

Historic Roberto-Sunol Adobe Acquired by California Pioneers of Santa Clara County

San Jose has only two extant adobes, one of which is the Roberto-Sunol Adobe, located at 770 Lincoln Avenue in Willow Glen, San Jose, California. On May 31, 2013, the owners – siblings John Bruzzone Jr., Jeanette Bruzzone, and Joyce Lo Franco -- donated the adobe, as well as the Laura Ville two-story historic landmark and grounds to the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County. The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County will create a museum for the benefit of the public. The adobe is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“This is a unique opportunity for our community to enjoy a museum that will showcase the five major eras of our valley’s history, with all eras being represented in a very tangible way at the site,” said Superior Court Judge Paul Bernal, who is also the Official Historian of San Jose and the president of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County. “The story will span the Indigenous People era, the Spanish era, the Mexican era, the American era, and the modern era. We will specifically tell the history of Willow Glen and what it meant to its occupants throughout the centuries. The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County is thrilled to have received this gift from the Bruzzone family, and we are humbled to be the next stewards of this outstanding historic resource. This is a monumental donation not only to the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County but also to the community.”

Background:

The indigenous people known as the Tamien lived in what was later called Willow Glen for thousands of years.

In 1775-1776 Spaniard Captain Juan Bautista de Anza led a settlement expedition that resulted in the founding of Pueblo San Jose de Guadalupe. San Jose was the first civil settlement in California, and would later be California’s first state Capital. Mission Santa Clara was founded in 1777, and what became Willow Glen was part of the mission lands, used for grazing sheep and raising pigs.

An indigenous Indian named Roberto Balermينو was born c1782 and grew up on this part of the valley in a rancheria called San Juan Bautista, where the Guadalupe and Los Gatos Rivers came together in Willow Glen. His adult occupation was that of a cook, probably serving food to the army of Indian workers on the vast mission lands. Around 1836, Roberto Balermينو built the Roberto Adobe, which still stands today. He petitioned the Mexican governor for a land grant called Rancho de los Coches (Ranch of the Pigs). He was granted the 2,219 acres in 1844.

By 1844, Spaniard Antonio Maria Sunol was living upon Rancho los Coches with his wife Maria Dolores Bernal and their children. Sunol was among the most educated citizens of San Jose, having been schooled in France. In 1847, Sunol acquired Rancho

los Coches, and built a brick house adjoining the Roberto Adobe. It was the first brick house to be completed in Alta California. At this residence, which still exists on the historic site, Sunol entertained members of the first California Legislature.

In 1853, an Dalmation sea captain named Stefano Splivalo purchased the Sunol home, and the surrounding ranch. Splivalo added a second story and encased the brick walls in wood siding. This is how the home looks today.

The Bruzzone family founded the Pied Piper Exterminator Company in 1934 and settled on Willow Street, in San Jose. John Bruzzone Sr., inherited the business. He owned the land behind the adobe site. In 1973, Bruzzone first laid eyes on the adobe and Splivalo's home, which carried the name "Laura Ville." When Bruzzone learned how unique the buildings were, he spent much time and money restoring them to their earlier glory. He hired adobe expert Gilbert Sanchez, an architect and contractor, to re-enforce and rebuild the Roberto-Sunol Adobe and the Sunol-Splivalo House. They lifted the second story off the first story, used concrete and steel to strengthen the building, and placed the second story back down on the first story. It took three years and \$300,000. The buildings were reopened in 1977. Laura Ville was rented as law offices until 2012.

On May 31, 2013, the three children of the late Julia and John Bruzzone Sr., sought a reliable historic organization to take possession of the property. Their wish was in line with John Bruzzone Sr.'s love of local history. They chose the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County.

The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County was created in 1875 in San Jose, California, with the purpose of celebrating those pioneers who came before us. It was founded with about 450 members. Today, the organization is proud to still have about 450 members. For more information about the organization's works, go to CaliforniaPioneers.com.

National Register of Historic Places, # 7700034.
State of California Historic Landmark, # 898.
City of San Jose Historical Landmark, # 83.