



## The History of Hidden Villa

Hidden Villa's story is a collection of many histories: the history of an inspirational and visionary family, the history of a local nonprofit organization, the history of our changing social values, and the history of California, and the west. In all of these story lines, stewardship is a common theme. Hidden Villa offers a fixed lens with which we can look back to the earliest known stewards, the Ohlone people, up through the days of missionaries, logging, and stagecoach travel, to the Hidden Villa of today, a thriving nonprofit organization working to inspire a just and sustainable future. We hope you enjoy a glimpse into Hidden Villa's past and join us in stewarding this gem for countless generations to come.



## Ohlone Presence

Long before the Duvneck family called Hidden Villa home, the native Ohlone people lived in the area as its earliest known settlers. The nearest known Ohlone settlement from pre-European times was discovered along El Monte Road at Summerhill Avenue and was excavated in 1971. Although no verified Ohlone artifacts have been discovered on Hidden Villa land, the close proximity of the

excavation indicates that the Ohlone most likely lived on or near the 1600 acres that comprise Hidden Villa today. During the period in which the Ohlone lived in the area, Adobe Creek ran year-round and the people had access to abundant marshland. The Ohlone would have likely fished in the creek, gathered bunchgrasses in the valley for weaving baskets, hunted deer, and gathered acorns in the hills.



**Illustration by Michael Harney from "The Ohlone Way" by Malcolm Margolin. Copyright 1978**

## Missionary Period

In the mid-to-late 1700s, the Spanish, who had conquered Mexico, needed to find a way to control the vast lands of California, which were part of Mexico at the time. The Spanish sent missionaries, who were usually accompanied by soldiers, to establish missions throughout California. The missions were established, according to the missionaries, to save the souls of the native people by converting them to



Christianity. In order to maintain the missions, native peoples were removed from their traditional lands and required to work in the fields and produce goods. Hidden Villa bears witness to these efforts in the form of a grove of olive trees planted during that era. This grove was probably associated with either the Santa Clara or the San Jose mission. Visitors can find the grove on their immediate right as they enter Hidden Villa from Moody Road.

## Mexican Independence Era

When Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1822, the Mexican government divided California into land grants, which it distributed to wealthy or influential male citizens or military personnel like General Vallejo. Hidden Villa was part of the La Purissima Concepcion land grant. Rancho San Antonio, just south of Hidden Villa along Highway 280, was also part of that same land grant. Over time, these large tracts were inherited or subdivided and sold. The land now known as Hidden Villa expanded over the years from 68 acres to its present 1600 acres.

## Early Statehood and Beyond

In the mid-to-late 1800s, the land was logged, farmed, and lived on. An 1868 map indicates that grapes were grown in the area near what is now the main parking lot. A vineyard is also indicated along the creek trail. A gentleman named George Thistleton owned a cabin and, perhaps, a small sawmill there, as well. In March, 1867, George Washington Moody requested that Moody road be recognized as a public roadway. For many years after that, regular stagecoach service ran from the then bustling port of Pescadero, along Page Mill Road, down Moody Road, through Hidden Villa, and on to the Mountain View train station. Remnants of the old grapevines and portions of the old road can still be found on Hidden Villa property today.



In 1887, Otto Arnold purchased 616 acres of land that's now part of Hidden Villa.

Arnold's purchase included the valley with its farm house and white barn, which were built around 1860. In August of 1888, Mr. Arnold petitioned to have the part of Moody Road that ran through his property decommissioned. Five months after Otto and his wife, Elvira, moved to the property, Otto died, leaving Elvira to run the farm. During her time here, speculators arrived, eager to discuss the purchase of the valley; they intended to dam the creek to

provide water for the burgeoning nearby population and vast orchards. According to legend, Elvira threatened these men with a shotgun, saving Hidden Villa from a potentially disastrous fate.

Hidden Villa was threatened again in 1904 when the army purchased the land as a shooting range. Only a technicality of the uncertain ownership of a small strip of land within the property prevented the sale from going through. The land changed hands several more times before that fateful day when Frank and Josephine discovered the entry gate of Hidden Villa and purchased it. Without their stewardship, Hidden Villa's property would have likely been subdivided and developed into many individual homes.

## The Duveneck Family

Frank and Josephine Duveneck purchased Hidden Villa in 1924, valuing the land for itself, rather than for its potential commercial gain. Instead of seeking to develop the land for commercial gain, Frank and Josephine decided to preserve the wilderness and manage the farm as a family ranch. Frank Duveneck was a civil engineer who understood the

importance of owning land to protect a watershed. He purchased parcels of property over many years in order to piece together the entire watershed. Eventually, Hidden Villa encompassed 2500 acres, 900 of which were later donated to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, leaving 1600 acres under a nonprofit trust.

## Social Justice Mission

Josephine Duveneck continually sought ways to use the land to advance social justice and promote environmental education. The Duveneck House became a center of social activism. The Duvenecks sheltered refugees fleeing from the Nazis, assisted Japanese-American families returning from internment camps, and hosted groups for social and educational reform.

Distressed by the internment of the Japanese-Americans, as well as by the Holocaust and the racism they encountered in their own community, the Duvenecks established the first residential, multicultural and racially integrated summer camp in the country. Also, pursuant to their vision of social justice, the Duvenecks opened their home to the National Farm Workers Movement (which later became the United Farm Workers union, UFW) in 1965, providing a safe space for Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta to organize their first strike of California grape pickers and the American boycott of table grapes.



## Environmental Education Mission

Respect for others is tied to respect for the environment. Hidden Villa's Environmental Education Program for schools arose naturally from the Duvenecks' duty of land stewardship and their interest in child development. Established in 1970, the Hidden Villa Environmental Education Program (HVEEP) has been encouraging school children to embrace the beauty of the natural world through hikes in the wilderness and tours of the organic educational farm.



## A Legacy Established

Frank and Josephine Duveneck instilled within their four children, Liz, Francis, Hope, and Barney, their remarkable compassion for people and respect for the environment. In an act of profound generosity, when Josephine and then Frank passed away, their children made a conscious decision to give up their considerable land inheritance and donate it to the nonprofit trust that their parents had established in 1960 to carry on Hidden Villa's ambitious mission.

## Hidden Villa Today

After the Duvenecks opened their land to the public for future generations to enjoy, they reduced their involvement in Hidden Villa's day-to-day operations. The nonprofit Hidden Villa Trust – consisting of a Board of Trustees, Executive Directors, staff, and volunteers – assumed management of the property, sustaining and strengthening the existing programs, maintaining and improving the property, and establishing innovative programs. Throughout this process, Hidden Villa has held true to the vision of the Duvenecks while responding to the changing needs within our community. Through summer camps, school programs, workshops, performances, corporate programs, rental facilities and more, Hidden Villa serves over 30,000 visitors each year. Hidden Villa's focus is on environmental education and sustainable agriculture, while sharing an abiding respect for all living things as an essential part of the mission.

For more information about the history of the Duveneck family, see *Life on Two Levels*, Josephine Duveneck's fascinating autobiography. You can check out a copy at your local library or purchase one for \$15 by emailing Hidden Villa's Development Department at [development@hiddenvilla.org](mailto:development@hiddenvilla.org) or calling 650-949-9702.

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