent coastal settlement that would help to deter England, Russia, and others threatening Spain's imperial ambitions.

The 1769 Portolá Expedition

In October, 1769, Santa-Cruz-area indigenous people witnessed a harbinger of big changes that would soon disrupt their long-stable lifestyle when a large group of strangers passed through: people who looked, talked, and acted like no one the natives had ever seen before.

Fears were temporarily assuaged when the group showed no aggression toward the locals, and stopped only briefly in this area before continuing up the west coast of the San Francisco Peninsula. The explorers passed quickly through again on their return journey without stopping at their previous campsite near the San Lorenzo River, and then were gone. Who were those strangers?

The large group belonged to an expedition led by Spanish military officer Gaspar de Portolá. They came from a world unknown to the central-coast native peoples, who could not have understood the political and commercial goals that brought them up the coast of the future U.S. state of California.

Because it was the first Spanish expedition to travel on land so far northwest into the unexplored Pacific Coast region, the Portolá expedition was also charged with a third goal, religious in nature; to convert the native Californians to Spanish-style Christianity. That religious effort tied into a secondary political aim, which was to mold the local people into supporters of Spanish Empire colonization goals and Spanish-style community life.

Toward those ends, the Portolá expedition included in its contingent a Franciscan missionary, Juan Crespi, who served as expedition chaplain.³ As a representative of the Franciscan missionary program, his main job was to identify suitable mission sites, chosen largely on the numbers of nearby potential converts to Christianity (i.e. indigenous residents). The presence of a sizable native village in a given location also indicated that the physical resources necessary for survival of a mission were present.

For the exploration party, the physical barriers to travel were more important than they were to the indigenous residents, who used no pack animals, had no herds of cattle, and whose groups tended not to travel far from their local areas. Portolá's scouts went ahead to mark out the easiest routes, while trying to stay near the coast. Another difficulty was that, while the locals had long ago developed adequate food supplies, the explorers depended almost entirely on supplies they brought with them. Resupply by sea was part of the expedition plan but remained

undependable, especially when the marchers were forced to detour inland away from the coast.

One such detour bypassed the rugged Big Sur coastline. Looping inland through today's Salinas Valley, the explorers found the seashore again when they reached the shores of Monterey Bay on September 30, 1769, in the area that later became Fort Ord. They knew that they were in the vicinity of Vizcaíno's Monterey, but didn't know whether Monterey lay to the north or south. Scouts were first sent out to the south but passed Monterey without recognizing it as a harbor. (Vizcaíno's wooden marker cross had apparently disappeared).

After crossing the Monterey Peninsula and Carmel River (also discovered and named by Vizcaíno but unrecognized by the Portolá scouts), the explorers again ran up against the forbidding Big Sur cliffs, and returned to report that Vizcaíno's harbor was not to be found in that direction. Had the scouts recognized Monterey, Portolá would probably have stopped there.

But instead the expedition turned north, traveling near the shores of Monterey Bay, crossing and naming *El Rio del Pájaro* (now the Pajaro River) into what is now Santa Cruz County on October 8. Another crossing and naming happened on October 17: *El Rio de San Lorenzo* (now the San Lorenzo River).⁴ That date is now celebrated as the birthday of Santa Cruz.

On the next day, they found the stream we now call Laurel Creek, which was given the name *Arroyo de Santísima Cruz* (literally Stream of the Most-Holy Cross). Crespi liked the area well enough to recommend it for establishment of a permanent mission, which later adopted a shortened version of the Crespi *arroyo* name. And so it happened that the expedition came to the Santa Cruz area because Portolá turned the wrong way in his search for Monterey. The first Spanish event that shaped Santa Cruz was an accident.

A secondary job for Crespi was to keep a detailed diary of the expedition's progress, to be reported back later to missionary leadership in Mexico City. Crespi was also the chief giver-of-Spanish-names to places the expedition passed. In the City of Santa Cruz, only two of the Crespi names survive today, but they are important ones: Santa Cruz and San Lorenzo. One other name that dates from the 1769 expedition is the Pajaro River (*pájaro* is Spanish for bird).

The First Road to Santa Cruz

In what is now Santa Cruz County, the most difficult and necessary part of preparing a travel route happened at stream crossings, where the deep arroyos had steep banks and heavy riparian vegetation (as they still do). The explorers had neither the time nor the skilled workers and tools needed to build bridges, so the steep and overgrown banks had to be descended/ascended, and dense vegetation had to be cleared.

On the return journey, the expedition retraced its travel route, using the same stream crossings and some of the same campsites. The time savings were considerable: the first crossing of what is now Santa Cruz County took fifteen days (October 8-23), while the return required only five days (November 19-24; the expedition didn't reuse the Santa Cruz campsite).⁵

Unsurprisingly, later arroyo-crossers tended to favor those same prepared locations, which turned into actual roads, where eventually bridges were built. There are still only a few places where roads cross those steep-sided arroyos. That fact, along with the narrowness of the coastal terraces between bay and mountains, are major reasons why road choices remain so few for someone wanting to get from Watsonville to Santa Cruz.

Within today's Santa Cruz city limits, Soquel Avenue roughly follows the 1769 route from the eastern city limits to the San Lorenzo River. Today's Soquel Avenue bridge is near where Portolá's scouts first found a spot shallow enough to wade across the river Crespi named for *San Lorenzo* (Saint Lawrence in English). From there, in order to continue following the coast, the expedition had to get out of the river bottom and up onto the surrounding terrace.

Of the few relatively easy routes that wouldn't require a major detour, the most likely may have been where today's Lincoln Street/Walnut Avenue makes that climb. Nearby Chrystal Gulch (to the south of and running parallel to a street called Chrystal Terrace) seems like it could also have worked, but there's no evidence that a road has ever existed there. Perhaps the presence of running water there discouraged the Portolá scouts from that route (and also from the Laurel Creek defile). Another possibility is where Locust Street once descended the hill. Locust was later cut in two when Chestnut Street was extended up the hill to Mission.⁶

Portolá marched back down to San Diego, completing a trip that began many months before. Reviewing their journey, expedition leaders must have concluded that they had indeed found Monterey but failed to recognize it.

Portolá returned to Monterey Bay by sea in 1770, finding Monterey this time and becoming the first governor of a permanent Spanish presence at a *presidio* (military base) in Monterey, accompanied by Junípero Serra, leader of the Franciscan missionaries. Serra founded the second (after San Diego) of an eventual twenty-one *Alta California* missions (the Monterey mission was moved to Carmel a year later).

The expedition's most difficult advance work in our area was cutting and grading crossings at the many steep-sided creeks (aka gulches), and finding the best fording spots at the two larger rivers. Those crossings and fords now have roads with bridges. The most difficult of the 1769 crossings are shown by the blue rectangles on Figure 3. From east to west, they are: Pajaro River, Aptos Creek, Soquel Creek, and San Lorenzo River. Arana Gulch was also a steep-sided crossing (near today's Harbor High School), but has been eased more by grading than by bridging.

Santa Cruz and San Lorenzo River are the only two local place names descended from the Portolá expedition, but much of the expedition's travel route has evolved into some of today's main travel routes through Santa Cruz County. Today's Main Street follows the first section of the Portolá route from its Pajaro River crossing through Watsonville. Then Freedom Boulevard continues to follow the Portolá route to its junction with Highway 1 in Aptos. Continuing roughly along today's Highway 1 as far as the Soquel Avenue/Drive crossing, Soquel Avenue follows the Portolá route from there to the San Lorenzo crossing.

Advance scouts who laid out the path for the main party to follow probably used existing native trails whenever they found ones headed in the desired direction, but we don't know exactly where those preexisting trails might have been.

After fording and naming the San Lorenzo River, the expedition stopped for a night on the western side of the river. Despite seeing no indigenous people since the full expedition crossed the Pajaro River, the expedition found several hastily-deserted villages.

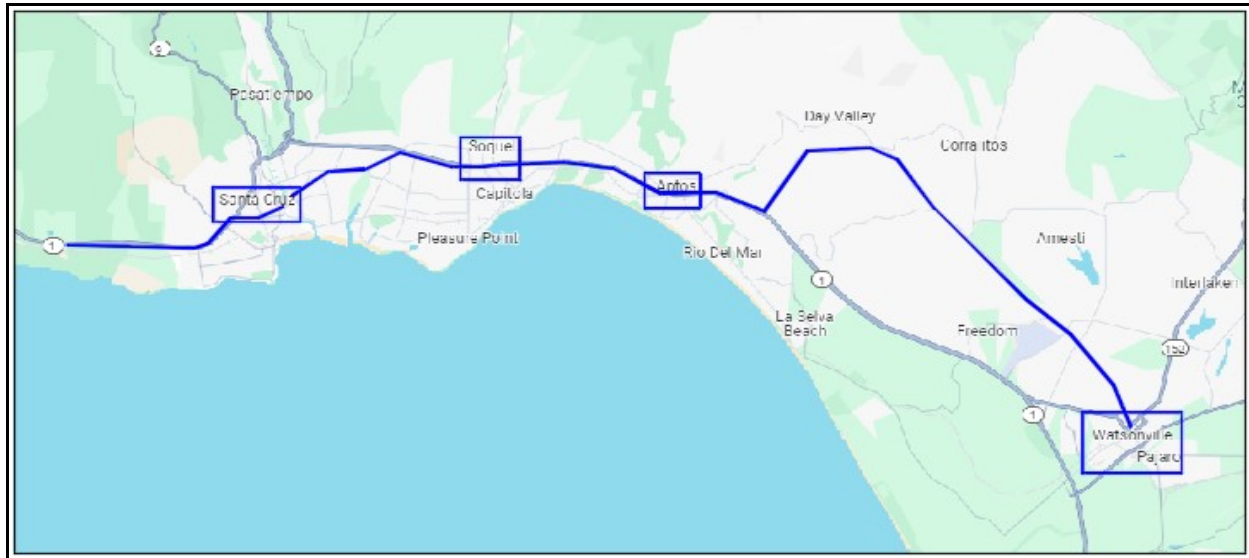


Figure 3: Portolá route (approx.), with locations of today's major bridges shown by blue rectangles.

Although visible across the water from Monterey, and despite the Crespí recommendation of Santa Cruz as “one of the best spots for a very large mission,”⁵ more than twenty years passed before the Franciscans were able to send missionaries to found Mission Santa Cruz. So, like the proverbial calm before the storm, indigenous peoples were given a two-decade reprieve before their way of life was upended forever.

Another factor helping to put off a return to the northern end of Monterey Bay was that, in 1770, Portolá deputy Pedro Fages succeeded his former commander to become the second governor of *Las Californias* (which included today's USA state of California and the Baja California peninsula). Fages further explored the region and found an easier inland route from Monterey to San Francisco Bay. The route (roughly followed by today's Highway 101 through Salinas, San Juan Bautista, and the Santa Clara Valley) bypassed the future Santa Cruz. And as the primary travel route to San Francisco Bay changed back then, so it remains today. Travelers headed for the Bay Area don't often just pass through Santa Cruz on their way.

Mission Santa Cruz

Fermín de Lasuén, successor to Serra as president of the Franciscan missionary organization in California, traveled from Monterey (i.e. Carmel) to consecrate Mission Santa Cruz in 1791, twenty-one years after establishment of the Monterey/Carmel mission. Local researcher Melanie Mayer determined that the first Mission Santa Cruz location was probably in the vicinity of today's intersection of Laurel Street and Center Street.⁷ One season of winter weather, however, showed the missionaries that the dampness of the riverside lowlands was not suited to the Spanish-style adobe construction methods that had worked well in drier locations to the south.

The next year, the mission began a move to the higher (and much drier) ground of Mission Hill, where it began the systematic development of a permanent residential complex for the missionaries and their indigenous converts.

Establishment of Mission Santa Cruz initiated a transition from the hunter-gatherer traditions of the indigenous residents to the Spanish style of permanent structures, European livestock, and food crops planted in prepared fields. Researcher Randall Milliken estimates that: “By the year 1810 . . . the tribal territories in all but the most northerly reaches of the San Francisco Bay region were empty.”⁸ Most of the natives had moved into the Mission compounds, where up to ninety percent of them died from European diseases for which they had no immunity.

Moving the mission complex to the higher site also required a different water source. Spanish engineers were skilled at constructing aqueducts and *zanjas* (ditches) with just the right amount of slope to maintain a continuous and steady flow without overflows, but they apparently did not dig wells or use any devices that *lift* water. The mission systems depended entirely on gravity to move water downhill, so finding a suitable water source at an elevation higher than its end use site was essential. Water was brought to Mission Hill in a *zanja* from a group of springs they called *Tres Ojos de Agua* (literally "Three Eyes of Water"). The springs are located to the west of the mission site, along today's High Street; high enough above Mission Hill to provide a gravity-assisted flow to the mission residential complex, and to the tannery that was built next to the *zanja* near today's corner of High Street and Highland Avenue. High Street itself began as a path next to the *zanja*, used to build and maintain the system.

The Mission established the first roads and patterns of travel around the central Santa Cruz area, because their permanent structures and activities needed permanent roads to connect them. When the mission complex moved up onto the hill, the Portolá trail was rerouted to run past the mission before continuing out of town on the "coast road" (today's Mission Street). Those Mission-era roads have evolved into some of today's most-traveled Santa Cruz streets. At the mission complex itself, the central plaza remains as Mission Plaza city park, and all four sides of the plaza are now streets. Adjacent School Street began as the way running past the only remaining mission-era building, now part of Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park. From the mission plaza, the road that descended the north side of Mission Hill to the orchards and pastures is today's Potrero Street (*potrero* is Spanish for "pasture").

From the junction at the base of Mission Street, in early days often called the "lower plaza" (where the Town Clock stands today), today's Pacific Avenue began as the Mission road to the beach, where supplies were brought ashore from small boats.

The road descending the hill from the Mission to the riverside lowlands (part of today's Mission Street) and to the San Lorenzo River ford at today's Soquel Avenue bridge also went by way of the lower plaza, becoming today's Front Street (as far as Cooper Street). A road from the lower plaza to another ford became today's Water Street, and the river bottom farmlands were bordered by what is now

Rincon/Chestnut Street (following the base of the terrace-edge hills).

Also established soon after the Mission founding was a road (or at least a trail) leading over the mountains from the Water Street ford through today's Scotts Valley and Los Gatos to Mission Santa Clara (1777) and the San Jose pueblo (1781).

It can be seen today that Mission-era roads established most of the major routes that constitute today's city arterial road network. Those routes can be identified on the first accurately-surveyed map of the Santa Cruz coastal area.

In 1853, the U.S. Coast Survey Office conducted a survey of the Santa Cruz-area coast and inland as far as Mission Santa Cruz.⁹ In Figure 4 (the base is from an 1854 version of the map), number notes point to some of the roads we can identify as dating from the Mission era. Note that the map is rotated approx. 15 degrees west (counterclockwise) from true north.

Modern urban planning recognizes a phenomenon called "desire paths", where unofficial pedestrian routes are created entirely by foot traffic. This mechanism was at work in the early days of Mission Santa Cruz, when there were as yet very few established travel routes. Residents had to get from one place to another, and the most popular routes between the most popular destinations soon wore visible paths into the earth. Some of those "desire paths" have evolved into today's streets. The now-established shapes formed by that evolution will become evident as we move through the following decades.¹⁰

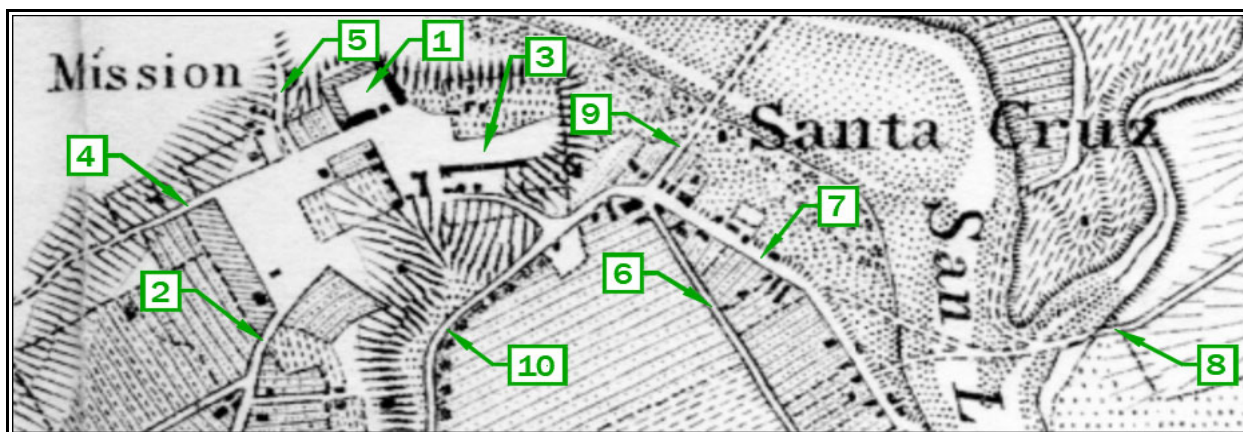


Figure 4: 1854 survey map detail

Key to numbered notes on the Figure 4 map, pointing to the mission and mission-era roads (using modern names):

1. Mission Santa Cruz
2. Mission Street (connecting the mission to the 1769 Portolá coast road)
3. School Street
4. High Street
5. Potrero Street
6. Pacific Avenue
7. Front Street (the first section from the lower plaza to Cooper Street)
8. Soquel Avenue (the 1769 Portolá trail, leading to the San Lorenzo River ford used by that expedition)
9. Water Street (leading to another San Lorenzo River ford, this one established during the mission era)
10. Rincon/Chestnut Street (where it follows the base of the terrace escarpment).

Some of the mapped roads may have been altered from their original mission-era routes. Other roads and man-made features shown on this map *may or may not* date from the mission-era, and/or may not be shown accurately. Some of those more-ambiguous roads/features will be revisited when the discussion moves on to later historical periods.

Another feature of the 1854 map: it appears to show a number of discrete parcels with contrasting hatch patterns indicating cultivation, surrounded by what looks in some cases like fence lines (shown dashed) separating the parcels. Some of those fence lines later became streets.

One other modern Santa Cruz street name survives from the mission era, but did not come from the mission itself. The straight mile of North Branciforte Avenue was laid out by a 1797 survey party given the task of mapping lots and streets for a secular *Villa* (a type of pueblo intended for settlement of retired military veterans). Pueblo grazing lands were divided from mission lands to the west by the San Lorenzo River. The *Villa* settlement failed, however, to develop the typical pueblo pattern (which had been planned with a central *plaza* surrounded by structures). The result was that pueblo residents and leadership gradually began to move across the river to the more-structured settled area around the mission. Only that one named street has survived to commemorate the pueblo, and the entire *Villa de Branciforte* area was annexed to the City of Santa Cruz in 1905.¹¹

In other uses of the name, Branciforte Creek is shown on early maps as *Arroyo de la Villa*, and its current name seems to have been applied after the mission era. Today's Branciforte Drive (not to be confused with Branciforte Avenue) was named after Branciforte Creek which it follows.¹²

Missions to Ranchos

After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1820, the first big change was the secularization in 1833 of the twenty-one Franciscan missions of *Alta California*, including Mission Santa Cruz. That action released vast tracts of land from mission control, enabling the acquisition of that land by private individuals.

The second big change was a relaxation of rules regarding land ownership by non-Mexican-citizens. Combined with a shortage of migration from Mexico to *Alta California*, U.S. immigrants became a larger and larger share of the population, and in 1833 the Mexican government enacted a law that secularized the twenty-one Franciscan missions of *Alta California*, including Mission Santa Cruz. Finding that the missions had failed to make good Spanish citizens out of the indigenous Californians (those few who survived), and so had not turned over to them the vast tracts of land that the missions were supposedly holding in trust for them, the vast land holdings of the missions were made available as grants and/or sales to private citizens.

Disposition of the large tracts of rural land was controlled by the successive *Alta California* governors, beginning in 1834 with José Figueroa. These became the fabled free-range, cattle and horse-grazing *ranchos*, with their *haciendas* hosting lively *fiestas* and *fandangos*, and dashing *vaqueros* performing *rodeo* cattle roundups. Unsurprisingly, none of those large land grant recipients went to native Californians or their tribal groups. Many of the grants went instead to the *ranchero* families (including some “foreigners”) that had previously lived on and run the ranching operations under mission control. Other grantees were those who held government positions and/or had personal connections to the governor.

However, the area that is now the City of Santa Cruz is smaller than those expansive cattle ranches, and only three small *rancho* grants were made within today's city limits. Larger grants did, however, define future those city limits, as shown in Figure 5.

Following statehood, boundaries of most Mexican land grants were confirmed by a state lands commission. Those boundaries formed the basis for all later land divisions and many jurisdictional divisions. Figure 5 shows how the grant lines remain today.¹³ In areas not belonging to one of the ranchos, a township-range-section grid system was overlaid after statehood.

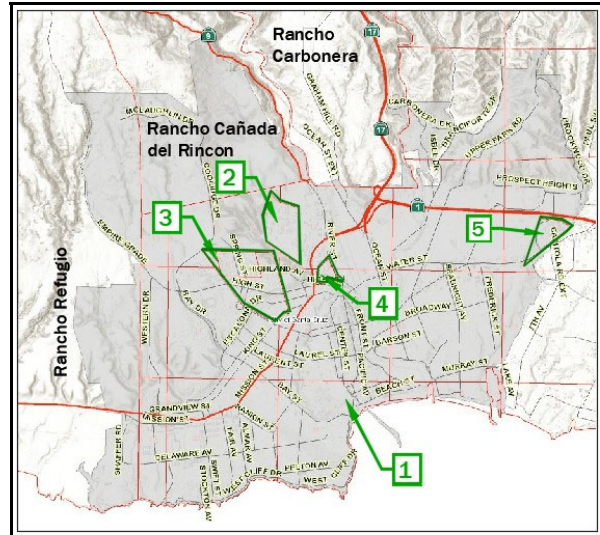


Figure 5: Land grant boundaries can still be seen today in the online Geographical Information System (GIS) of Santa Cruz County

Key to notes appended (green) in Figure 5:

1. Today's City of Santa Cruz (gray area)
2. *Rancho Potrero y Rincón de San Pedro Regalado*
3. *Rancho Tres Ojos de Agua*
4. Santa Cruz parish (mission remainder)
5. *Rancho Aguajito*

Although the disposition of most other mission land holdings within the *pueblo* was left to the *alcaldes*, larger governor-approved grants adjoined the town limits in several places, as shown in Figure 5. Three of those grants helped to define the original Santa Cruz town limits when they were first mapped in 1866. The eastern edge of the Castro/Bolcoff *Rancho Refugio* (1833) later became the original western boundary of Santa Cruz. Another land grant, *Rancho Cañada del Rincón en el Río San Lorenzo* (1846), established the future town's northern boundary, on a line perpendicular to the border of *Rancho Refugio*, and extending east to the San Lorenzo River. Later annexations of former *rancho* lands have since expanded the town/city limits to the north and west.

The southern edges of another large land grant, *Rancho Carbonera* (1838), became part of the northern Santa Cruz boundary in 1905. Two smaller grants lay entirely within the 1866 town limits: *Rancho Potrero y Rincón de San Pedro Regalado* (1842) and *Rancho Tres Ojos de Agua* (1844). To the east, part of the *Rancho Aguajito* boundary follows Arana Creek, which has been part of the City of Santa Cruz eastern boundary since the 1905 annexation.

Bolcoff and Other Early non-Spanish Speaking "Foreigners"

Until Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1820, only Spanish citizens could legally reside and/or do business in California. Independent Mexico liberalized those rules, however, and a number of immigrants from outside Mexico were able to obtain citizenship and land grants. In Santa Cruz, one of the first to take advantage of the changes was a Russian named *Osip Alexandovich Bolkhov*, whose naturalized name became *José Antonio Bolcof*.

By 1822 Bolcoff (the anglicized spelling) had become a naturalized Mexican citizen and married a daughter of the prominent local Castro family. He received the *Rancho San Agustín* land grant (which included today's city of Scotts Valley) in 1833.

The next year, Bolcoff was appointed *mayor domo* (secular administrator) of Mission Santa Cruz, a position that assigned to him the duty of disposing of mission property deemed to be in excess of what a parish church needed after secularization.

In 1839 he sold his interest in that grant to an American, former frontiersman Joseph Majors. Majors had also been naturalized and married another Castro daughter, so he and Bolcoff became brothers-in-law. The land grant title was formally transferred to Majors in 1841.

Bolcoff then petitioned the governor to be granted the *Rancho Refugio* grant. The grant was made jointly to Bolcoff's wife and two of her Castro sisters in 1840, so Bolcoff became a grantee by marriage. Today's Wilder Ranch State Park preserves an adobe building constructed by Bolcoff in the 1840s.

Some historical changes are important to Santa Cruz because they *didn't* happen. When Mission Santa Cruz was secularized, residents of the surrounding communities were given the choice of retaining the mission name or adopting a new name. According to local names authority Donald Clark, residents around Mission Santa Cruz decided to rename their community after then-current governor José Figueroa.¹⁴ However, the name *Pueblo de Figueroa* probably became suddenly less popular a year later when a new governor replaced Figueroa. For that or some other reason, the community once again became Santa Cruz, and so it remains.

Bolcoff became an important figure in the post-Mission-era Branciforte pueblo, whose jurisdiction was expanded to take in the settlement that had grown up around the mission. For example, in his later role as *Juez de Paz* (Justice of the Peace), in January of 1846 Bolcoff began a proclamation with "Citizen Jose Bolcoff, Constitutional Juez de Paz of the Villa de Branciforte and Santa Cruz."¹⁵

By about 1840, twenty-six years before town incorporation and before large numbers of Americans began to arrive, Santa Cruz had already established much of its 1866 boundary and many of today's major roads. Most later roads were forced to adapt to the irregular courses of those earliest roads.

Figure 6 shows the established lines and roads as of about 1845, added to the same modern GIS map used in Figure 5.

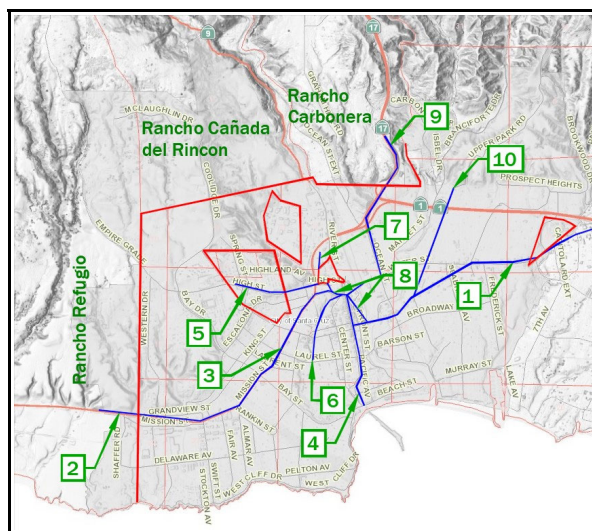


Figure 6: Santa Cruz main roads (blue) as of ~1845

Key to Figure 6 numbered road notes, with (today's names in parentheses):

1. Portolá route (Soquel Avenue)
2. Portolá route (Highway 1)
3. Mission to Portolá route (Mission Street)
4. Mission to the beach (Pacific Avenue)
5. Mission along the *zanja* (High Street)
6. Mission fields border-west (Rincon-Chestnut)
7. Mission to orchards/pastures (Potrero Street)
8. Mission to Portolá ford (Mission/Front)
9. Mission to San Jose (Water-Ocean-Hwy 17)
10. Branciforte main street (N. Branciforte Ave.)

In addition to the few place names, some Spanish words for geographical/physical features crossed over, and remain in some of today's place names, although it's difficult to pinpoint sources and/or dates. For instance, the name Escalona Drive uses an anglicized spelling of *escalón* (step or terrace: the modern English equivalent word is escarpment). And indeed the street does follow the base of one of the sudden and steep elevation changes between coastal terraces that define the shape of the Santa Cruz Westside.¹⁶

Other adopted Spanish/Mexican-era words that can be found on today's Santa Cruz maps describe natural features, including: Rincon (from *rincón*, meaning corner or nook), Potrero (pasture), and Laguna (lagoon). Quite a few more adopted Spanish place/feature names can be found in Santa Cruz County areas outside the city limits, although many of these were applied well after the Spanish-speaking era.

Mexico-U. S. Tensions Build

The Mexican government had no more success than Spain in enticing emigration from Mexico to faraway *Alta California*, and the sparsely-settled frontier province soon began to feel pressure from the westward expansion of the United States. A trickle of American explorers, frontiersmen, and trappers began to find their way overland to California, beginning with Jedediah Smith in 1826. Smith was followed in subsequent years by a number of hunter-trapper groups. Every time one of those groups passed through California, a few stayed behind and tended to accumulate with like-minded men in places like Isaac Graham's distillery near Salinas, established in 1833.

In 1836 young Monterey-born government official Juan Alvarado recruited Graham to lead a group of his fellow Americans in support of a coup that eventually led to Alvarado's appointment as governor the following year. But by 1840 the alliance between the governor and the unruly frontiersmen had frayed, and Alvarado ordered about one hundred foreigners arrested for anti-government activities. Unfortunately for Alvarado, the forty who were charged and sent to Mexico for trial were acquitted and released.

Graham and other exonerated foreigners returned to California, but found a new home farther from Alvarado's power base in Monterey. Graham started a new settlement of American expats at *Rancho Zayante*, which was re-granted in 1841 to Graham's former trapping companion Joseph Majors (already a Mexican citizen and grantee).

Graham would later make his own contribution to the Santa Cruz roadway system, building a road from his lands to Santa Cruz, parts of which were incorporated into today's Graham Hill Road. The Zayante settlement evolved into the part of today's community of Felton that lies east of the San Lorenzo River.

In the early 1840s the first wagon trains arrived in California from Missouri and other states, and some of the immigrant families ended up in the Santa Cruz area. But before any of those overland arrivals reached our part of the coast, the last Mexican-era *padrón* (census) of Branciforte/Santa Cruz pueblo population was conducted in 1845, probably by *Juez de Paz* (Justice of the Peace) Bolcoff.

The census listing of 470 individual residents was divided into three groups. The first group included 294 Mexican citizens, six of whom were naturalized residents of foreign birth (including Bolcoff and Majors). The second group included 56 *extranjeros* (the term literally means "strangers"). In this context, it referred to un-assimilated immigrants, although 10 of those included in that group were California-born wives and children. 33 of that group were Americans, including Isaac Graham and others living at Zayante. In a third group, listed separately from the other two, were 120 Native Californians.^{17, 18}

Foreigners comprised just under 12% of the local population counted by the 1845 padron. Within a year, however, the pace of demographic change in the Santa Cruz area began to accelerate rapidly with the onset of the Mexican-American War, which ended the Spanish-Mexican era in California. From that point forward, changes in the shape of Santa Cruz were largely determined by its rapidly-increasing population of American immigrants (supplemented by smaller but significant numbers of Europeans and Asians).

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