

**WILLOW GLEN:
FROM WILLOW BOGG TO SAN JOSE ADDITION**

**An Essay Presented to
the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County**

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**WILLOW GLEN HIGH SCHOOL
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PREFACE

Campbell Thompson Settle, one of Willow Glen's first entrepreneurs, may be given credit for the population of the city when it was first covered with blossoming orchards. Now those orchards have been paved over . . . and in their place are the memories of some of its brave residents who united against a railroad company to turn Willow Glen into a city. The following describes Willow Glen's formation as a community, and its later annexation to the city of San Jose.

DISCOVERY AND FRUIT INDUSTRY

The area where the city of Willow Glen would eventually develop was first discovered in 1774. A group of explorers had climbed up the hill behind what is now Oak Hill Cemetery in south-west San Jose. They looked out over the willow swamp which lay before them. There were forests of giant willow trees and wild blackberries. Wild cattle had carved the only trails between the thickets of brush. After all of that climbing, the explorers were not feeling very original, so they decided to name the area "The Willows."

The swamp among the willow trees was formed by Canoas Creek, which was also known as Old Channel Los Gatos. The creek had supplied San Jose's water from 1707, through the mid 1800's. Canoas Creek ran through "The Willows" into the Guadalupe River. Flooding pushed the creek into the upper Guadalupe, but the dried bed was marked by Dry Creek Road. It was rumored that a farmer had caused the flood by using spring water to flush out gophers.

Early farmers and explorers first moved into The Willows because they thought the soil would be great for farming. One of the first settlers of the area was Campbell Thompson Settle, who purchased 200 acres of the rich farming land in 1860. He paid \$10 an acre for willow thickets, and \$20 an acre for cleared land¹. His nearest neighbors were the Cottle Brothers, Ira and Royal. All of these settlers of The Willows were still considered San Jose citizens since their homes were so near the city.

Until 1862, the main crop grown in The Willows was grain. After that time, Campbell Settle tried his hand at growing pears and apples. The new crop flourished and marked the beginning of the fruit industry in The Willows. The intersection of Lincoln and Minnesota Avenues is the area where Settle's fruit operation began.

Campbell Settle was a proud resident of The Willows. He soon Founded the Farmer's Union of San Jose. He pioneered fruit drying by the successful operation of a large dehydrator. In 1876, Settle became the manager of Alden Fruit & Vegetable Company's "evaporator." The company processed 4,000 pounds of delicious prunes every 24 hours². By the mid-1870's, The Willows was the leading fruit-growing area in the valley.

The value of land in The Willows rose quickly. The building of a street car line from San Jose boosted the value to \$1,000 an acre. It was estimated that Settle's income for the fruit on his original 200 acres was almost equal to that which was paid for all of San Jose when he bought his land in 1860.³

PROBLEMS IN "THE WILLOWS"

Problems soon arose in The Willows. San Jose's main source of transportation in 1927, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, wanted to build a track through the residential area there in order to ease traffic congestion caused by the tracks in Downtown San Jose. The residents of The Willows were enraged. Nobody wanted the noise or pollution of the train running near their orchards and homes. Some form of government was needed to deal with these problems.

On September 8, 1927, Willowers held a vote for incorporation. There were 1,400 registered voters who expressed concerns about a raise in taxes. The majority of the voters, however, were for incorporation by a vote of 686-364, so The Willows became the city of Willow Glen.⁴ The city officials were elected: Paul Clark became the mayor, Paul Smith became the Chief of Police, and Joe Hageman, A.R. Webster and L.C. Rossi were elected as councilmen. By action of these newly-elected officials, The Southern Pacific Railroad Company was forced to rerout through San Jose. The building codes in Willow Glen harmonized with San Jose's in case of future consolidation. Some San Joseans joked of Willow Glen some day taking over San Jose.

By 1928, Willow Glen was a rapidly growing city. Seventeen subdivisions opened in the first year, all of which filled almost instantly. The new-comers were eager to buy the great property with rich farming soil. The population, based on 1,200 homes, was about 5,500 people, and more houses were going up daily.⁵ Although Willow Glen was smaller than Santa Clara at the time of incorporation, it was larger than Los Gatos, Gilroy, and Mountain View.

Now that Willow Glen was a full-fledged city, major changes needed to take place. The only grammar school needed an annexation. It was not only used for education, but it was the center of social life in the new city and was the location for the meeting of the city council. There was no high-school in Willow Glen, so students were sent to San Jose, Campbell, or Los Gatos after finishing junior high. As a result, Willow Glen residents were forced to pay \$1.31 in taxes per year for high-school services, more than any district in San Jose. Services were needed to start a volunteer fire department. The city also needed its own sewer system.

Doubt and question of disincorporation rose in the minds of Willow Glen citizens. Some were in favor of becoming county territory once again. Very few were in favor of continuing as a city because they had no sewer system, fire department, or police protection of their own. Most of the original residents were in favor of annexation to San Jose. One official said, "But while there is no doubt that annexation will carry when it is brought to a vote in Willow Glen, there will be no vote on the proposition until the Southern Pacific tracks are down and the first trains are moving over them." He further explained, "It is not due to the distrust of the Southern Pacific Railroad, but since Willow Glen incorporated specifically to prevent the use of the 1906 right-of-way, they feel Willow Glen should remain incorporated until that route has been set aside for all time."⁶

More problems with the Southern Pacific Railroad occurred in 1929, when the Southern Pacific hurriedly laid portions of the forbidden tracks without anyone being aware of what was happening. Willow Glen sought an injunction against the track-laying, charging

that the railroad had not asked for a franchise. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company said they didn't need one. Willow Glen finally forced them to reroute once again, making the new route even better than before.

PETITIONS FOR ANNEXATION

When the need for a costly new sewer system presented itself, the citizens of Willow Glen began to petition for annexation to San Jose in 1931. One hundred more people signed the petition than eventually voted for annexation. One of the reasons for the success of the petition was that the solicitation was done in such a way that many people signed the petition just to be rid of the solicitor. The city council circulated the following statement against annexation:

To The Voters of Willow Glen

You will be asked to sign a petition for an election for annexation to San Jose.

If you favor annexation you will of course sign such a petition.

If you do not favor annexation now, do not sign it and thus put your city to the expense of an election for something you do not want.

It is certain that annexation to San Jose at this time means:

1. The railroad will run through Willow Glen somewhere west of the Western Pacific.

2. Our city taxes, which are now 79 cents for city purposes will then be at the San Jose rate of \$1.83 for city purposes.

3. We will lose control of our schools.

4. We will lose our efficient fire department, and we may get as much as College Park.

5. After annexation, we can have sewers IF WE PAY FOR THEM. Without annexation, we can have sewers IF WE PAY FOR THEM.

In no event can we have sewers WITHOUT PAYING FOR THEM OURSELVES.

Paul F. Clark
Joe Hageman
L.C. Rossi
A.R. Webster
R.A. Whiffen⁷

The petitioners earned their signatures despite the government discouragement. On September 19, 1931, the majority voted 807-653 that Willow Glen was to remain a city.⁸

A new mayor, Mr. W.B. Putterbaugh was elected on July 10, 1933. He had new ideas and a suggestion for Willow Glen to build her own sewer system. The prescribed location for the disposal plant was on the banks of Guadalupe Creek. The majority of the voters didn't want the plant. No one wanted sewage near their home, and there was really no other place to put the plant. San Jose wouldn't allow it to flow into any creek that passed through San Jose. The other option was to join up with Los Gatos, Campbell, and others, but that would be very expensive. The last option was the best and cheapest solution. . . consolidation with San Jose.

ANNEXATION

In 1936, Willow Glen decided to hold the "Big Election" and possibly annex themselves to San Jose. H.H. Hallin, Campaign Chairman, announced that 627 of the needed 800 signatures to call the election had already been obtained.⁹ The "Big Three" of the merger plan were Mayor Putterbaugh and Councilmen Whiffen and Austin.

Hallin expected quick annexation to San Jose and the proposal of attaching the San Jose sewer system with Willow Glen's. He justified the raise in taxes from annexation by pointing out the lower school costs and the ability to use San Jose schools. If Willow Glen joined San Jose, the tax savings would pay the \$50,000 sewer bonds in just ten years, but if they didn't, taxes would be raised.¹⁰ The only opposition to Hallin's ideas was that residents of Willow Glen thought San Jose would permit saloons to be built in the area. Willow Glen residents were deeply opposed to this idea.

On September 4, 1936, Willow Glen held an election on whether or not to annex themselves to San Jose. The vote was 978-871 for annexation to San Jose.¹¹ Willow Glen thus became the eleventh area to join San Jose after nine years of independence.

Changes began taking place in Willow Glen almost immediately. The city of San Jose began work on the promised sewer system. The Willow Glen volunteer fire department gave their equipment to San Jose and applied for the services of the San Jose Fire Department. San Jose police took over Willow Glen's police department and they accepted applicants to help cover the Willow Glen area. Willow Glen

building licenses could be used until their expiration, but builders had to purchase new ones if they were moving to San Jose property.

San Jose was proud to see Willow Glen as part of its mother city once again. Willow Glen's high-class citizens were welcome in San Jose and added a good sense of community there. Willow Glen was a special attraction with its own downtown, Lincoln Avenue. Some of the original shops which had been built for the workers at the fruit company were still there.

One of Lincoln Avenue's first retail buildings was the Lawrence building. It was used as a grocery store in 1923. By 1928, there were two businesses on the Avenue. A year later, Lincoln Avenue boasted nineteen different shops. By 1930, downtown Willow Glen bustled with thirty-two new businesses. The boom was caused by the addition of a railroad line which was allowed after Willow Glen's annexation to San Jose. It ran from downtown San Jose, down Lincoln Avenue, to Minnesota.

Many of Lincoln Avenue's old shops have been serving customers until just recently. Among the old shops are the Willowett Bakery (1930's), Bergmann's Department Store (1946), George and Inman Clothiers (1946), Robert Sawyer China & Gift Shop (1946), and the Garden Theater (1949). Although most of these businesses are now closed, Lincoln Avenue continues to gain restaurants and botiques catering to the upscale tastes of Willow Glen shoppers.

Today, Lincoln Avenue continues to serve as the heart of Willow Glen. Each year many happy Willow Gleners of all ages come to celebrate Willow Glen High School's Homecoming Parade where graduates can show their school pride by cheering on the home-made

floats. Lincoln Avenue unites citizens from all over San Jose to celebrate at the Founder's Day Parade held there annually. Willow Glen will never lose the sense of pride and community that once united them as a city, and still unites them today.

NOTES

¹ Patricia Loomis, "Willow Glen Once Tops for Fruit" (San Jose News, May 18, 1973), n.p.

² Ibid., n.p.

³ Loomis, Op. Cit., n.p.

⁴ Clyde Arbuckle, History of San Jose (San Jose: Smith Mckay Printing Co., Inc., 1986), p. 62.

⁵ G.B. McMurry, The County Viewpoint (November 29, 1928), n.p.

⁶ G.B. McMurry, The Couty Viewpoint (December 1, 1928), n.p.

⁷ Unknown Author, "Willow Glen's Council Fights Consolidation" (San Jose News, March 21, 1930), n.p.

⁸ Unknown Author, "Willow Glen, By 807-653 Vote Remains City" (San Jose News, September 19, 1931), n.p.

⁹ 627 Signed For Annexation Vote in Willow Glen (June, 1936)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Arbuckle, Op. Cit., p. 62.

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"Willow Glen's Council Fights Consolidation With San Jose," newspaper unknown, n.p., March 21, 1930.

"627 Signed For Annexation Vote in Willow Glen," newspaper unknown, n.p., June 26, 1936.

