

# SALINAS HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

## DRAFT OUTLINE

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### Historic Context

- **Historical Overview** – *The following seven sections provide a historical overview of the history of Salinas in chronological order. The outline is arranged with various key events and relevant examples listed under each period. These notes provide an overview of the general direction that will shape the historical overview. Other significant events or major trends not included in this outline may be identified during staff review and community outreach.*

#### I. Indigenous Settlement (pre-1770)

#### II. Mission and Rancho Periods (1770–1866)

- a. Establishment of the Missions and Mission System

- i. Carmel (1770), San Antonio (1771), Soledad (1791) and San Juan Bautista (1797)
  - b. Rancho Nacional (deeded to Vicente Cantua in 1839) and the Rancho Sausal (deeded to José T. Castro in 1834, later purchased by Jacob Leese in 1845) became the foundation of present-day Salinas
    - i. Elias Howe (credited as the founder of Salinas) purchased 80 acres from Leese and built Halfway House
      - 1. Purchased by Alberto Trescony in 1857, who built several buildings
    - ii. Growth as a dairy farming area in the 1850s and 1860s

### **III. Settling Salinas (1867–1879)**

- a. Town formed ca. 1867 with planned town layout (Alanson Riker)
- b. Period of intense growth through 1870s
  - i. 1868: Chinese laborers immigrated to the area under the provisions of the Burlingame Treaty, aiding in the construction of the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad (1874)
  - ii. 1870s and 1880s: land reclamation completed by Chinese laborers (clearing and draining swamps, including Carr Lake)
  - iii. 1871: Telegraph service and *The Salinas Weekly Index*, Salinas' first newspaper, established
  - iv. 1872:
    - 1. Southern Pacific Railroad arrived; Salinas gained limited incorporation and became the county seat
    - 2. Salinas' first Chinatown established
    - 3. City gas works established
  - v. 1873: Construction of the "Abbott House" (Cominos Hotel) solidified downtown development
    - 1. Jesse D. Carr founded first bank in Monterey County in Salinas
  - vi. 1874: Main Street paved and water company established

### **IV. Agricultural Expansion (1880–1919)**

- a. Changing agricultural production
  - i. Salinas was a hub for business and politics in the valley, surrounded by wheat and barley fields dedicated to cereal crops
  - ii. By 1880, Chinese laborers made up 10% of the population and leased 1,000 acres for farming, contributing to land value increases
    - 1. 1893: Reestablishment of Chinatown on Soledad Street between East Lake Street and East Market Street
  - iii. Shift from cereal crops to sugar beets by 1898
    - 1. Japanese workers heavily involved in the sugar beet industry, with 200 workers arriving in 1898

2. Japanese farmers were the first to grow celery, broccoli, and strawberries in the Salinas Valley
  - iv. Dairy industry increased in importance by the early 1900s, supported by newly developed condensing techniques
  - v. California Rodeo became a local tradition (1909), formally established 1911
  - b. Population Growth
    - i. Population grew from 2,339 (1890 census) to over 3,000 by 1900
    - ii. Salinas High School was constructed in 1900
    - iii. Chinatown played an important role in supporting other immigrant groups and agricultural workers including Filipinos, Japanese, and Mexicans
    - iv. Related development of residential neighborhoods
  - c. Changing Transportation
    - i. Southern Pacific Railroad absorbed the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad (narrow gauge railroad between Salinas and Monterey) in 1879
    - ii. 1901: Southern Pacific Railroad connected Salinas to Los Angeles
    - iii. Personal automobile ownership influenced city planning and transportation routes
      1. Highway 101 construction (1915) brought fully paved streets to Salinas
  - d. Transition from Town to City
    - i. Board of Trade established 1887 to promote commercial growth of the city
    - ii. Expedient rebuilding following the 1906 earthquake
      1. Reinforced steel construction in fashionable styles of the era
    - iii. Adopted a "freeholders charter" in 1919, officially becoming a city
    - iv. Urban improvements included removal of wood awnings along Main Street
- V. Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century City (1920–1945)**
- a. Population Growth
    - i. 1920s: population reached 4,304
    - ii. 1930: population at 10,263
  - b. Agricultural developments
    - i. Shift from sugar beets and beans to lettuce ("green gold"), which became the primary crop of the Salinas Valley
      1. Profitability of lettuce and other crops in Salinas allowed small farms to be highly successful (stayed primarily small farms into the 1930s)
    - ii. Ice-bunkered railroad cars enabled nationwide shipping of fresh produce
    - iii. Artichokes also emerged as a significant crop
    - iv. Filipino laborers replaced Japanese workers in agriculture following Japanese internment during World War II, expanding Filipino communities east of Chinatown

- c. Labor History
    - i. Labor strikes by the Filipino Labor Supply Association (1934) and Vegetable Packers Association (1936)
    - ii. Dust Bowl migrants and their impact on local services and community
  - d. Expansion of Salinas and its changing architecture
    - i. Expansion to east (Alisal) and southwest (Maple Park)
    - ii. Modernization of Main Street
      - 1. Popular Moderne and International architectural styles
    - iii. New Deal-funded projects
      - 1. Armory building doubled as a civic auditorium
      - 2. Monterey County Courthouse and its bas reliefs
      - 3. Steinbeck Station Post Office
    - iv. Construction of schools, jail, city infrastructure upgrades, and airport expansion
    - v. Salinas' first annexation to the original city in 1933 included 52 acres to the south along Romie Lane
    - vi. In Alisal, the East Salinas Improvement Club organized with sixty members in 1938 and began a movement to build sidewalks, plant trees, and improve housing and sewage
      - 1. By 1940, Alisal Branch of the Monterey County Free Libraries opened
  - e. Impacts of World War II
    - i. Internment of 3,586 Japanese Americans from the Monterey Peninsula, Watsonville, Salinas, Gilroy, and San Benito County were detained at the Salinas Rodeo Grounds before being transferred to internment camps away from the coast
    - ii. Agriculture
      - 1. Labor shortages due to enlistment
      - 2. Increasing numbers of Mexican migrants via the Bracero program (1942)
  - f. Anticipated Development
    - i. Salinas planned for post-war development
    - ii. Outlined street and highway, public works, and parks and recreation plans
- VI. Postwar Years (1946–1979)**
- a. Post-war Growth
    - i. 1948 - Salinas Junior College officially renamed Hartnell College; attendance rises due to the GI Bill
    - ii. Annexation of adjacent land:
      - 1. Late 1940s:
        - 1. 1949: Alisal area voted “no” on annexation
        - 2. Airport and Rodeo tracts in the north launched annexation drives

2. 1950 and 1956, City Council began a long series of annexations that brought 43 additions to the city, doubling its area
- iii. Residential Growth
  1. Home construction was on the rise, and the population went from 13,917 in 1950 to 18,957 in 1960
  2. Neighborhood revitalization – especially around 1975
    1. East Salinas - Hebron Heights built a community center, cleared and replaced substandard housing, and initiated a community-wide improvement program
    2. North Salinas - housing, recreation, and jobs were key issues for spending city Housing and Community Development Act funds
  3. Patterns of development of community support institutions, such as libraries, schools, and parks
- iv. Redevelopment of Downtown Salinas from the 1950s into the 1970s
  1. Under the Federal Urban Renewal Program beginning in 1957, many buildings in Chinatown were deemed unsafe and demolished, displacing Chinese families and causing further disinvestment
  2. 1974: Downtown Revitalization Plan funded with \$1 million investment
  3. Old Monterey County Jail closed on West Alisal Street, new facility at 1410 Natividad Road completed 1977
  4. Proposed earthquake ordinance in 1979 to update buildings in downtown core to meet 2/3 of city code was strongly opposed
- b. Agriculture and Unionization
  - i. Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) began organizing activities in the Salinas Valley
    1. Chavez jailed in Old Monterey County Jail for 20 days in December 1970 for Salad Bowl Strike
- c. Diversification of Industries
  - i. Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital became a significant employer following its establishment in 1953
  - ii. Monterey County Industrial Development, Inc. (MCID) established to draw industrial employers and jobs to the area
    1. Nestle Chocolate Company (1960); Firestone Tire and Rubber (1963); Peter Paul, Inc. (1963); Fusion Rubbermaid Corp. (1964); Green Giant (1965); Fearn Foods, Inc. (1965); McCormick & Company, Inc., Schilling Division (1965); Thor Electronics (1966)
  - iii. Northridge Shopping Center opened in 1972, changing regional shopping patterns. It was the largest climate-controlled retail development between San

Jose and Santa Barbara and was the leading shopping center along the Central Coast

## **VII. Modern Salinas (1980–present)**

- a. Historic Downtown
    - i. 1989 earthquake proved very damaging to older masonry buildings
    - ii. 1998: National Steinbeck Center constructed, resulting in street reconfiguration
  - b. Declining Industry
    - i. Closure of several major industrial plants in 1980 and 1981
    - ii. Firestone’s manufacturing plant caused water pollution that became a subject of cleanup over the next twenty years
  - c. Majority Hispanic population
    - i. 50.6% Hispanic Americans in 1990
  - d. Environmental Events and challenges
    - i. 1995 Flood – impact on infrastructure, agriculture, etc.
- **Relevant Themes and Periods of Significance** – *Unlike the above historical overview, which is arranged chronologically, the following six Theme sections are related to the built features relevant to a particular development theme and trace the changes to a particular resource type throughout the period of interest. For example, the agricultural theme will focus on development patterns and built resources that reflect the agricultural history of Salinas, with a particular focus on resources that may be extant. Each theme section contains general notes on some of the areas and general trends that will be described, and each theme will have subsections describing Associated Property Types and relevant Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations.*

### **I. Agricultural Development**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. Changing patterns of agricultural development, including the size and locations of farms (i.e. periods when small farms got absorbed into larger farms and key dates where agricultural land was converted to other uses)
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **II. Residential Development**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. General patterns of growth and changing types of residential development
    - 1. Pre- and Post-World War II patterns of development
    - 2. Multi-family vs. single-family housing development patterns
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **III. Commercial and Industrial Development**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. Central business district and historic town center
  - ii. Transition to automobile-serving commercial uses
  - iii. Box stores and malls
  - iv. Development of agricultural and production industries
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **IV. Civic and Institutional Growth**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. Growth of support institutions like schools, libraries, post offices, newspapers
  - ii. Changing government institutions
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **V. Transportation & Infrastructure**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. Railroad-related infrastructure
  - ii. Growth of the personal automobile
  - iii. Transitions to trucking and its impact on infrastructure
  - iv. Municipal airport
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **VI. Social, Religious, or Cultural Institutions**

- a. Subthemes:
  - i. Religious life and patterns related to various ethnic and cultural groups
  - ii. Social halls, clubs, and groups
  - iii. Cultural centers
    - 1. Chinese community and Chinatown
    - 2. Filipino community
    - 3. Japanese community
    - 4. Hispanic and Latino community
- b. Associated Property Types
- c. Eligibility Criteria and Integrity Considerations

### **Selected Bibliography**

#### **Appendices**

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- II. Architectural Styles