
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN PLEASANTON

Walking Tour Guide

Pleasanton Offers More than History Mysterious Murder and Ghost Sightings Claimed

Welcome to the historic downtown district of Pleasanton. Downtown Pleasanton contains a treasure trove of fascinating buildings having many different architectural styles, accented by stories of ghosts, underground tunnels, murders, speakeasies and even a brothel or two. This walking tour guide has been prepared by the Pleasanton Downtown Association Historical Preservation Committee and its adviser, local architect Charles Huff. It is designed to make your visit to Downtown Pleasanton more enjoyable and interesting. You can begin your tour anywhere on Main Street, go in either direction and circle back until you return to your starting place. You can also take side street excursions where indicated and then return to Main Street to continue your tour. Pleasanton is truly a special town that preserves its heritage unlike any other town in the Bay area. As you take your stroll today, try to envision the special feeling that each of these buildings had on earlier residents of Pleasanton.

Brief History of Downtown Pleasanton

Alisal (renamed Pleasanton in 1894) was first settled in the 1850s by Spanish families fortunate enough to be granted huge tracts of land as a result of the abandonment of the California Mission system. Alisal was located on one of the main routes to the gold fields and quickly became a mercantile stopover for the many miners seeking fortune in the Mother Lode. The village's climate and rich soil conditions were ideal for growing a variety of crops, including hops, barley and red oat hay. By 1900 Pleasanton had become the agribusiness center for the Amador Valley. Among the many crops of the valley, hops played the largest role in making Pleasanton internationally famous. Many of the buildings that you will see today were built from the revenues generated from the hop fields. In the first half of the 20th century, other towns in the area began to remodel and tear down their older buildings in the name of progress. Fortunately, during that time, downtown Pleasanton was off of the beaten track. Pleasanton did not have the need to tear down and improve its central business district, because there was no market for services in downtown Pleasanton. The town was essentially frozen in time during one of the most historically destructive periods of modern history, the era of the late 1950s through the early 1970s. As you walk down Main Street, enjoy these treasures that were spared by those who could have destroyed them in the name of "progress."

Main Street Tour

288 Main. Now occupied by the *Gay 90's Pizza Company*, this 1864 building was one of the first commercial buildings in town. It originally housed a general store, bar and Wells Fargo stagecoach stop. The upper floor housed a brothel for many years, and some Pleasanton residents have reported seeing a "full-figured ghost lady" in the front second story window. Chinese laborers constructed a connection in the basement to the town's underground tunnels. During the 1870s, Chinese people were discouraged from residing in town, so many lived in the underground tunnels, which ran between this building and 855 Main St., now the *Pleasanton Hotel*. Most of the tunnels collapsed in the 1920s when Main Street was paved.

Continue along Main Street to:

450 Main. This brick Italianate style building was completed in 1893 as the *Arendt Commission House*, one of Pleasanton's first mercantile stores. In 1984 it was extensively renovated, re-using the bricks from the original building. At that time, the 400 Main St. building was added in a style that complements the original structure.

Either take the Neal Street Excursion or cross Neal Street and go to:

500 Main. Built in 1912 by the Arendt family, this Neo-Classical building once housed the post office, the *Bank of Pleasanton* and a branch office of the *Bank of Italy*, the predecessor to the *Bank of America*.

520 Main. This wood false-front building was constructed in 1889 as *C.H. Dall's Harness and Saddlery*. A woman's image can be seen in the cameo over the door. Many times a ghost has been seen here, usually early on Saturday mornings, and always wearing a blue Victorian dress.

548 Main. This is the site of the original *Pleasanton Hotel*, built in 1863 by Antonio Bardellini in the Second Empire style. In about 1881 Jason Rose purchased the hotel and changed its name to the *Rose Hotel*. The famous racehorse *Sea Biscuit* was once stabled behind the hotel. In 1930, a jealous jockey named Sykes murdered a man at the hotel after a dispute over a woman. The *Rose Hotel* had many famous visitors, including Henry Ford, Leland Stanford of Stanford University fame and Presidents Herbert Hoover and Calvin Coolidge. It is also rumored that William Randolph Hearst kept a room at the hotel for his close friend, Marion Davies. In 1941 Abbot and Costello made the movie *It Ain't Hay* at the fairgrounds and used the hotel as a backdrop. In 1955, *Bank of America* tore down the *Rose Hotel* for its new bank and parking lot. The bank building was later remodeled and is now *Roundtable Pizza*. Venture inside to see old photographs of the *Rose Hotel*.

550/560 Main. This was the site of the *Fashion Livery Stable* from 1902 to 1937. The present terra cotta brick building was erected in 1937 as the *French Steam Laundry*. While white people dealt with the public at the front counter, Chinese people actually performed laundry services in the small building at the rear.

Cross Division Street and go to:

600 Main. The original hardware store at this location, the *Pinkley Tin Store*, was constructed in 1876. That building was later moved to Division Street, directly behind the present structure. The *Kolln Hardware* building is a fine example of Italianate Colonial Revival style architecture, and is a well known landmark of the City. It was constructed in about 1899 by C.A. Wise who later sold it to Frank and Bert Lewis. In 1905 James Cruikshank and H.G. Kolln took over and opened the *Cruikshank and Kolln* hardware store. *Kolln Hardware* has operated here since 1931.

614/616 Main. The original occupancy of this 1882 wood frame storefront building was first a saloon, and then a tailor shop.

624 Main. This highly detailed wood-framed building was constructed in 1890 and was originally occupied by the *Kolb General Merchandise Store*. In 1954, the detailing was covered by stucco and the building was expanded to become *Dean's Café*.

690 Main. This building was constructed in 1932 for \$6,000 and was originally occupied by the *Hagstrom Food Store*. *Sletten's Department Store* was here from 1951 to 1955 when *Townsend Hardware* occupied the building. Today, it is one of the many masonry buildings in town which have been seismically retrofitted to meet current earthquake standards.

Either take the Spring Street Excursion or cross Spring Street and go to:

700 Main. This Mission Revival style building was constructed in about 1910 as the *Pleasanton First National Bank*. It later became *Community First Bank*, and hosted Pleasanton's first rose show. In 1926, the bank was robbed of \$9,000, a huge sum of money in those days. The robbers were never caught.

706 Main. Built in 1904 as *Schneer Mortuary*, and later as *Graham Mortuary*, this Mission Revival building has a front picture window that was used to display the deceased in their coffins. The walkway to the right is the old driveway for the hearse.

720/722 Main. Built in about 1920, this Mission Revival style building first housed a garage and car showroom owned by Lincoln Ziegenfuss. In 1945 it became *Rancho Theatre*, a Spanish movie house.

728 Main. Built in 1911 and remodeled in 1929, this Mission Revival building was originally a department store. One of its features is Pleasanton's first fire escape.

Either take the Ray Street Excursion or cross Ray Street and go to:

800 Main. Originally the site of *Heyers' Steam Brewery*, this Spanish Colonial style building was built in 1940-41 by Dr. Harold Shanks who was a general family doctor.

824/830 Main. Originally this address was two separate buildings. Ms. Amador lived in the 824 Main St. address in about 1907. The terra cotta brick building was built in 1916. It was occupied by *Parnassus Cheese Company* and, later, in the 1930s, by the *Standard Cheese Corporation*. It was re-named the *Cheese Factory* in the 1970s and was the largest local cheese processing plant at that time. This building had an underground connection to the hotel across the street.

Return to Ray Street, cross Main Street, and go to:

855 Main. This site has a long and colorful history. It is now the location of the *Pleasanton Hotel*, the third Main Street site to have that name. In 1852 John Kottinger originally had a small store here. In 1864, the *Farmer's Hotel* was built on the site. In the 1880s a woman was murdered in one of the upstairs hallways. By 1900 there were ladies available in small houses in the back of the hotel for the company of male guests. The exterior of the hotel was remodeled to its current Victorian style in 1919, and the hotel was re-named the *Riverside Hotel*. In 1934 it was again re-named as the *Pleasanton Hotel*. At one time the racketeer, Paul "Bouquet" Cohn (Mickey Cohn's brother) owned the hotel, after he was barred from doing business in San Francisco. It stopped being a hotel during the 1960s, and today private offices occupy the second floor.

Cross St. John Street and go to:

749 Main. Built in 1938, this Moderne style building was the second Pleasanton grocery store location for the *Safeway* chain. The new faux stucco elements now cover all of the Moderne architectural details of the original structure.

725 Main. Built in 1876, this building was originally a saddle shop and later a saloon. During prohibition (1919 - 1933) the front of the store became an ice-cream parlor, while the back was a speakeasy. Earl Warren, then Alameda County district attorney, eventually put an end to these illegal activities.

719 Main. The original occupant of this site was the *Barios & Graham* mercantile store which was build in 1876. The upstairs was used by the *International Order of Odd Fellows*, a fraternal organization, from 1876 to 1911. The building was replaced in 1956 with a *Sprouse-Reitz* discount store.

707/711 Main. In 1874, the Victorian style *Germania Hotel* was built on this site by John Kottinger. In 1881 it was renamed the *Pleasanton Hotel*. That *Pleasanton Hotel* was torn down in 1931 when John Amaral built the present gasoline station for \$5,000 in the Mission Revival style. The **711** address was used as a garage for the adjacent gas station. The arches seen on this building were the entrances to the garage.

Either take the St. Mary Street Excursion or cross St. Mary Street and go to:

645-649 Main. Herman Kolln built these terra cotta style brick buildings in about 1928. The **645-647** address was a Greyhound Bus Terminal until 1956. The **649** address was originally *Harzell's Drug Store*, and later *Jorgensen's Drug Store*, Pleasanton's corner drug store.

641 Main. This Mission Revival style building was constructed in about 1920 and was originally called the *New Lincoln Theatre*. In the 1940s it became the *Roxy Theatre*. If you go to the rear of the building you can recognize the theater appearance and see the stage door entrance. By 1956, the building was occupied by *Daughtrey's Department Store*. The interior still contains the backdrop from the old theatres.

629-633 Main. These terra cotta brick style buildings were built in 1926 and 1929, respectively. Later, an in-fill structure, *The Tack Room*, was built, connecting the two buildings. *Christesen's* is the original occupant.

625 Main. This 1888 Colonial Revival structure was originally the home of the prominent Jerome Arendt family. The Actress Mary Pickford stayed here in 1917 when she was in town filming *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. In later years the building became apartments and later served as the school district offices.

603 Main. This Spanish Colonial style building was constructed in 1915 as the City Hall on land donated by the Pleasanton Women's Improvement Club. Phoebe Apperson Hearst donated money (anonymously) to construct the building. At one time it housed the public library, the Women's Improvement Club, city offices, council chambers and police department. It remained home to the police department for many years. In 1984, after an extensive historical renovation, it became the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Museum.

The Pleasanton Arch. The Women's Improvement Club built this landmark and symbol of Pleasanton in 1932 for \$532. The archway served as an entry to Pleasanton and was topped with police and fire sirens. Today this is one of the few town gateway signs remaining in California.

Take either the Division Street* Excursion or cross Division Street and go to:

* As you cross Division Street you will notice that it is very narrow. Several times the City of Pleasanton asked property owners along this section of Division Street to donate part of their frontage in order to widen the street. When the owners refused, this portion of Division Street became known as "Stingy Lane" for a long time, and was shown as such on city maps.

537-541 Main. This was the site of the *Snug Saloon*, built in 1879. The saloon was torn down in 1911 when the present structure was built as the *Columbo Hotel* by the Pons family. The hotel was re-named *The Hotel Roosevelt* for a short time, and later changed back to the *Columbo Hotel*. Later, 537 Main became the *Green Door* and later *Elvira's Castle*, a local watering hole for three generations of patrons.

531 Main. This terra cotta brick structure, built around 1929, was the location of Pleasanton's first *Safeway Store*. Later this was the location of *Jim's Creamery*, a soda fountain and popular hangout for teen-agers in the 1940s.

525-527 Main. This Italianate style building was constructed around 1898 and housed a post office and stationary store. Architecturally, this building is one of the few narrow false front Italianate buildings remaining in their original condition on Main Street.

519 Main. This Victorian style building was built around 1898. It was originally occupied by *Mello's Hardware Store*. It was Astuccoized @ long ago and has lost all signs of any architectural significance.

515 Main. Built in about 1888, the original occupant of this wood false front building was *Pleasanton Shoe Store*, which was owned by Serena Diavila.

511 Main. This building originally housed the *Gem Theatre* and was constructed in 1910. It later became the *Lincoln Theater*. The vacant lot on the corner used to be the location of a *Durant* car dealership and was later occupied by *Barry's Auto Garage*.

Either take the Rose Avenue Excursion or Cross Rose Avenue and go to:

465 Main. The roof parapet of this building proudly displays a construction date of 1896. Mr. George Johnston built this building and was known as one of the town's benefactors. He was a wealthy farmer and rancher who primarily raised sheep. The building is of the Richardson Romanesque style with palladium windows. It and the Arendt building at 450 Main St. are two brick monoliths that anchor this prominent downtown intersection. The Johnston building was first a mercantile store in 1896 and later became a harness shop with a fraternal lodge hall upstairs. In 1910 it became *Lethams Bakery and Coffee Shop*, a popular meeting spot for prominent town leaders of the day.

459 Main. This terra cotta brick building was constructed in 1929 and was first used as a *Radio Shop* and by *The Pleasanton Electric Company*.

443 Main. Built in 1879 in the Richardson Romanesque style, this building was first the *Bohemian Café*, then *Hap's Bar*, and then another bar called *The Starting Gate*. There used to be a connection from the basement in this building to the underground tunnels. The Italianate keystone arches and ornate brick detailing were deservingly re-exposed during the building's renovation in 1990.

425 Main. Dr. M. F. E. Harms, a local dentist and entrepreneur of the time, constructed this Mission Revival style building in 1910 as his dental office.

405 Main. Dr. Harms constructed this terra cotta brick building in 1929. It was first an *IGA (Independent Grocers Association) Store*, and later became *Frudden's Grocery Store*.

Cross East Angela and go to:

301 Main. This Veteran's Memorial Hall was built in 1932 in the Spanish Colonial Revival style for \$38,500, in honor of those who served in World War I. Notice the WWI doughboy soldier's face cut into the concrete at the top of the building.

Cross Main Street and go to the *Gay 90's Pizza Company*, which is described at the beginning of this Guide.



Side Street Excursions

Division Street Excursion:

219 Division. This Queen Anne style home was built in about 1891, and now houses a dentistry office.

Neal Street Excursion:

122 West Neal St. *Hap's Restaurant* has become a local institution. Originally a bar owned by Hap Bonde, it was sold to Milt and Julie Dunham in 1949. The Dunhams were in the horse racing business and Milt had promised Julie he would get out of the business some day. When one of their horses finished last at Bay Meadows that year, Milt decided to buy a bar. At the time, they couldn't afford the \$50 to change the bar sign, which still today reads *Hap's*. In 1956, one of their racehorses placed first, and they bought the business on Main Street currently occupied by Bruno's Restaurant. They also purchased a home on Neal Street one block away from *Hap's* bar. In 1957, they started expanding their home into the restaurant/bar it is now. *Hap's* was known as a family place. Children were welcome to sleep in the adjoining Dunham home if they got tired before their parents were ready to leave.

62 West Neal St. The front part of this interesting building was constructed in 1884 and housed *Wennig's Meat Market*. Additions have been made to the structure since then. At different times the building housed the *Bank of Pleasanton* and the Pleasanton Justice Court. For a long time, the *C. A. Gale Law Office* was in the building.

30 West Neal St. This Craftsman Stick style building was constructed in 1895 as a *Southern Pacific Railroad Depot*. The original train station on this site was moved to Second Street in 1894.

100 East Neal St. Cross First Street and on your left at Second Street is, in the words of a local historian, "*the church that looks like a church.*" This New England Gothic styled church was built in 1876. Originally it was a Presbyterian Church and is now a Baptist Church.

Ray Street Excursion:

200 Ray St. John Kottinger's barn was constructed in 1852 and later became Pleasanton's first jail. It is one of the few remaining adobe structures in the area and is the only building in Pleasanton to be designated by the National Register of Historic Buildings. Kottinger became the county's first Justice of the Peace in 1853. Since there were no public buildings at the time, Kottinger used his home for court and his barn for a jail. After criminals were convicted in Kottinger's courts, bandits waiting outside overcame the lawmen and helped the outlaws escape on horseback. Kottinger then had a tunnel built from the courthouse to the jail. Notable desperadoes such as Juakin Murrietta, Juan Soto, and "Three Fingers" Jack Garcia were tried in Kottinger's court and escorted through the tunnel to jail.

Rose Avenue Excursion:

272 Rose. This wood false front building was built in 1903 and housed *Fiorio's Market*, one of the last Mom and Pop grocery stores in Pleasanton.

339 Rose. This building was constructed in 1924 as an American Legion Hall.

469 Rose. This building was constructed in 1876 as *Western Pacific Café and Saloon*. The vacant lot next door was the site of Pleasanton's second train station, which was designed in the Mission Revival style.

Spring Street Excursion:

These Mission Revival homes just off Main Street were built in about 1928 as Pleasanton's first housing development.

St. Mary Street Excursion:

325 St. Mary. This home was built by Mr. John Amaral as his residence.

328 St. Mary. Originally the local Odd Fellows' Hall, this building was constructed in 1911 in the Mission Revival style. The second floor of this building was sometimes used as a dance hall and, in 1917, was the site of the premiere of the movie *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. Behind and attached to this building is a structure that was built in about 1888 as a Presbyterian Church.

404 St. Mary. This Craftsman Stick building was constructed in 1910 as a Portuguese meeting hall, commonly known as the *IDES Hall*. Many May Day celebrations occurred at this site.

This Downtown Pleasanton Walking Tour Guide was prepared by Gary Fletcher, Jim Hoge, Julia Lewis and Lauren Purcell of the Pleasanton Downtown Association Historical Preservation Committee, under the guidance of Pleasanton architect Charles Huff. It is not copyrighted and may be reproduced freely. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. November 2003.