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**Tour 3/SU4 –
Japantown and
Heinlenville**

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The focus of this tour is an industrial heritage view of Japantown (“Nihonmachi”, which is Japanese for “Japan Town” ;-)) and the Chinese enclave of Heinlenville. Located along SP rail lines, the area was also home to several canneries and related industries.

Both these two communities force us to consider some of the darker moments and movements in our society, particularly the virulent anti-Asian sentiments once prevalent in California. Japantown is one of three remaining Japantowns (the others are in San Francisco and Los Angeles). Once, there were Japantowns in many West Coast cities, but the effects of the Japanese internment during WWII and other forces meant that most of them have disappeared.

Heinlenville was created as a walled enclave to protect the Chinese population after the arsons of two previous Chinatown areas. German immigrant John Heinlen purchased the block bounded by Taylor, Sixth, Jackson and Seventh, and established a safe haven for the Chinese population, protected by walls and gates. A strong community developed within the walls. The project failed in the 1930s, and the site became a yard for the City.

Take VTA light rail North (to either Mt. View or Alum Rock) to the Japantown/Ayer stop, just north of downtown. Walk East on Jackson to Fifth, where we’ll meet representatives of the Japantown neighborhood association who will guide part of the tour.

(From the Downtown to Tasmien IA on VTA notes)

[Convention Center – Paseo de San Antonio]

As you pass by Plaza de Cesar Chavez on the left, you can glimpse the Tech Museum, on the west side of the plaza, and St Josephs Cathedral and the Art Museum on the east side. In the middle of the Plaza is a play fountain. In the middle of the lower point of the plaza is a large black statue of a “Plumed Serpent”, possibly an Aztec god, one of the more controversial pieces of art in the city. From the Convention Center to Paseo de San Antonio, you pass by the historic Hotel Sainte Claire on the right and the Hotel Montgomery on the left. The Hotel Montgomery was built in 1911. It was designed by architect William Binder, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is operated by Joie de Vivre Hotels, based in San Francisco and offering themed boutique accommodations across California. The building was relocated 186 feet south of its original location in 2000 to save it from demolition during the expansion of the Fairmont Hotel.

[Paseo de San Antonio – Santa Clara]

On the left, at 89 South First Street is an empty lot. Up until January 16, 2008 it was the Porter Stock Building, a two story building built in 1867, one of the oldest commercial buildings in San Jose. It caught fire during renovation.

[Santa Clara – St. James]

On your right is Fountain Alley, named when an artesian well was dug here. The Pioneer Carriage Manufactory was located on the Alley from 1853 to at least 1881. The corner once held Krumbs Brewery and later Walteufels Book Store. Just past the Alley is the Bank of America Building, built by H. A. Minton in 1926. The bank was featured in the Architect and

restored. The Superior Court website has more interesting history of this building, and the old Hall of Records and Hall of Justice that used to be here.

Japantown is bounded by First Street, Taylor, Jackson and Eighth Streets. It formed around the Chinatown of Heinlenville, discussed below. The area is a mixture of housing, cultural and religious sites, and small businesses, including a number of Japanese restaurants as well as other cuisines. The eastern edge, along the SP tracks was home to canneries and related industries. Calpak (Del Monte) Plant #56 produced pickles in open vats whose pungent smell filled the vicinity. Like other locations in San José many of these cannery sites have been redeveloped into mixed retail/residential communities. After over 50 years as a City yard/garage, the Heinlenville site itself is being redeveloped.

(from the Japantown San José web site, <http://www.japantownsanjose.org/>)

San Jose's Japantown began as did many other communities with the need to combine comradeship and resources to survive as immigrants in a new country. It began near what was known as Heinlenville Chinatown between Jackson and Taylor east of Sixth Street. After the city's second Chinatown burned to the ground under mysterious circumstances, John Heinlen offered his own property for the new location. Mr Heinlen built a new Chinatown entirely of brick despite outrage from the general public. He then rented these buildings to the Chinese at very low rates.

Japanese, new to the country, eventually chose to build their wooden buildings next to Chinatown. Because the Chinese had already settled there, the environment was more familiar to them.

Most of Japantown was comprised of single men who found employment in the fruit orchards. Living in the barest of accommodations and having left family and friends at home, their lives were harsh and lonely.

With as many as 3,000 seasonal workers finding shelter during the spring and summer growing and picking seasons, Japantown , by 1902 had a community of Japanese businesses catering to the society of the single men. The Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 changed the fortunes of the men when wives and children were finally allowed to emigrate from Japan. The nature of the town changed also along with the advent of families and grocery and clothing stores made their appearances.

Misfortune struck again when the U.S. Government forbade female immigration in 1921. Marriage between Caucasians and Asians was illegal in California. With 42 percent of the male population yet single, the problems of community were profound. However, this also caused people to form clubs based upon prefectures from which the people immigrated. These clubs were called kenjinkai and helped to form Nihonmachi into a community.

Businesses sought to accommodate their customers by staying open in the evening and on weekends. The Japanese merchants lived behind their places of business with their families.

December 7, 1941, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, saw the evacuation and relocation of the Japanese community on the West Coast of the United States. This would irrevocably change the face of the nation and cause a legacy for Japanese Americans that is reflected in the lives of the community today. Most of Santa Clara's 3,000 Japanese-American residents were interned at Heart Mountain, Wyoming from the relocation centers. Almost all of Japantown's fifty-three businesses closed during internment. Since little time was given to dispose of property and belongings and only a limited amount (150lbs) per person which no one could carry, was allowed to be taken along on the buses and trains to the relocation centers, people sought to store their belongings in the Buddhist and Methodist Churches. As can be imagined, property and personal losses were staggering.

In December of 1944 the Japanese internment policy was revoked. By 1947, 40 businesses and 100 families had re-established themselves in this area. If you walk down Jackson Street today you will no longer see families living behind their stores, but you will experience the increasingly rare feeling of a neighborhood where history and heritage reside in the keepers of the shops and the people walking along the streets. Restaurants, specialty stores and gift shops, reflect Chinese and Japanese heritage which is carefully preserved by nearby residents and shopkeepers alike. Professional services, doctors, dentists, lawyers, non-profit organizations and churches flourish. Every Sunday morning there is a Japantown Farmers' Market on Jackson Street east of Japantown where both locals and out-of-towners come to buy fresh vegetables, baked goods, or flowers. In this country, where most other Japanese-American neighborhoods were lost after the internments of World War II, San Jose's Japantown is a rare treasure.

At the corner of Fifth and Jackson is some new public art which has a timeline of Japanese-American history.

We will make a stop at a unique industry, the San José Tofu factory/store. It's really tiny, so only a few people at a time can fit. We hope that we can get there while they are still making tofu, but they may be finished for the day by the time we get there (and they are closed on Sunday). This is an artisan tofu factory, where the soy curd product is produced by hand in small batches. People from the neighborhood (and beyond, it's a San José institution!) stop by to purchase fresh tofu and carry it home in their own containers. Tofu is an "acquired taste", and you probably can't carry some back home with you, but do try some while you are here. It can be cooked in a wide variety of ways. There are also other food, candy and drinks imported from Japan at the store.

A little south of Jackson on Fifth is an interesting adaptive reuse of an industrial building. Object Art is housed in a former walnut shelling operation. Nuts were another important crop in the Valley of Heart's Delight era. There was quite a bit of invention and innovation in developing machines to shell the nuts without damaging the meat. Whole walnut meats were much more valuable than pieces. Now it's the work and studio space for artist Ken Matsumoto. A personal favorite among his works is a bowl turned from a section of brick wall.

Right next to the gallery is the burnt out “Japanese Midwife’s House”, destroyed in a tragic fire that killed two occupants in early 2008.

The Japanese American Museum San Jose (JAMsj) broke ground for their new home in March, 2008 at a site a little further down Fifth.

<<other material from Japantown walking tour brochure>>

(Most of this material comes from an article by Scott Herhold, “Heinen’s Chinatown” published in the San José Mercury News on April 15, 2008.) From 1887 to 1931 the block bounded by Sixth, Seventh, Taylor and Jackson was a walled Chinatown, referred to as Heinlenville. John Heinlen (1815-1903) came to the US from Germany at the age of 2. He eventually became a grocer in Bucyrus, Ohio. Lured by the gold rush, in 1852 he joined a wagon train. He considered becoming a miner, but soon realized that there were other ways to make a living, and purchased land. At one point he owned a 1,000 acre ranch in the Coyote Valley (southern part today’s San José), as well as two large grazing ranches in Kings and Fresno counties.

Never a very public man – though he served as school board trustee early in his career – Heinlen was unafraid to resort to the courts when he felt crossed. He engaged in lengthy legal warfare with his partners and once sued a Fresno irrigation company using his son, Gothe, as a lawyer.

He was also a dutiful churchgoer. He and his wife, Jane Rodgers Heinlen, belonged to the Methodist Episcopal Church at Second and Santa Clara streets, which was burned in 1869 – in part, some people thought, because it taught Chinese children.

On May 4, 1887, the Chinatown located at the site of the current Fairmont Hotel burned down mysteriously.

A little more than a month later, Heinlen stepped in to offer a group of Chinese merchants the use of his land between Sixth and Seventh north of Jackson.

The explosion in San José’s Second Ward, which included the large, comfortable homes north of Santa Clara Street, was immediate. There were torchlight parades against Heinlen’s proposal.

Though a delegation led by Mayor C.W. Breyfogle called on Heinlen at his 530 First Street home, the crusty German refused to back down. In what is likely bluster, he was quoted as saying it would take \$20,000 to make him abandon his plans.

“It was a very brave thing to do because of the timing,” said Connie Young Yu, who has written a book called *Chinatown, San Jose, USA*. “It was a time when people feared being burned out for supporting the Chinese.”

It was also good business. Records from the time indicate Heinlen signed a master lease with the Chinese merchants for \$1,500 per year or about \$33,000 in today's money. He also invested an estimated \$30,000 in brick buildings, which were designed by the noted San José architect, Theodore Lenzen.

At the time, just five years after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the prejudice against the Chinese was intense. And the presence of opium dens and gambling parlors made it an easy target for newspapers who dubbed Heinlen "Ah Heinlen".

Heinlen died in 1903 at the age of 88. None of his seven children married.

The Heinlen empire dissolved quickly during the Depression, when his heirs were no longer able to collect rent or pay taxes. The Heinlen Co. went bankrupt, and by early 1932, the City cleared away most of Chinatown, leaving only the temple and a few structures. In 1949, the land became a corporation yard, where the city parked and repaired its trucks.

Was Heinlen a hero or an opportunist? The answer is both. Though his rents were reasonable, he clearly aimed at a profit. He was also a resilient man who cared enough about an unpopular cause to defy the public – one of several such characters in San José history.

All in all, our city is better for them.

(the following section is from the History San José web site

http://historysanjose.org/visiting_hsj/buildings/history_park/ng_shing_gung.html



The Ng Shing Gung was built in 1888 in "Heinlenville." at Taylor and Cleveland Streets in San José , to serve as a cultural and religious center for San José's Chinese community.

" Ng Shing Gung " means "Temple of Five Gods" and was named for the five divinities whose statues were housed within: Kwan Yin, Goddess of Mercy; Choi Sun, God of Wealth; Cheng Huan, the Canton City God; Kwan Gung, God of War and Justice; and Tien Ho, Queen of Heaven.

The ground floor functioned as a community center with a Chinese calligraphy and literature classroom for children. An elaborately carved and gilded altar stood on the second floor.

The original Ng Shing Gung was demolished in 1949. However, the altar, furnishings and a portion of the facade were saved and formed the core of the exhibit completed by the Chinese Historical and Cultural Project in 1991 at History Park. The replica Ng Shing Gung houses exhibits and *Home Base: A Chinatown Called Heinlenville*, a video depicting the life and contributions of the Chinese Americans in the Santa Clara Valley.



Main altar inside Ng Shing Gung

Redevelopment of the Heinlenville site has begun, with an archeological survey conducted in early 2008. From the beginning, the site had sewers, so the usual rich trove of artifacts from privies was not available. As of these notes, no reports on findings have been issued.

To the east of Japantown there are only a few remnants and traces of the canneries and related industries along the SP tracks which cross Jackson at Seventh.

Mariani Packing site is now occupied by the Mariani Square project of townhomes and lofts. The business moved to Vacaville where it is still in operation, producing the ‘2 scoops of raisins’ as its main product. From 1962 to 1965, under the name Santa Clara Packing and using the address 620 North 8th, the site was also used to produce B&M Baked Beans as a contractor, using 32 ovens, thereby providing off-season work. Although some of the buildings are well preserved and adaptively converted to lofts, there is no signage. The water tower has been adaptively reused as a cell phone tower. History of the family and company is at - <http://www.mariani.com/about.html>. Pictures of the site before demolition are available for viewing and sale at <http://www.gorillasites.com/marianis.htm>

The block north of Mariani is an apartment complex now called “Esplanade”. It was home to the fragrant pickle vats of CalPak (Del Monte) formerly at 653 North 8th St. The only signage for this property is a map that shows “historic building” with no details.

Continental Can and Tri Valley Cannery operated on 10th Street north of Taylor. There are remnants, but development is in the works. We like the “bridge to nowhere”, a remnant of an earlier redevelopment.

Gordon Biersch, a modern lager brewery is on Taylor St. <http://www.gordonbiersch.com/brewery/beer/index.html>

“It all started with the dream of two passionate guys named Dan Gordon and Dean Biersch. This dream of exceptional beer and delicious food became a reality on July 6, 1988 when the first Gordon Biersch opened in Palo Alto, California.” (from the [gordonbiersch.com](http://www.gordonbiersch.com) web site) Eventually, the success of the restaurant chain and the retail sale of the beer ran into complex

issues in California/Federal liquor laws, and the restaurant chain and brewery had to separate. The brewery is a state of the art facility, but does not offer tours to the public.