

Cultural and Historic Resources

This section of the Background Report describes the existing conditions of the City of Elk Grove relative to Cultural and Historic Resources.

Prehistoric Background

While archaeology in the San Joaquin Valley began in the 1890s, it was not until the early 20th century that excavations were conducted in the southern Sacramento Valley. The mounds of the southern Sacramento Valley are remnants of Indian villages. Native American people constructed and rebuilt villages over periods of hundreds, even thousands of years, often at the same location along rivers and creeks on natural clay knolls that stood above springtime floodwaters.

One of the earliest local “digs” near Elk Grove was at the Cantrell Mound, a late prehistoric village and historic cemetery site situated on a slight rise along the Cosumnes River Overflow about one-half mile outside the City of Elk Grove Planning Area. Elmer J. Dawson conducted excavations at the site in 1912.

After the first discovery was made, there were many others made and recorded in the years to come. In 1929, Hewes recorded the Panabaker Mound (CA-SAC-108) among other sites within what is now the City of Elk Grove Planning Area, between Deer Creek and the Cosumnes River. Research in the area continued heavily until the pre-World War II era. There were a few studies conducted after World War II, which included a discovery by Jerald Johnson at the Blodgett site (CA-SAC-267) of a late period advanced baked clay “industry” akin to incipient pottery manufacturing.

For a more detailed description of prehistorical findings, please refer to the Elk Grove General Plan Background Report on Paleontological, Archaeological and Historic Resources.

Ethnographic Background

The City of Elk Grove Planning Area encompasses the former territory of six Plains Miwok tribelets along the Cosumnes River drainage and two, possibly three tribelets along the Sacramento River. James A. Bennyhoff’s research revealed that the Plains Miwok were recognized as a distinct language group as early as 1806 when Spanish explorers first entered the region (Bennyhoff 1977:1).

In his early, definitive ethnographic work on California Indians, A. L. Kroeber asserted that most northern California groups did not have true tribes, rather the distinction was between “village communities” or “tribelets.” The term, “village” implied a tract of land rather than a settlement. Generally, the population of a village community was divided between several settlements, each consisting of a few households. The principal village was maintained on a permanent basis, while subsidiary hamlets were frequently abandoned, reoccupied or newly founded (Kroeber 1925:831).

Of the 12 Miwok tribelet names associated with the northern Delta and Sacramento River, three appear within the City of Elk Grove Planning Area: *Hulpumne*, *Gaulacomne* and the *Chupumne*.

Much of the ethnographic background that encompasses the City of Elk Grove Planning Area was taken from James Bennyhoff.

Historical Background

Local History

One of the earliest recollections of what is now the City of Elk Grove Planning Area was written by William Robinson Grimshaw. In April 1849, Grimshaw volunteered to convey a message from Sutter’s Fort to William Stout on the Stanislaus River, about 80 miles distant. Two years earlier, Stout led a party of Mormons overland to establish the City of New Hope in anticipation that this would be

the final destination for Mormon people moving west under the leadership of Prophet Brigham Young (Barnes 1987:4). Riding one horse and leading another, Grimshaw took the old trail from Monterey to Sutter's Fort, known as "Upper Stockton Road" (the route of present day Highway 99).

The City of Elk Grove Planning Area includes ten commonly used place names representing historic communities, stations, schools or post offices: Bruceville, Elk Grove, Franklin, Hood, McConnell Station, Pleasant Grove, Point Pleasant, Sheldon, Sloughhouse and Walsh. Portions of two Mexican land grants lie within the City of Elk Grove Planning Area: Leidesdorff's Rancho Rio de los Americanos and Sheldon and Daylor's Rancho Omochumnes.

There were also historic cemeteries, airports/air fields, railroad, bridges, and farms found in the Planning Area.

Known Cultural Resources in the Planning Area

Prehistoric and Archaeological Resources

The North Central Information Center's records search identified 93 prehistoric and historic Native American archaeological sites within the City of Elk Grove Planning Area. Many, if not most of these archaeological sites are village mounds. Some are known to contain human remains. Many, if not all, have the potential to contain human remains.

The entire culture sequence of prehistoric and historic Native American occupation of the Elk Grove area is represented in these archaeological sites as a group—from the Middle Archaic of approximately 4,500 years ago to the late 1800s. Most are located along rivers, creeks, sloughs and around lakes.

The information center also identified 24 historic sites, many of which are remnants of farms and ranches within the City of Elk

Grove Planning Area. Included among the historic sites is the Murphy's Ranch (Murphy's Corral) site, State Historic Landmark 680 and California Inventory of Historical Resources 182; the site of Joseph Hampton Kerr's home, California Inventory of Historical Resources 178 and Point of Historical Interest 001; the site of the Old Elk Grove Hotel, Point of Historical Interest 004; and the site of the first county free library branch in California, California Historical Landmark No. 817.

Old Town Elk Grove became nationally recognized as a historic district on March 1, 1988. It is listed as the Elk Grove Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places. Please refer to **Appendix C** for further details and a map outlining the historic district boundaries.

Appendix C also provides additional details on Elk Grove's historic resources.

Historic Resources

There are two sites within the Elk Grove Planning Area listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Within the City limits of Elk Grove, the Elk Grove Historic District, located along Elk Grove Boulevard is the only site listed on the National Register. The Eastern Star Hall, located along the Sacramento River, approximately 1.5 miles north of the community of Hood, is the only other site in the Planning Area listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Properties of historical importance in California are currently designated as significant resources in three State registration programs: State Historical Landmarks, Points of Historical Interest, and the California Register of Historic Places. Below are three State Historical Landmarks that are within the region.

No. 680 Murphy's Ranch (Murphy's Corral): Located near the southwest corner of Grant Line Road and State Route 99 – site of the beginning of the United States' conquest of California.

No. 657 Grave of Alexander Hamilton Willard: Located in Franklin Cemetery; gravesite of the last possible remaining member of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

No. 719 Grave of Elitha Cumi Donner Wilder: Located in Elk Grove Masonic Cemetery; gravesite of a Donner party survivor.

Paleontological Resources

Paleontology is defined as a science dealing with the life of past geological periods as known from fossil remains. Paleontological resources include fossil remains, as well as fossil localities and formations, which have produced fossil material in other nearby areas. This resource can be an important educational resource for the reasons mentioned before, and are nonrenewable once destroyed. The California Environmental Quality Act offers protection for these sensitive resources and requires that they be addressed during the EIR process.

A file search was conducted in the GeoRef database covering the years 1785 to the present. A broad reconnaissance-level field survey of the Planning Area for the purpose of inspecting the land surface and potential outcrops of fossiliferous geological formations was also conducted.

While no fossils have been officially reported from the Planning Area, there have been informal finds. In 1959, a local Elk Grove farmer discovered a Pleistocene bone bed within the Riverbank Formation along the west side of Deer Creek. While the find was reportedly examined by a geologist from California State University, Sacramento, the find was apparently never published.

The fossils recovered to date from the Riverbank Formation are typically large, late Pleistocene vertebrates, although fish, frogs, snakes, turtles and a few plants such as *Prunus* (prune), *Platanus* (sycamore) and *Salix* (willow) are known as well (Hansen and Begg 1970, Hilton *et al.* 2000). The typically large, Rancholabran vertebrates include *Bison* (bison), *Equus* (horse), *Camelops*

(camel), *Mammuthus* (mammoth), *Paramylodon* (ground sloth) and *Canis* (wolf).

These fossils suggest a wet grassland environment interspersed with rivers, streams, ponds and bogs. The Rancholabran fauna and flora are well known in California and they typically include many more species than reported from Sacramento County.

Elk Grove Historical Society

The Elk Grove Historical Society (EGHS) was established to preserve the history of the Elk Grove area and disseminate information about Elk Grove's past. The historical society is governed by a board of directors who serve one-year terms and is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

The EGHS currently has three major operations. First, the Hotel and Stage Stop serves as the focal point of the Society. The Hotel is a replica of the original hotel that served the Elk Grove area. The original building was located along the Old Stockton Road which connects Sacramento to Stockton. In recent times the site was paved to become part of Highway 99. The EGHS began to build the museum in 1982 with a ground breaking in the northwest corner of Elk Grove Park. The society raised the money through grants and fundraisers. Members actually built much of the structure you see today. The museum contains donations from several families in the area. The museum is scheduled to be open in late 2001 and will contain exhibits showing the history of the Elk Grove region from 1850 to the present.

The Elk Grove Historical Society also maintains the program of the Rhoads School. The school was named for James Rhoads, a prominent resident who also participated in the rescue of the Donner Party. This one-room schoolhouse was moved to Elk Grove Park in 1976 from its original site on Sloughouse Road, where it had been built in 1872, and served its

community children until 1947. It was relocated to Elk Grove Park by the Bicentennial Committee to save it from further deterioration, and was restored to its original condition consistent with the turn of the century.

Today, the Rhoads School serves Sacramento area school children as a Living History Program, with third, fourth, and fifth grade classes visiting each school year for lessons, recess games, and moral teachings typical of schools in the 1890s. The visits are administered by experienced "schoolmarm" docents, who, along with all their student and adult participants, are dressed in clothing appropriate to the period. The total immersion in a school of the 1890s provides a rich learning experience for the children.

In 1999, the Elk Grove Historical Society added the Generations genealogical group to the many historical activities provided to local residents. The goal of Generations is to collect and preserve genealogical and historical information that relates to the Elk Grove area. The group meets monthly and uses computer assisted research methods to develop a family history of families in the Elk Grove area. It also provides resources for residents to study their own family trees.

Members of the Elk Grove Historic Society are also leading an effort to inventory all historic structures within the City. The Inventory currently includes approximately 110 buildings, all of which are a minimum of 60 years old. The structures date from the 1860s through the 1930s.

The Society is served by a monthly publication, The Elk Grove Stage Stop Gazette. It is published ten times each year and contains articles about Elk Grove history in addition to stories on the three main functions of the society. Through its many functions, the Elk Grove Historical Society looks forward to continuing its service to the Elk Grove community.