

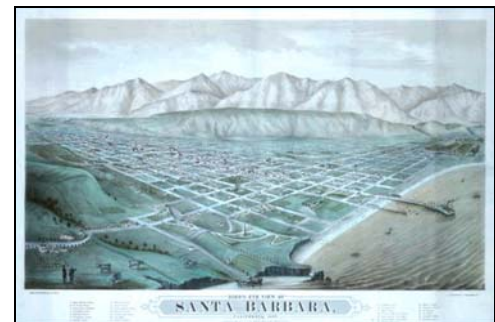


II. HISTORY OF THE PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM

Santa Barbara has a rich and colorful history. Its natural surroundings, Spanish missionaries, the first American surveyors, and earthquakes have all influenced its present urban form.

First Settlements

Santa Barbara began as a Spanish Presidio, founded by Jose Francisco Ortega in 1782. The purpose of the Presidios was to prevent the Russians and/or the British from annexing California, and to retain Spanish control over its portions of the state. The Presidios were also military settlements for the protection of missionaries, also established in San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco. Their 12-foot high adobe walls enclosed storehouses, a church, and the residence of the commandant. At first, all of the soldiers and their families lived within the walls of the Presidio. Part of their payment for service to the military was the gift of land in the Presidio area. Thus, after a period of time, some of the soldiers began to build adobe houses outside of the fortification, marking the birth of the Spanish Pueblo. Much of the interaction between these early adobe houses was via a series of pedestrian and cart paths.



Credit: Robert Honeyman Jr. Collection

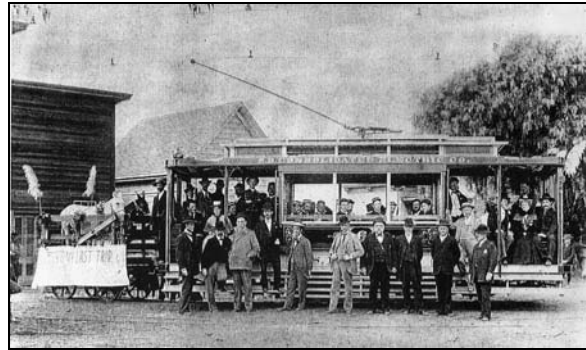
An early view of Santa Barbara.

A Mission was established in 1786 by Father Fermin Lasuen. Lasuen chose a location far enough away from the Presidio as to not allow the soldiers to corrupt the Indians, but close enough to be under Presidio protection.

For at least 800 years prior to the arrival of the Spanish, there were three or four Chumash villages within the area we now call Santa Barbara. The largest “Syuxtun” (which meant “the road that branches”) was located near the mouth of Mission Creek and had a population of nearly 600.

Streets, Blocks, and Plans

California became an American state in 1850, and the City of Santa Barbara incorporated in 1851. In 1851, the City commissioned Colonel Salisbury Haley to survey the city and establish a grid street system with the intent of delineating the extensive land holdings that the City had inherited from the former Mexican Pueblo. At this time, there were approximately 60 houses. These homes were arranged without regard to a grid system or compass direction. All streets were to be 60-foot wide with the exception of State Street and Carrillo Street, which were to be 80-foot wide. The corner of State and Carrillo Streets was designated as the center of Downtown Santa Barbara. The streets and city blocks were to be laid out parallel (and perpendicular) to the ocean and were designed for the movement of pedestrians and horse carriages. The problem with this approach was that the homes of many prominent residents were in the middle of proposed roadway locations. While many homes were torn down, others were left in place and the roadways “detoured” around them. The current jogs along East De la Guerra Street at State and Santa Barbara Streets are remnants of these early detours.



Credit: Jake Jacobus, Santa Barbara Urban Historian

First electric street car in Santa Barbara, c. 1897

The construction of Stearn’s Wharf in 1872, as well as the introduction of the Southern Pacific railway line in 1887, brought growth to Santa Barbara, and new businesses began to cluster along State Street. About half of the first 50 businesses were saloons, which lined the sunny, eastern side of the street. On the other, shadier side of the street, where shoppers preferred to walk, were merchants.

Development

Mule-drawn streetcars operated in Santa Barbara from 1875 until 1897, when they were replaced by an electrified wire system. At this time, Santa Barbara was not considered very attractive due to its dirt roads, overhead wires, and disjointed smattering of building styles. This began to change for the better in the late 1880s as telephone service - and the coastal rail line - connected Santa Barbara with the rest of California. With its beautiful backdrop of the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Ynez Mountains, Santa Barbara began to develop a reputation as a vacation destination, especially for health-oriented travelers.



Credit: Bancroft Library, Univ. of California, Berkeley

State Street in 1925

Streetcar service was suspended in August of 1927, when Spreitz Transportation began to operate commercial buses throughout the city, primarily along the old streetcar lines.

A major turning point in Santa Barbara’s history was the earthquake of June 29, 1925. Thirteen people died, State Street was closed for six months, and damage exceeded \$15 million. In 1921, the concept of using the Spanish Colonial architecture style as a unifying element in Santa Barbara was introduced by

Bernard Hoffman and the Plans and Planting Committee. The earthquake's destruction brought a clean slate, as well as a new investment in the city, allowing for the proliferation of the Spanish Colonial architecture style along State Street and the city's commercial center. These architectural features include red-tiled roofs and ornate wrought iron.

In fact, Santa Barbara's modern system of paseos (walkways) dates back to this time. El Paseo, Santa Barbara's original pedestrian mall, was established after the earthquake. Numerous other paseos have been established since then, including: Victoria Court, a pedestrian oriented complex built in the late 1970s and Paseo Nuevo, Santa Barbara's most recent pedestrian mall, completed in the early 1990s.

Post-War Period

Like many American Downtowns, Santa Barbara began to lose its vitality in the 1950s and 1960s as population growth shifted towards suburban areas. In addition to the population boom and the increased funding for highway construction, the damming of the Santa Ynez River in 1956 also affected Santa Barbara. This dam's creation of Lake Cachuma made it possible for the population of the Goleta Valley to increase, ultimately tripling in size. Additionally, the increasing size of the University of California at Santa Barbara, as well as the arrival of such companies as a General Motors Research and Development facility, led to increasing traffic and land use pressures adjacent to and within Santa Barbara.

In 1967, Santa Barbara merchants formed the "Downtown Organization" and members voted to tax themselves to create a Downtown plaza and pedestrian mall. The addition of tile sidewalks, palm trees, and attractive street furniture served to attract business and energy back to the Downtown. Additionally, the sidewalks on State Street were widened by eliminating parallel parking, and continuing improvements included the introduction of brick sidewalks, which are easier to repair than the former tile, and provides more sure footing when wet. These improvements have helped make Santa Barbara an attractive and walkable city.

In 1964, the Santa Barbara General Plan recognized the importance of pedestrians. It called for the consideration of pedestrians in transportation decisions, but still put emphasis on automobile mobility. In 1997, the Circulation Element of the Santa Barbara General Plan greatly redirected the City's transportation goals and priorities. This document encouraged planners, engineers, citizens, and elected officials to work towards equality of all modes of transportation, thereby boosting the importance of bicycling, walking, and transit use.

