

# Beckstrom Architecture+ Interiors

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145 Tait Avenue

## Minor Development in Historic District

### Long Range Historical Context (20,000 years ago until 1848)

Flora Context: Prior to European immigration, Los Gatos and the surrounding Silicon Valley was covered in enormous, dense, old-growth Redwoods. The micro-climate would have been vastly different in the shade and soil conditions created by the towering redwoods. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century all the trees had been cut down in Los Gatos and surrounding hills. All the trees we see today are very young, second growth trees and have little to no connection to the previous forest which covered the hills and valley floor. The quality of the forests in Los Gatos today are completely different. Previously, Los Gatos would have felt like walking in Muir Woods or Big Basin Redwoods.

Approximately 13,000-20,000 years ago the first human immigrants came from the East over the Bering Strait land bridge. These native Americans lived among the dense forests and creeks in Los Gatos. It does not appear that they used slash and burn practices as the Native Americans did on the East Coast. The slash and burn practices actually paved the way for the survival of the first European immigrants to the East Coast. The slash and burn practices opened up the forest for the cultivation of crops and fauna for food (deer, boars, etc.). Our ancestors relied on the native Americans prior work in order to survive after first arriving on the North American continent in 1620.

On the West Coast, Spanish explorers came to the Los Gatos area and subjugated the Native Americans, took their land and quickly divided the it into very large ranches. Mexico gained independence in 1821 from the Spanish. **El Rancho Rinconada de Los Gatos Ranch** was created in 1839. The population was very sparse at this time.

### USA Transition (1848 until the present)

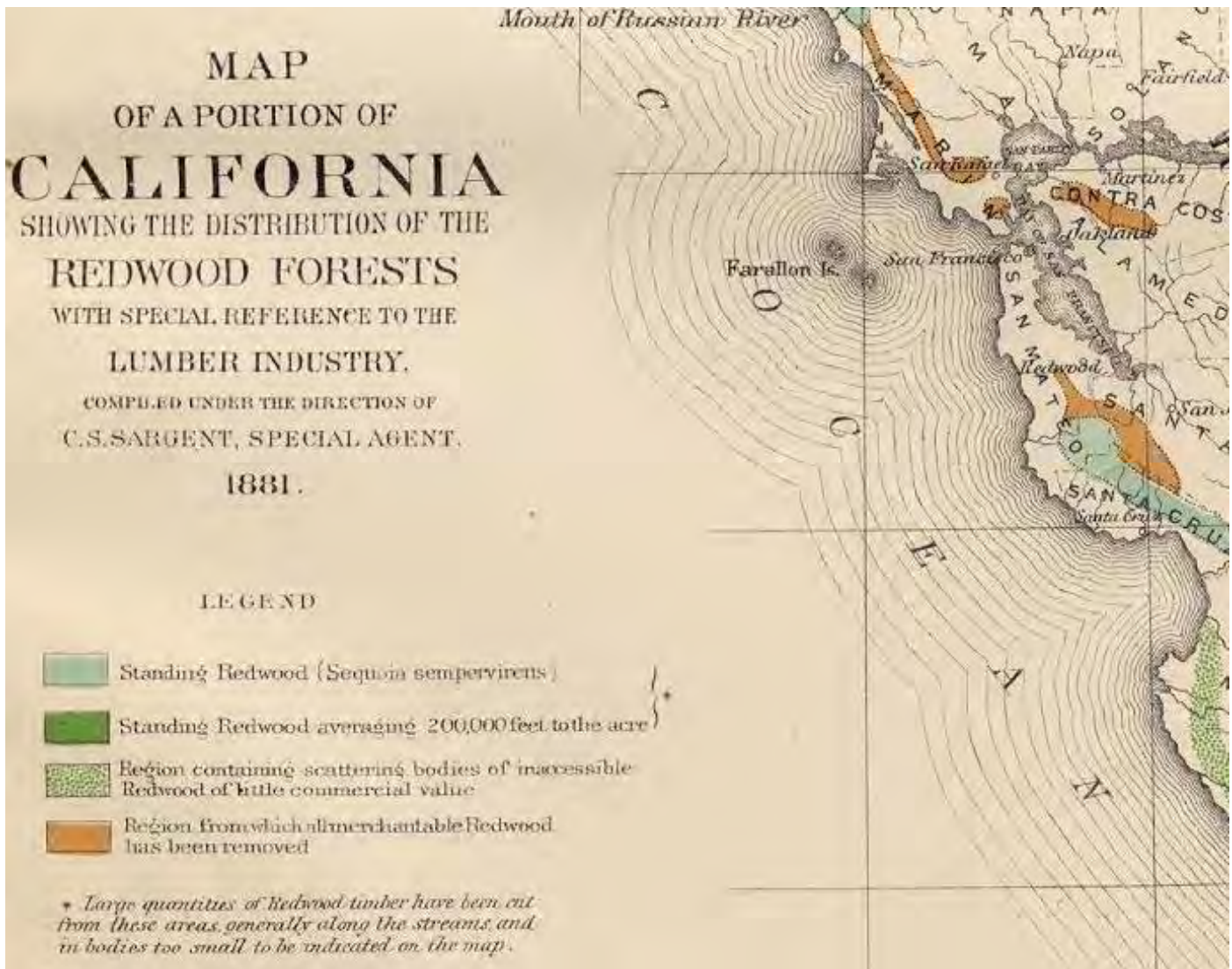
The Gold Rush of 1848-1855 brought a wave(tsunami) of immigrants from the East Coast and Midwest. California became a state in 1850 due to this overwhelming westward immigration and the economic/political changes here. Drastic landscape transformation ensued from complete deforestation in Los Gatos and the surrounding area. Clear cutting of the ancient and valuable redwood forests began with these immigrants. It must have been a truly shocking transformation. In approximately 20-30 years all the Redwoods were gone and replaced with grassy hills. The map of forest resources below shows that Los Gatos Redwood forests were gone by 1881.

The sad irony of the is that the older houses and structures of Los Gatos and throughout the Bay Area were built with this incredibly valuable, old growth, tight grain Redwood from the giant trees as seen below. Old growth Redwood is rot resistant, stable and can ensure that a structure will stay together for a very long time. Modern framing and siding material made of Pine/Spruce/Fir is in no way comparable to the many incredible qualities of 1000 - 2000 year old Redwood lumber.



The Los Gatos forest environment and trees would have been similar size to these felled trees above. It must have been incredible. There was an immense amount of money made by this deforestation which took approximately 20 years or less.

The map below also shows the wide spread distribution of old growth Redwoods in the Los Gatos Coastal range, prior to European immigration



1881 Forest Resource map

### Los Gatos Urban Development

The USA was settled by the construction of dense villages, towns and cities. They were accessed by water in ports and rivers. American towns and cities were dense due to transportation limitation. They were walkable or would not survive.

In 1864 railroads connected San Francisco to San Jose. In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho was selected as a town site. In 1876 rail lines were extended from San Jose to Santa Cruz for logging operations which allowed the complete clear cut the coastal range around Los Gatos. The Los Gatos railroad station fostered fast and dense population growth of the town center. Many San Francisco took the railroad and built summer homes in Los Gatos due to the pleasant weather at the 344' elevation which creates a wonderful environment. Dense population increase around railroad stops was typical across the USA. The Town was incorporated in 1887, and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,652. Population growth spread along Santa Cruz Avenue and over to Los Gatos Boulevard neighborhood of Loma Alta/Johnson Ave. Soon after the street car, 'InterUrban', network was established which greatly facilitated dense population growth. This was also typical in all USA cities and towns. In 1903 the Streetcar/Interurban line was started which went to Saratoga where Highway 9 is now located. Saratoga was already connected to San Jose.

Below are various pictures of the Urban development of Los Gatos.



1890, First Los Gatos Hotel



1895, Los Gatos Hotel expanded around the corner.



1895, Los Gatos Train station



1900, Los Gatos Train station



1891, President Harrison at Los Gatos Train Station



Hotel Lyndon, 1930(site of Los Gatos Hotel which burned down in 1898)



1902, East Main street looking East with treetcar/InterUrban



1900, train; Los Gatos to Santa Cruz



1890's Main St. Bridge



1900, Main Street Bridge



1900's



1940's



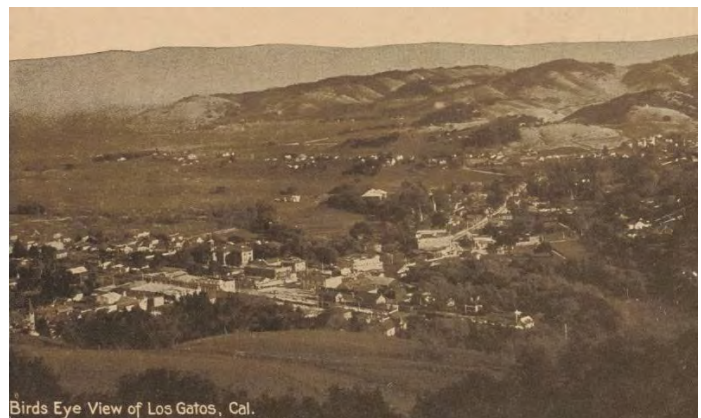
1970's

**Agricultural History**

In 1887 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Los Gatos after the complete removal of the ancient Redwood Forest. Los Gatos and the entire surrounding area was transformed into one of the largest fruit orchard areas in the world. Santa Clara County was once the **prune capital of the world**. Orchards provided an abundance of fruit in the mountains and in the valley of Los Gatos. Prunes, peaches and apricots.



1900, panorama over Los Gatos



1910, view looking East over Los Gatos



A View of Foothills Orchards, Los Gatos in the distance.



1900, rural road to Los Gatos



1900, Large Prune Drying Yard. Los Gatos

Los Gatos streets were platted in the 1870 & 1880's.



1895 Sanborn Los Gatos Reference 'Fire' Map, 145 Tait Avenue is located in Map #8 above (yellow) and below. The Architect lives in the map #2 area (blue).

**Map #8** below. As of 1895, 145 Tait Ave. was part of a larger empty lot and was not subdivided yet. Later Sanborn maps show the same empty lot. It could be assumed that the property was not subdivided until the house was built in 1920. This pattern of development was typical throughout the South Bay. Owners would purchase large parcels and gradually subdivide and/or develop 'spec' houses for sale to the public as a way to make money. This could have been the situation for 145 Tait Avenue. 145 Tait Avenue could have been a 'spec' house which might explain its simple, yet handsome design. Many owners would pick styles from books and have a builder construct from these pattern books which offered different styles. The 145 Tait structure would benefit from its construction from the old-growth Redwood lumber.



1895 Sanborn Fire Map #8



1908 Sanborn Fire Map #8 enlarged, showing no structures on 145 Tait Avenue

**145 Tait Avenue – Overall Background**

This lovely neighborhood has a plethora of styles and a very mixed typology. There are many dense multi-unit apartments, ADU's, woven between single family homes. This complex neighborhood typology is bound together by a wonderful sidewalk network and which is not encumbered by driveways as there are alleys between the primary streets. The Alleys are actually just as interesting to walk on as the main streets with the multitude of Outbuildings, Garages and ADU's which creates a diverse and very nice, intimate quality due to the closeness and 'jumble' of different structures. When I lived in this area I walked on the alleys as much as I did the street sidewalks due to this 'alive' neighborhood quality.

The primary draw of historic neighborhoods is not the actual individual designs or structures but more the walkable street quality and dense and extremely varied built environment. It is the 'whole' of it that really matters. The higher density of dwellings which makes it feel safer than a typical suburban neighborhood. These qualities are obviously what draws so many children and families to this neighborhood for Halloween. It is truly remarkable to see all the families mixing and enjoying themselves on that civic night with some many different cultures coming together in peace.

### **145 Tait Avenue – 1920's Front Section**

The existing, original front part of the house was constructed in 1920 in a 'craftsman' style. Prior to this period, most of the houses were built in the more vertical and steep roof Victorian style, although there were many variations from the pattern books at the time. Most domestic USA Architecture was not designed by individual Architects but from pattern books which were used by builders. Later there was a plethora of styles used in the early teens and 1920's.

145 Tait Avenue is basically a simple rectangle plan, single-story house with a 'Gable' front and a few brackets and another small cross gable at the Kitchen. The 7:12 pitch roof is shallower than the typical Victorian roofs which would save money on materials and the budget. It is evident that the house was remodeled and altered throughout its life. All the windows have been changed to 1990's Anderson, modern windows are not consistency in details. Some windows have many lites and others have none, all are SDL style. It is not clear what the original window design/layout may have been which is typical in a house's life.

### **Proposal – Front Section**

Fill in 35 sf behind the Kitchen Bay as this room could use the extra 2' to make it work better. This would also remove a later HVAC closet addition which is fairly mediocre to poor looking on this elevation facing this lovely large side yard. The new design would enliven this area with appropriate looking French doors and double hung windows. A new ground level wood deck coming out nearly 12' in front of the existing Kitchen Bay would also anchor the house to the large side yard better.

### **145 Tait Avenue – 1996 Back Section**

In 1996 a 1 and 2-story addition was built in the back facing the Alley. The back section is a 1-story, 2 car garage addition and a 2-story section with a Bedrooms and Laundry. The aesthetic integration seems to be medium to poor quality, although it is barely by the public from the Tait Avenue sidewalk.

### **Proposal-Back Section**

First Floor: construct a 1-story, shed roof, garage addition for a third garage bay for storage. This will also help frame the side yard area.

Second floor: redo the interior layout of the Primary Bedroom Suite with a new Bathroom and Closet while also bringing the existing gable roof through to the other side for both more head room and aesthetically to bring better composure and balance to this rear section. A new 146 sf, Primary Bedroom to be constructed over the existing Garage Attic Storage area with mountain view windows. The design of the back of the house will be nicer to look at from the Alley than the existing house and garage roof.

Please call or email with any follow up questions. Thanks.

Sincerely,



Eric A. Beckstrom, Architect





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