

National City in Pictures

Steven Schoenherr

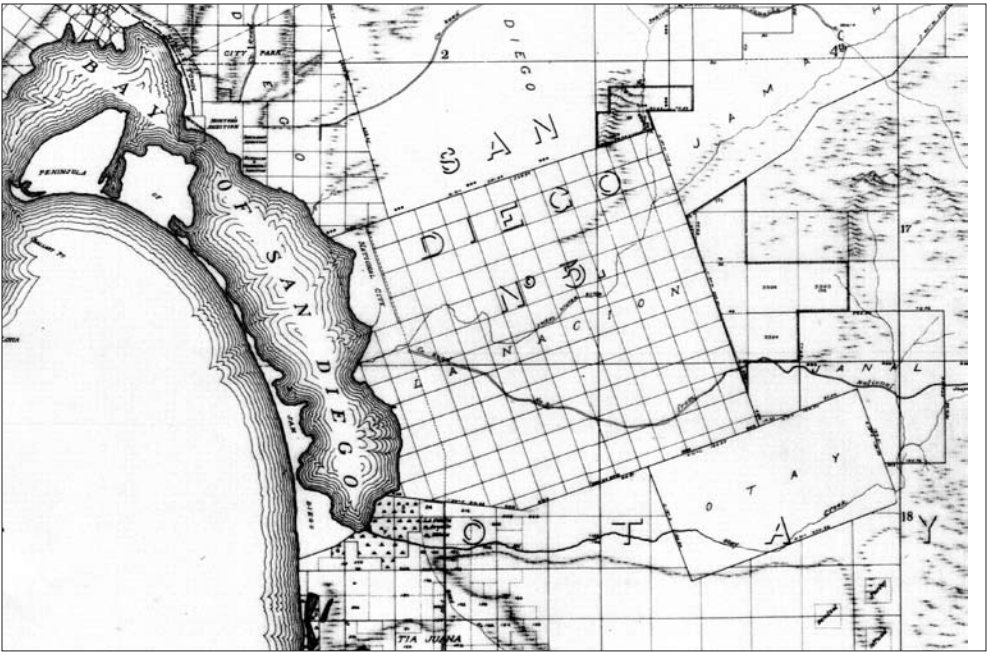
National City began as *El Rancho del Rey*, or the King's Ranch, and was used for grazing the Presidio livestock during the Spanish and Mexican eras. In 1845, Governor Pío Pico granted the 26,612-acre ranch to his brother-in-law, John Forster, who renamed it Rancho de la Nación. It was sold to two San Francisco bankers, Francois Louis Pioche and J. B. Bayerque, in 1856. Frank Kimball and his brothers bought the ranch in 1868, laid out the townsite of National City, built a port, opened roads, planted citrus trees, and attracted the railroad and settlers. The city was incorporated in the South Bay on September 17, 1887.

The following historic photographs illustrate the development of National City from 1887 to the present. Modern views can be found at the following website: <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/local/nc/>.

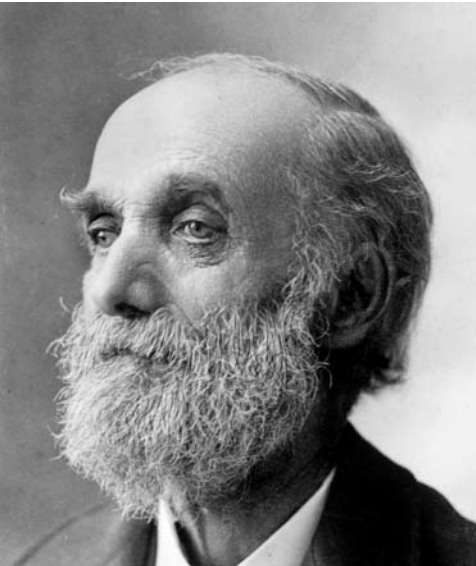


Frank Kimball (1832-1913) and wife Sarah Currier Kimball (1838-1912), ca. 1890 ©SDHS #11183.

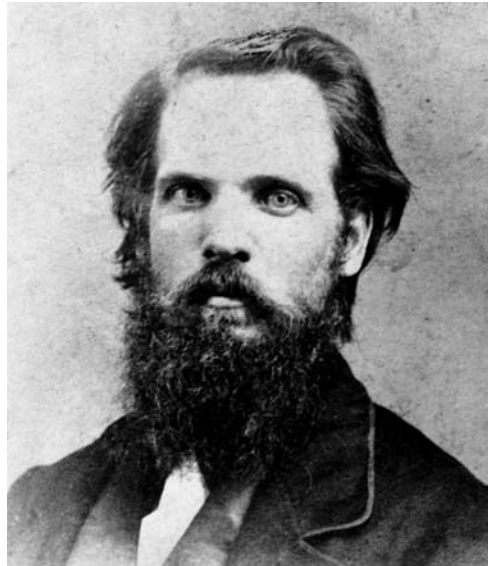
Dr. Steven Schoenherr is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of San Diego where he taught classes in U.S. history from 1977 until his retirement in 2007. His most recent publications are a 44-disc collection of Universal Newsreels and the Appendix DVD for the William Randolph Hearst 21st Century Perspectives Symposium. He is currently writing a history of Chula Vista.



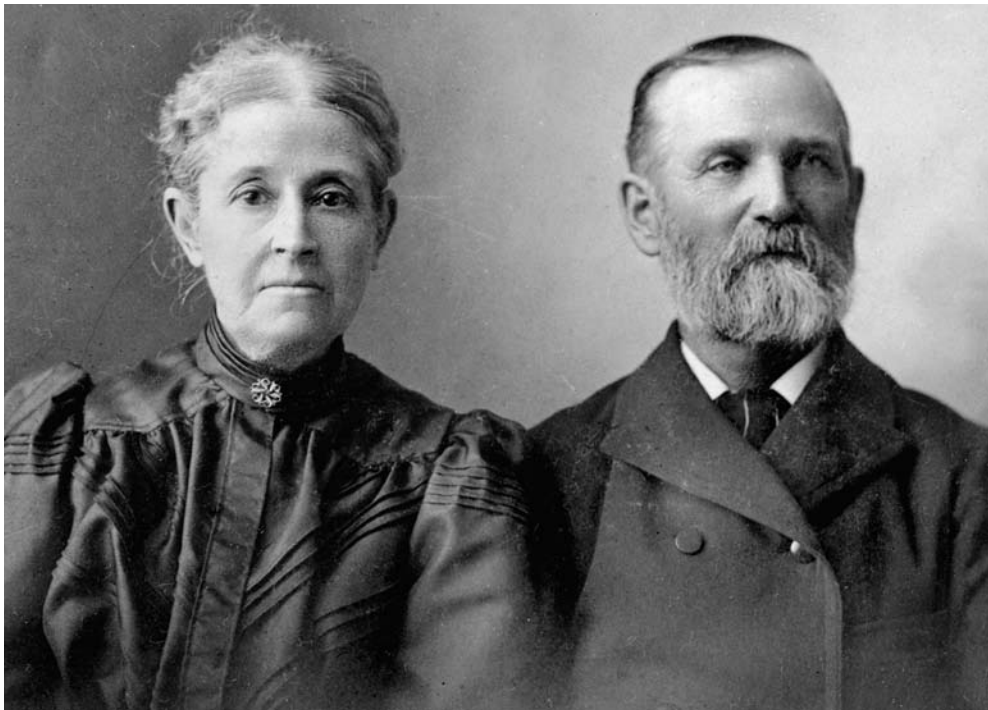
"Official Map. The Western Portion San Diego County California Made Under Direction of the Board of Supervisors A. D. 1872 By M. C. Wheeler Co. Survey'r assisted by F. Copeland dep'y and L. L. Lockling Draughtsman." The original boundaries of the Pío Pico land grant were vague. Frank Kimball and George Morrill made an official survey in 1868 that resulted in a square plat of 26,612 acres. The northern side started at the southern edge of San Diego's pueblo lands. The southern side bordered the ranchos of Mt. Miguel, La Punta, and Otay. The eastern boundary stopped at the foothills of the San Miguel mountain. Kimball put his townsite of National City on the northwest side, close to the bay and the road from Mexico to San Diego, but north of the marshy estuaries of the Paradise and Sweetwater rivers. This detail of southwest corner of the Wheeler map shows the Bay of San Diego and the rancho boundaries of la Nación, Otay, Janal. ©SDHS #M 868 COU-1870s YEAR 1872.



George Kimball (1824-1904), ca. 1890 ©SDHS #10766.



Levi Kimball (1826-1892), 1886 ©SDHS #10886.



Ellen and Charles Kimball (1836-1903), ca. 1890. ©SDHS #11127.



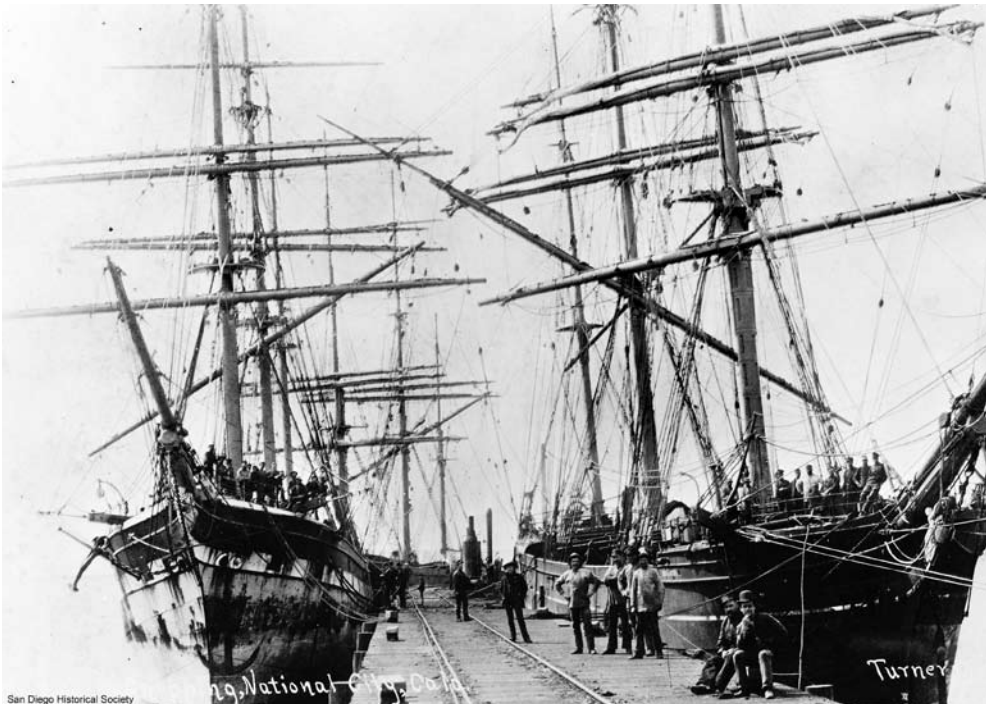
Warren Kimball, one of the founding fathers of National City, helped with the formation of the National City Public Library with a generous donation of books. Warren also helped establish the National City Bank in 1887. Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.



St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (1887) at 8th Street and F Avenue is the oldest surviving church building in the South Bay and is listed on National Register of Historic Places, 1910. ©SDHS #80:8568.



Frank Kimball's house at its original location on the west side of National Blvd. between 9th and 10th Streets, built in 1868-69 at cost of \$8,000-\$10,000, was the first house in National City and had indoor plumbing and hot water. Standing in photo that was taken about 1906 are, left to right, Prof. C. P. Evans, Mrs. C. P. Evans and daughter, Mrs. Ava Evans Smith, 1868. ©SDHS #10707.



The waterfront was the key to National City's prosperity before the railroad. In this Turner postcard, ships unload at the 17th Street wharf in the 1880s. The ship on the right may be the Eurydice, sister to the Star of India. ©SDHS #7692.



The Kimballs owned the first lumber and brick yards that provided the raw materials for their town. These workers pose in the lot of the National Lumber and Mill Company at 9th Street and A Avenue, ca. 1912. ©SDHS #10336.



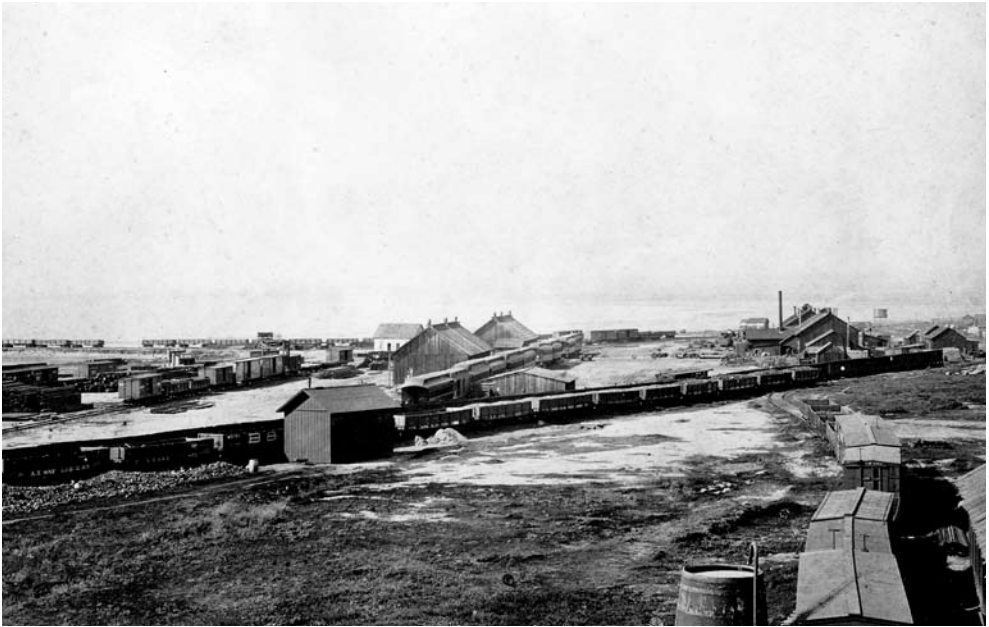
This aerial view shows the large lots with rows of fruit trees that were characteristic of eastern National City. The Dickinson-Boal house at 1433 24th Street and the house across the street belonging to Wallace Dickinson, son of Col. William Dickinson, at 1430 24th St. were both built in 1887. Photo made in 1928. ©SDHS #81:12267.



Frank Kimball promoted agriculture, planted orchards, grapes and olives, founded a Grange society in 1875, and organized the first County Fair in 1880 that would later move to Del Mar. His "Virgin Olive Oil" was produced at his Southern California olive mill, which was located at 8th Avenue and 23rd Street. Photo ca. 1887. ©SDHS #9737.



The National Ranch School District, formed in 1871, built a high school in 1882 at 9th Street and E Avenue called the Academy. It was demolished in 1969 for Old Schoolhouse Square. A second high school was built in 1883 at Roosevelt and West Avenue, known as the 16th Street School, demolished in 1923. The latter is shown here facing an unpaved 16th Street in a photo by Ralph P. Stineman, ca. 1911-15. ©SDHS #91:18564-1580.



The railroad came to National City with the first rail spike driven October 22, 1880, at the foot of 25th Street, followed by a wharf, freight depot, hotels, and a population surge known as the "Boom of the '80s." Photo shows the railroad repair yards and shops along the bay front land given to the Santa Fe railroad by the Kimbells, 1887. ©SDHS #9913.



This photo, made in 1887, shows the International Hotel that was built at 6th Avenue and 23rd Street in 1885 by the Boston Syndicate. It later was moved to another location and renamed the San Miguel Hotel. ©SDHS #1347. The new Southern California Railroad that was created by the Boston Syndicate, owners of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, built a depot in 1882 that today is the last remaining transcontinental station on the West Coast. The first transcontinental train from San Diego left this depot on November 14, 1885.



Brick Row, spanning an entire city block between 9th and 10th Streets along A Avenue, was built in 1887 by Frank Kimball with 240,000 bricks from his own brickyard, at a cost of \$30,000. It was designed by J. J. Hunt in the style of Philadelphia row houses and was intended to provide housing for the executives of the railroad. This photo made in 1911 shows an early automobile parked on the unpaved 10th Street. Brick Row survives intact as a National Register Landmark in Heritage Square. ©SDHS #14420.



This photo shows a water delivery wagon of F. T. Moore in 1904. ©SDHS #13017. Water was vital to the city's growth, and Frank Kimball used railroad money to build the dam on the Sweetwater River in 1888. It would be decades, however, before water pipes reached every home.



The Boston Syndicate sent William Dickinson to manage the Land and Town Company that funded the Sweetwater Dam, built a local railroad system, and developed Chula Vista. This photo shows Dickinson with Frank Kimball on Sweetwater Dam with sign, “Erected by the San Diego Land and Town Co. of Boston, Mass.,” 1888. ©SDHS #10668.



National City & Otay Railroad (NC&O) excursion train, with steam dummy engine named “Dickinson” in 1888. The trains ran south to the border, east to La Presa, and north for a 30-minute ride to San Diego. ©SDHS #80:7971.



The National City & Otay Railroad stopped at the Olivewood home of Warren and Flora Kimball at 24th Street and E Avenue, with its Olivewood Lunch Parlor, 1889. ©SDHS #1250.



The three-story Steele Block with its great tower was built by Elizur Steele and dominated the corner of National Avenue and 8th Street for decades. This photo, looking north on National Avenue, shows the NC&O tracks in the unpaved street, a carriage, and group of men in front of the Steele Block with a furniture store on the first floor and the Royal Hotel above. The other buildings up the street, from right to left, were Horticulture Hall, a Real Estate Office, and Old Grange Hall with the second story used as Masonic Hall. Photo 1890. ©SDHS #1319.



The Dickinson-Boal house was one of the most elaborate Queen Anne Victorian homes in the city. It was designed by Comstock and Trosche in 1887, the same year that they designed the Villa Montezuma home of Jesse Shepard in Golden Hill. Photo made 1888. ©SDHS #12110.



The Stein Farm at 1808 F Avenue has become the National City Living History Farm Preserve. Charles Stein immigrated from Germany in 1888, farmed in Otay until the dam was built, then moved to National City in 1900 with his wife Bertha, pictured here with their children, ca. 1900. ©SDHS #T2004.56/15.2.



Paradise Valley looking east on an unpaved 8th Street from K Avenue. The Sanitarium in the upper left was founded in 1888 by Dr. Anna M. Longshore Potts, one of the first graduates of the Philadelphia Female Medical College. This photo of 1899 shows the original building that was closed in 1895 and replaced by a larger medical complex after the property was sold to the Seventh Day Adventists in 1905. ©SDHS #1252.



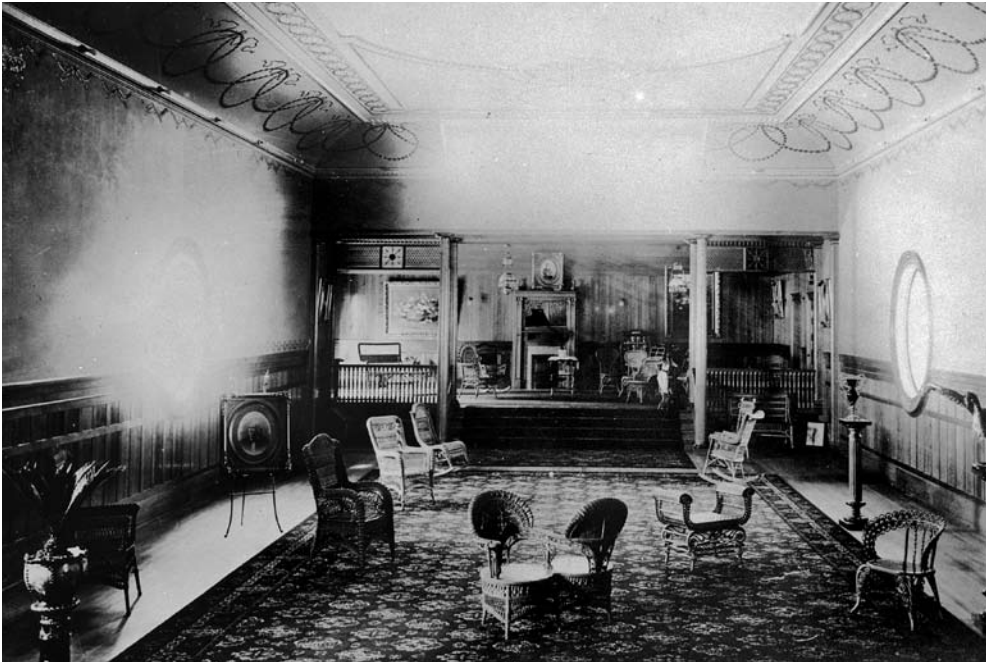
Interior of factory for packing lemons at the foot of 23rd Street in 1906. ©SDHS #10759.



The group of ten women who organized the first Tennis Club of National City High School, 1892. ©SDHS #10871.



Olivewood Club House, built in honor of Flora Kimball in 1911. Flora was a leader in National City, elected first female member of a school board in the state, Grange Grand Master, author, newspaper editor, suffragist, founder of the Tuesday Club. Photo by Ralph P. Stineman, June 20, 1913. ©SDHS #91:18564-1594.



Ralph Granger commissioned Irving Gill to design a music hall that was built at its original location on 8th Street, but moved in 1969 to 1615 4th Street. The interior featured an organ, violins and a large piano, 1890. ©SDHS #11024.



Oliver Noyes house at 2525 N Avenue was built on a 7-acre lot in 1896 by the city postmaster and his wife Mary Jane who had been friends of Frank and Sarah Kimball in New Hampshire. The home, recently owned by John and Christy Walton, has been donated to the International Community Foundation. Photo by Ralph P. Stineman, ca. 1911-15. ©SDHS #91:18564-1582.



Otto Stang blacksmith shop interior, at 18th and 7th Avenue (now McKinley), was established in 1896. Photo made in 1906. ©SDHS #10682.



National City & Otay train wreck at Sweetwater junction, May 20, 1905, in which engineer Mark Baird was killed. ©SDHS #9871.



National City High School, "Old Central," at 9th Street and E Avenue from 1908 to 1954, designed at Frank Kimball's request to resemble the San Luis Rey Mission. Postcard 1913. ©SDHS #AB-072-25.



Post Office interior, in rear of the Knights of Pythias Building on southeast corner of 8th Street and National Avenue. S. S. Johnston, postmaster, Mrs. Mary McDaniel Copeland, assistant, 1912. ©SDHS #13339.



Downtown National City prospered between WWI and WWII and population rose from 1,733 in 1910 to 21,199 in 1950. Shipbuilding and the Navy were important additions to the bayfront. This view from post-WWII shows a National Avenue with theaters, clothing stores, radio shops, and a new bus line. SDHS #AB-072-13.



Lincoln Acres subdivision, car in front of solitary house. Frank Kimball had been forced to sell or give away most of his ranch to get the railroad in the 1880s. Later subdivisions like Lincoln Acres, Paradise Hills, and the Bay Terraces would be privately developed starting in the 1920s but would refuse annexation into the municipality of National City. Photo ca. 1920. ©SDHS #5467-1.



Men pose in front of Blackman Fruit Market across National Avenue, the town's main street, renamed National City Boulevard in 1978. The three policemen represent the growing importance of trying to keep order on the "Mile of Bars" during prohibition. Photo 1925. ©SDHS #5202-C.



"The Road to Hell" painted on National Avenue and 13th Street pointed to Mexico where liquor and gambling were legal. National Avenue was a link to Highway 101 that led to the border crossing at Tijuana during prohibition. Photo ca. 1920s. ©SDHS #16814.



Keith's drive-in restaurant at 214 National Avenue in the 1950s was a favorite spot for the cars that cruised the wide avenue from Division to the Sweetwater river. Photo ca. 1950. ©SDHS #LB-5487.



Aerial view of Harbor Drive-In at the southern end of National Avenue. Photo 1956. ©SDHS #UT84:30162-3.



The Maytime Band Review began in 1947 and became the largest musical parade in the county, drawing 150,000 spectators. The Chula Vista High School band appeared in this parade on May 5, 1953. ©SDHS #UT84:30191-21.



South Bay Plaza shopping center was the second shopping center in the county when dedicated in 1954, following the smaller Linda Vista center that opened in 1943. The first store that opened in the Plaza was the Mayfair Market, followed by J. C. Penney, Wm. T. Grant, Woolworth's and forty other stores when this photo was taken in 1958. ©SDHS #S-4388.



National City politicians, April 20, 1954. Seated: Thelma Hollingsworth and Dorothy Jensen. Standing: George Parchen, John Heck, Mayor Walter Hodge. Hollingsworth became the first female city mayor in California and attracted international attention to National City. ©SDHS #UT84:30172-1.



Mayors Walter F. Hodge and Kile Morgan and Claude Hunt were given keys to city on March 18, 1969. Morgan reshaped the city with urban redevelopment projects and tax-generating economic enterprises such as the Mile of Cars that replaced the Mile of Bars during his twenty years as mayor, 1966-1986. ©SDHS #UT85:h6475#5.



The new Montgomery Freeway began the transition to the Interstate 5 highway system that opened access to the dredged-in Tidelands shown in this Rozelle aerial of 1956 as light-colored land south of the Navy's mothball fleet. ©SDHS #82:13673-1362.



Modern Cheneweth house in front of Victorian Bon-Aire house. Thomas Swayne built the Bon-Aire at 2216 East 5th Street in 1891. James Cheneweth started the Valley View Sanitarium in 1945. Photo 1958. ©SDHS #S-4402.