A Brief History of Population Growth in the Greater San Francisco Bay Region

Page Mosier
U.S. Geological Survey, Menlo Park, Calif.

The population of the San Francisco Bay area is both growing and becoming increasingly diverse. The term "Greater San Francisco Bay Region" is applied to counties which are adjacent to the San Francisco Bay, including San Francisco, Napa, Sonoma, Solano, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. (Although other counties are often included in the Bay area or region, they are not included in this report.)

The first people in California were the Native Americans. Although it is hard to say exactly how many lived in California, their numbers are estimated to have been between 200,000 and 500,000 at the time of the first Spanish explorations. The native population in the Bay area was mainly of the Coastanoan, Coast Miwok, Yokut, and Wintun tribes. There were an estimated 7,000 Native Americans in the Bay area during the time that the Spanish missions were being established, including some that had been brought in by the Spanish from other areas.

Although many ethnic groups have come to the Bay area, the first group to make a major impact on the population were the Spaniards, who erected their northernmost outposts in the San Francisco Bay region and attempted to convert the Native Americans in the area to their religion. Approximately 90 percent of these Native Americans died of hardship and disease resulting from their contact with these new immigrants. Spanish contributions were both political and economic. They erected presidios, or forts, and missions, which provided the economic basis for later California settlement.

As a result of the War of Independence in 1821, Mexico attained independence from Spain, and California became part of the Republic of Mexico. San Francisco did not appear in the 1840 United States census, because it was then still part of Mexico. The majority of the immigrant population lived south of San Francisco. Land ownership consisted of large Mexican land grants covering most of the Bay area, which were given by the Mexican government to be settled by Rancheros or "Californios," as they were called. The Mexican period was one of turmoil and transition, ending with a war between Mexico and the United States. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, California became part of the United States territory. Eventually the major ranchos were divided into smaller properties and both land speculation and squatting were widespread.

The opening up of the West in general, and the 1849 gold rush specifically, saw the beginning of a great flow of people to California from all over the United States and the world. It was this flow of people that made it possible for California to attain statehood in 1850. Since then, this influx of people has persisted, making California the most populous state in the Union.

Because of the gold rush, the population grew and the demographics changed. By 1860, San Francisco had more than 50,000 people, and the population more than doubled in the following decade. From 1870 until the turn of the century, the rate of population growth became slower with each decade. Between 1900 and 1960 there was no consistent pattern. Slow growth occurred in the 1930's, followed by fast growth between 1940 and 1960. The influx of people during World War II and the postwar baby boom produced the highest rate of population growth since the 1870's.

In the mid and late 1800's, most of the growth occurred within the city of San Francisco. People crowded into the San Francisco metropolitan area in the 1880's, and the population grew to 274,000. The outlying areas remained mainly agricultural. The flight to, and growth in, the suburbs mainly came in the 1940's and 1950's, when the agricultural land and surrounding hills began to gain in population. The people in the San Francisco Bay area of the 1960's numbered about 3.5 million, and they were spread out over a land area more than twice the size of Rhode Island (fig. 9.1).

Since the first major mode of transportation in the Bay area was by water, it was around the ports or embarcaderos that cities first developed. Steamboat travel led to the growth of East Bay towns such as Oakland, Berkeley, Encinal, and Alameda. Local railroads reached the area in 1864, but it was not until 1869 that the transcontinental railroad began bringing tens of thousands of people to the Bay area. Railroads brought in more people and created new towns South of San Francisco, such as Burlingame, San Mateo, San Carlos, Belmont, and Atherton.

In 1863, there was also an active local ferry system between Oakland and San Francisco, as well as trolley car systems in both of these cities. These were to fade and mostly disappear as major modes of transportation after the advent of the automobile. The increasing popularity of the automobile at the end of World War I provided a major impact on California and the Bay area. Ownership of cars in California was far ahead of other states, and because of this the urban population spread rapidly between 1910 through 1940. In the 1920's and 1930's, California's population was only slightly outnumbered by New York's. Between 1920 and 1939 the population in California more than doubled.

During World War II, the population in the Bay area grew through an influx of people from other parts of the United States, such as those who came to work in the Bay area shipyards.

Areas which had largely remained agricultural, such as the Santa Clara Valley, became highly urbanized after the World War II, largely owing to the automobile (tables 9.1, 9.2). From the 1950's until the present, the Santa Clara Valley has continued to show remarkable growth because of major industries, such as missile development and the electronics and computer industries, earning it the name "Silicon Valley" and making San Jose now the largest city in the Bay area (table 9.3). The Livermore Valley at this time also changed from a purely agricultural region, growing cattle and wine, to an industrial area with the growth of what was to become the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratory.

The population of the Bay area is not only growing but is becoming more and more diverse, (table 9.4), although individual communities vary dramatically. A Gallup study done in 1996-97 showed that 9.9 percent of adults in the area were African-American, 15.5 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 15.6 percent were Latino, 74.8 percent were white, and 0.8 percent were other ethnicities. Marin County, however is more than 95 percent white, while San Francisco is 25 percent Asian. Throughout California, groups that were once the minority are now becoming the "emerging majority." The largest growth in the State in the 1990's has involved the Asian population, many of whom have immigrated to California to find work in the technology industry. Asians, including those that are part Asian, have shown an increase of 61 percent from 1990 to the 2000 census. California gained 731,000 Asians or Pacific Islanders through immigration and 528,000 through births during the 1990's. Asians are now a majority in some cities, including the Bay area cities of Milpitas and Daly City.

Despite attempts to develop public transportation systems such as bus lines, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), Caltrain, and light rail, ever-increasing numbers of automobiles continue to clog major traffic arteries throughout the Bay area. The increase in traffic, and continued population growth present additional housing and transportation problems for the future. However, some forward-looking California and Bay area leaders have set aside tens of thousands of acres of open-space land for watersheds and recreation in the Peninsula, East Bay, and Marin County. These areas, which include the Golden Gate Headlands, Angel Island, East Bay Regional Parks, Point Reyes, Mount Tamalpais, and Mount Diablo, provide some refuge for the ever-expanding Bay area population, which now numbers close to seven million.

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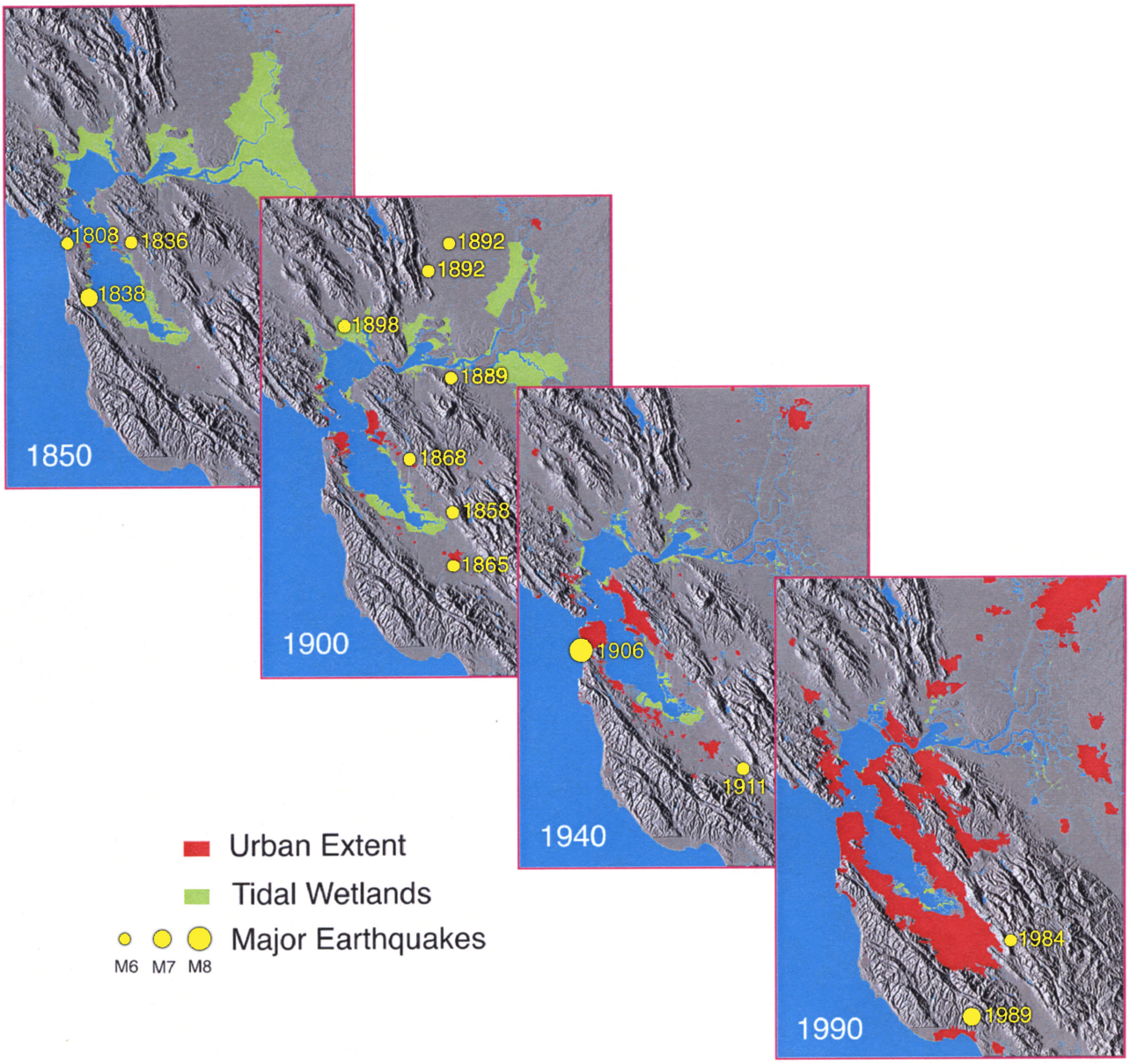

Figure 9.1. The growth of urban areas, the decline of tidal wetlands, and the epicenters of major earthquake in the Bay region since 1850 (from Leonard J. Gaydos and William Acervedo, http://sfbay.wr.usgs.gov/access/IntegratedScience/IntSci.html).

Table 9.1. Total population of San Francisco Bay area counties, 1930-90 (from Association of Bay Area Governments http://www.abag.ca.gov).

	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
San Francisco	634,394	634,536	775,357	740,316	715,674	678,974	723,959
San Mateo	77,405	111,782	235,659	444,387	557,361	587,329	649,623
Santa Clara	145,118	174,949	290,547	642,315	1,065,313	1,295,071	1,497,577
Alameda	474,883	513,011	740,315	908,209	1,071,446	1,105,379	1,279,182
Contra Costa	78,608	100,450	298,984	409,030	556,116	656,380	803,732
Solano	40,834	49,118	104,833	134,597	171,989	235,203	340,421
Napa	22,897	28,503	46,603	65,890	79,140	99,199	110,765
Sonoma	62,222	69,052	103,405	147,375	204,885	299,681	388,222
Marin	41,648	52,907	85,619	146,820	208,652	222,568	230,096
Region	1,578,009	1,734,308	2,681,322	3,636,939	4,630,576	5,179,784	6,023,577

Table 9.2. Percent change in total population, San Francisco Bay area Counties, 1930-2010 (from Association of Bay Area Governments http://www.abag.ca.gov).

	1930/40	1940/50	1950/60	1960/70	1970/80	1980/90	1990/00	2000/10
San Francisco	0.0	22.2	-4.5	-3.3	-5.1	6.6	7.8	2.6
San Mateo	44.4	110.8	88.6	25.4	5.4	10.6	12.0	2.7
Santa Clara	20.6	66.1	121.1	65.9	21.6	15.6	14.8	7.3
Alameda	8.0	44.3	22.7	18.0	3.2	15.7	13.6	7.1
Contra Costa	27.8	197.6	36.8	36.0	18.0	22.4	19.8	16.3
Solano	20.3	113.4	28.4	27.8	36.8	44.7	24.3	21.3
Napa	24.5	63.5	41.4	20.1	25.3	11.7	19.8	9.0
Sonoma	11.0	49.7	42.5	39.0	46.3	29.5	22.8	13.5
Marin	27.0	61.8	71.5	42.1	6.7	3.4	11.1	6.4
Region	9.9	54.6	35.7	27.3	11.9	16.3	15.1	8.8

Table 9.3. January 1, 1997, population rankings of San Francisco Bay area cities (from Association of Bay Area Governments http://www.abag.ca.gov).

City	Population	City	Population
1. SAN JOSE	873,300	51. SAN CARLOS	28,050
2. SAN FRANCISCO	778,100	52. LOS ALTOS	28,000
3. OAKLAND	388,100	53. BENICIA	27,350
4. FREMONT	192,200	54. DUBLIN	26,750
5. SUNNYVALE	129,300	55. SAN PABLO	25,900
6. SANTA ROSA	127,700	56. SUISUN CITY	25,800
7. HAYWARD	123,900	57. BELMONT	25,200
8. CONCORD	111,800	58. EAST PALO ALTO	25,050
9. VALLEJO	110,500	59. LAFAYETTE	23,600
10. BERKELEY	105,900	60. EL CERRITO	23,300
11. DALY CITY	101,300	61. MILLBRAE	21,450
12. SANTA CLARA	100,000	62. WINDSOR	19,200
13. SAN MATEO	92,000	63. HERCULES	18,800
14. RICHMOND	91,300	64. PINOLE	18,150
15. FAIRFIELD	89,000	65. ALBANY	17,300
16. VACAVILLE	85,100	66. ORINDA	16,900
17. ANTIOCH	76,500	67. MORAGA	16,350
18. ALAMEDA	76,300	68. BRENTWOOD	14,500
19. REDWOOD CITY	73,200	69. MILL VALLEY	13,900
20. MOUNTAIN VIEW	73,000	70. DIXON	13,650
21. SAN LEANDRO	72,600	71. SAN ANSELMO	12,300
22. NAPA	68,000	72. LARKSPUR	11,750
23. LIVERMORE	67,800	73. HILLSBOROUGH	11,350
24. WALNUT CREEK	62,200	74. PIEDMONT	11,300
25. MILPITAS	61,200	75. HALF MOON BAY	10,850
26. PALO ALTO	59,900	76. CLAYTON	10,050
27. PLEASANTON	59,800	77. HEALDSBURG	9,625
28. UNION CITY	59,700	78. AMERICAN CANYON	9,025
29. SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO	57,600	79. SONOMA	8,925
30. SAN RAFAEL	53,400	80. CORTE MADERA	8,750
31. PITTSBURG	50,800	81. TIBURON	8,550
32. PETALUMA	49,000	82. LOS ALTOS HILLS	7,975
33. NOVATO	46,100	83. SAUSALITO	7,725
34. CUPERTINO	44,800	84. SEBASTOPOL	7,575
35. SAN RAMON	41,950	85. ATHERTON	7,375
36. SAN BRUNO	40,800	86. FAIRFAX	7,100
37. NEWARK	40,450	87. COTATI	6,550
38. PACIFICA	39,650	88. EMERYVILLE	6,525
39. CAMPBELL	39,300	89. ST HELENA	5,725
40. ROHNERT PARK	38,700	90. CLOVERDALE	5,525
41. DANVILLE	38,100	91. WOODSIDE	5,475
42. MARTINEZ	35,350	92. CALISTOGA	4,790
43. GILROY	35,250	93. PORTOLA VALLEY	4,470
44. PLEASANT HILL	31,450	94. RIO VISTA	3,710
45. SARATOGA	30,600	95. YOUNTVILLE	3,490
46. MENLO PARK	30,550	96. MONTE SERENO	3,360
47. FOSTER CITY	29,750	97. BRISBANE	3,210
48. LOS GATOS	29,700	98. BELVEDERE	2,280
49. MORGAN HILL	29,250	99. ROSS	2,260
50. BURLINGAME	28,550	100. COLMA	1,240

Table 9.4. San Francisco Bay area Census 2000 (from Association of Bay Area Governments http://www.abag.ca.gov).

TOTAL POPULATION	6,783,760	100.0%
RACE		
White	3,941,687	58.1%
Black or African American	511,084	7.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	43,529	0.6%
Asian	1,289,849	19.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	36,317	0.5%
Some other ethnicity	627,004	9.2%
Two or more ethnicities	334,290	4.9%
HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE		
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	1,315,175	19.4%
Not Hispanic or Latino	5,468,585	80.6%
White	3,392,204	50.0%
Black or African American	497,205	7.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	24,733	0.4%
Asian	1,278,515	18.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	33,640	0.5%
Some other ethnicity	18,451	0.3%
Two or more ethnicities	223,837	3.3%