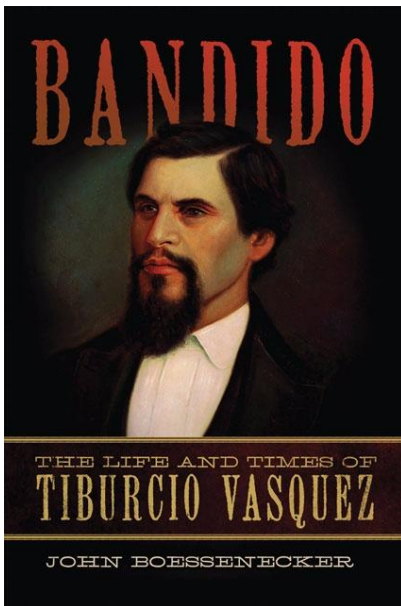


# Milpitas Muse

## The Wild West Returns

The next Milpitas Historical Society meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 11, at 7:00 pm. Our presenter at this meeting will be John Boessenecker, a writer, attorney, and charismatic speaker, who will tell the story of the famous California outlaw Tiburcio Vasquez, the subject of his latest book, *Bandido: The Life and Times of Tiburcio Vasquez*. He'll also tell us about some banditry that went on in our very own area in those Wild West days.



Vasquez (1835-1875) grew up in Monterey, robbed and romanced his way through much of California for 20 years after the Gold Rush, and was finally captured in Los Angeles, tried and hanged in San Jose, and buried in Santa Clara.

**Special Note:** Once again, our meeting will **not** be held in the Community Room (Auditorium) of the Milpitas Library, but in the Library's cozy **Children's Activity Room** in the children's wing, where we met in January. We will set up signs to show you the way.

The public is invited, no charge. Light refreshments will be served. See you there!



Author and speaker John Boessenecker at the grave of Tiburcio Vasquez in Santa Clara

## What? More Than One Milpitas?

Although we tend to think that there could only be one community bearing this distinctive name, it turns out that there were at least two other sites called Milpitas.

One was a Rancho Milpitas formed when the lands of the Mission San Antonio de Padua, (in Monterey County, near today's King City) were secularized and divided into Mexican land grants. When William Randolph Hearst acquired the rancho in 1925, he commissioned architect Julia Morgan (who also designed Hearst Castle, some 30 miles from there) to build the Hacienda Milpitas for his employees and guests. It was completed in 1930 and has also been known as Hacienda Guest Lodge and Milpitas Ranchhouse, under which name the property was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

Although the land was acquired by the U.S. War Department in 1940 to create a troop training facility, and the Hacienda was used as housing by the military during WWII and after, today, the US Army Reserve operates the base, and a civilian concessionaire is allowed to run the Milpitas Hacienda as a hotel open both to the public and to the military.

The other was, according to *Spanish and Indian Place Names of California*, by Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, the the crop and garden area of Mission San Antonio de Pala, in San Diego County. The Mission was founded in 1861 as an "asistencia" to its parent, Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, about 25 miles east of San Luis Rey, and is now located inside the Pala Indian Reservation.

## Milpitas Street Name Stories: French Court

French Court is a little cul-de-sac off of Dempsey Road near the Highway 680 interchange with Montague and Landess that you've probably never even seen unless you live in that area. However, it is named for a very early local pioneer who ran the first hotel in Milpitas.

Alfred French arrived in the Santa Clara Valley from Ohio, by way of the Gold Country in 1852, in the company of other early settlers Dudley Wells and Nicholas Harris.



French's Hotel

Courtesy of Skip Skyrud

The original hotel structure, located on the northwest corner of Serra and Main Street, was built by Alex Anderson (on a lot rented from Michael Hughes, Milpitas' first American settler) and run briefly by two other people before French purchased it. County records show that in 1859, French paid A.M. Thompson \$1500 for the parcel of land on which the hotel and stable were located. French's Hotel burned down on January 17, 1861, but French immediately rebuilt it and kept it running for at least 30 years.

The US Census of 1860 lists the French family as Alfred, Nancy, John S., Theodore, E. E., William E., and their oldest daughter Clemina French (age 25) who was one of the first school teachers in the first Milpitas Grammar School, then recently built on Higuera grant land owned by Abraham Weller at the north end of town.

When French sold it in the 1890's, it became the Milpitas Hotel, which burned down again in the great Milpitas fire of August 1910 that destroyed three saloons, two barbershops, and a grocery store as well.

French served as a Justice of the Peace in Milpitas from the 1860s to the 1880s. Around 1890, he retired and moved to San Jose.

The lot on which the hotel once stood has remained more or less intact down to the present day. By the mid 1920s, a Fat Boy Barbeque Restaurant was erected on the site. The Fat Boy Restaurants were one of the first "fast food" chains in America and the one in Milpitas was a landmark for community connection for many years until it finally closed in the 1970's. Today the site is occupied by a dental office building with a fine display of local history in the lobby.

## Milpitas Historical Society Videos to See

The Historical Society now has a YouTube Channel called "MilpitasHistory." So far we have four videos about our town's history available for viewing: "The Origin of Milpitas," telling how Milpitas got its name; "Ed Shaughnessy's Milk Shed," showing the Shaughnessy-Murphy milk shed that the Society is hoping to restore and perhaps use as a museum office; "The Caretaker Cottage," showing views of the interior as well as telling the history of the caretaker's cottage at Higuera Adobe Park; and "A Historical Tour of Main Street," which is a walk along Main Street showing homes and buildings of interest, as presented by Joann Souza. Our videos have been seen by nearly 500 viewers in fourteen states and five countries.

## Milpitas Historical Society Contact Information

You can contact the Milpitas Historical Society:

- by phone at (408) 320-9587
- by mail at 160 N. Main Street, Milpitas CA 95035
- by email at: [tmhs@milpitashistory.org](mailto:tmhs@milpitashistory.org).

Our new web page offers general information on the Historical Society and its accomplishments:

<http://www.milpitashistory.org/historicalsociety/society.html>

**Milpitas Historical Society**  
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**First Class**