

Annadel State Park Oral History Transcript

Archaeologist Annita Waghorn offers us a comprehensive view of Annadel State Park as a cultural landscape from Native American occupation to present use. Rich with natural and cultural resources, Annadel is full of reminders of human occupation. Obsidian lined trails, orchards, stonefences, quarry pits, and beautiful Lake Ilsanjo are evidence of the historical events that have shaped Sonoma County's history. Annita tells us exactly what happened and what might have been had forces not come together to preserve Annadel as a State Park.

Transcription of an oral history interview recorded for Sonoma County Museum's exhibition: Sonoma Confidential

Annadel is a fascinating place; it represents many of the historical themes and events that have shaped Sonoma County's history. It is what archaeologists and many social scientists call a "cultural landscape," meaning that its appearance and how it functions in the system reflects the history of human use. You can walk through Annadel today and simply from the evidence of what's on the ground around you, begin to develop ideas of how people have lived and made use of Annadel in the past.

Pieces of obsidian that have been shaped tell us that Native Americans came to Annadel and used the obsidian for making tools. Euro-Americans also had an enormous amount to do with Annadel's history. We see fruit trees along the trails that tell us that people farmed Annadel, while stonefences mark the old property lines and show us that landowners probably used the land for grazing stock. There are old roads and quarries and piles of chipped stone that show us the extent to which the paving stone industry in the nineteenth-century shaped the Annadel landscape.

The changing of this landscape from private to public use is the story of our times. John Coney, the Oakland businessman had owned Annadel Farms since the 1930s. He ran cattle there and he also used it as a place to spend time with family and friends. By the early 1960s, however, he'd begun to think of the land in a different way. In 1963, he sold the lower area of Annadel Farms, the area that bordered Highway 12 in the Los Guilicos Valley for the development of Oakmont. This was a very controversial development, it was one of the first times that kind of planned community had taken place in Sonoma County--and it served to awaken local people to the possibility that scenic farmland would increasingly become subject to development.

In the mid 1960s Coney, himself, began to look at developing land for housing. He developed plans for a large housing subdivision on the uplands of Annadel Farms in the half of what is now Annadel Park. A golf course, a country club, and houses were to be built around Lake

Ilsanjo. In trying to make this dream a reality Coney overreached and lost ownership of Annadel Farms when he couldn't meet financial commitments. The new owner tried to pursue Coney's plans, but couldn't obtain city council approval, as the council feared the development would add too much strain to the city's police and services.

News of the proposed development quickly raised public outcry, people were increasingly concerned that scenic areas around Santa Rosa would, in the words of one 1969 letter writer to the Press Democrat, "fall to the bulldozers or to the steamroller." Public interest helped to spur the idea of purchasing Annadel as a park for public use. The California Department of Parks and Recreation was enthusiastic about the idea. They saw the future need for open space around the edges of growing cities, but the price of purchasing the land was very steep. The California State Parks Foundation and local businessman, Henry Trione, led the effort to find funding. In fact, Trione, himself, donated large sums of money to make the park a reality. Their efforts were helped by the Santa Rosa Citizen's Committee formed to help solicit public donations. Their slogan was, "Be part of the park." In 1971 Annadel Farms State Park was opened. It's truly a peoples' park, having been born out of the public outcry and the development of open space. For many Santa Rosans, it remains an important and beautiful part of their lives in the county.

One of the things I love about Annadel though is that it remains a vigorous changing landscape today. This is because different generations of users have continually reinvented how they see the landscape and what's important to them within it. Annadel is a State Park today and one of the big things State Park managers have attempted in the last ten years or so, is to recreate Annadel as a "natural" area or to reemphasized its natural values. There are programs of burning, of management of eucalyptus stands and Douglas fir stands, and the recreation of the trail system in the last five or six years--have all sought to reemphasize a particular type of natural landscape that they believe Annadel represents. Of course, this has brought them into conflict with many park users who see Annadel as strongly important because of its recreational values and feel very protective about it. The park is so important to so many people and for good reason, it is such a beautiful, rich place to spend time. I think its real legacy though, is that it is a record of our past and present attitudes towards the landscape around us. It is a microcosm of attitudes towards land that have been very common in the shaping of the West in the United States.