

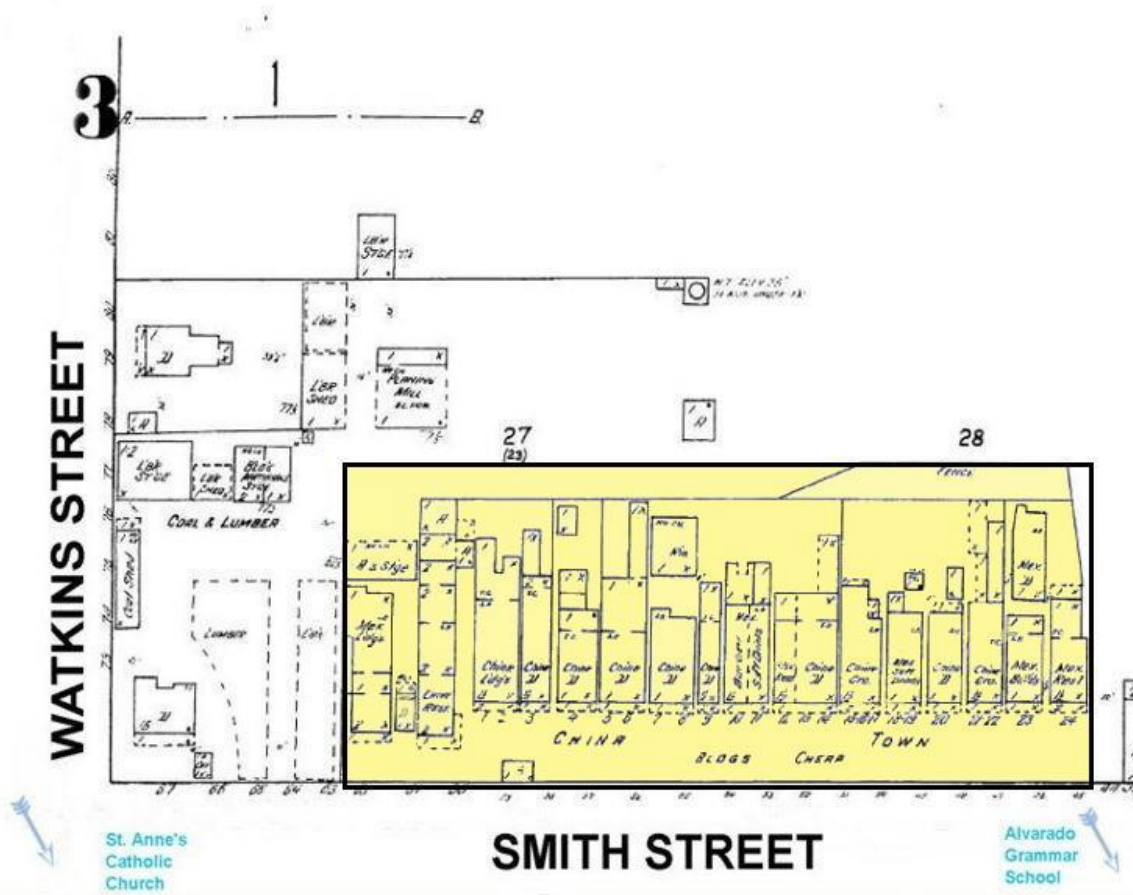
# Alvarado's Chinatown/Little Tijuana

In the 1920's the town of Alvarado had an infamous section of town known as "Little Tijuana." The section derived this name from the lawless city in Mexico across the border from southern California. The location of this section of Alvarado was on the north side of Smith Street and stretched from Watkins Street east to where the Union City Historical is located today.

But before it was known as "Little Tijuana" it was known as Chinatown. In the 1860 Alvarado census there were no Chinese reported to be living in Alvarado. The 1870 Alvarado Census showed that there were 107 Chinese living in Alvarado. Although this seems like a large leap, most towns in the Bay Area saw an influx of Chinese in the 1860's with the gold fields no longer panning out and the completion of the Transcontinental Railway in May of 1869. To be sure, Alvarado's Chinatown was no where near what San Francisco's became.



Alvarado's Chinatown just after the turn of the 20th Century. Note that Smith Street is not paved yet. Also note the board walk used during the rainy season and when the annual floods would come. These board walks were common throughout Alvarado.



This is the Sanborn Fire Map Company's sketch of "Chinatown/Little Tijuana" of 1925, just two years before the district burned to the ground. It is a good representation of the photo above. You can get a larger view of this by increasing the zoom rate of Word to 125% or 150%.

Alvarado's Chinatown became the Chinatown of Washington Township, not for its number of Chinese, but because of its centralization in the downtown section, and the diversity of their shops and businesses, which probably catered to many Chinese of Eden and Washington Townships.

The Chinese population for Alvarado taken from Census information shows a curious rise and then a decline in the Chinese population in Alvarado. Below is the Alvarado Chinese population by decade:

1860	0
1870	107
1880	261
1890	Census sheets destroyed by fire, no figures available.
1900	152
1910	65
1920	39 ("Little Tijuana" destroyed by fire in July 1927)
1930	10

The Year 1880 gives us our first look at the diversity of the Chinese inhabitants of Alvarado and downtown Alvarado merchant row. Below is a listing of vocations of the Chinese community in Alvarado in 1880. This is not to say, however, that all 261 Chinese inhabitants of Alvarado lived in downtown Alvarado. I am sure that most of the laborers boarded near their place of work, but visited Alvarado's Chinatown for supplies and entertainment.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>
Chinese Boss	9
Clerk in China Store	1
Cook	14*
Dishwasher	1
Doctor	1
Farmer	2
Fisherman	1
Gambler	2
House of Ill Repute	2
Keeper: Gambling House	1
Laborer	100
Laborer Farm	1
Laborer Salt Company	54
Laborer Sugar Mill	40
Laundryman	5
Merchant	8
Prostitute	5
Restaurant	3
School Teacher	1
Seamstress	1

\* Chinese cooks were employed by Chinese labor gangs, Chinese Restaurants, and two were employed by the Alvarado wealthy (Ebenezer Dyer & John Beard). Oddly, it became fashionable in Alvarado to employ Chinese as servants and cooks after 1880, even though the Chinese were abused during the early years.

What was known as Chinatown in the late 1800's would eventually become known as "Little Tijuana" in the 1920's. This was because during the "Roaring 20's," Mexicans began to occupy the little enclave. This led to conflicts with the Chinese and an increase in violence, criminal activity, and vice. It is because of this Mexican influence that this section of Alvarado became associated with the notorious Baja Mexico town called Tijuana.

### **Anti-Chinese Sentiment:**

During the 1860's the Chinese population in Alvarado began to grow, as it did in all other towns in the Township. Indeed, the Chinese population in California began to swell considerably. This caused alarm throughout the State for two reasons, first they were of a different race and culture, and second they worked for extremely low wages, depressing the wage earning ability of many Americans. Much resentment built up against the Chinese, and violent flare ups were occasionally seen. Here are a few of the instances I was able to find:

In August of 1870, a rumor to the effect that an anti-Chinese element in Alvarado attempted to drive away the Chinese from Alvarado.

In August 1876 as a consequence of disorderly conduct on their part, all the Chinamen in Alvarado were driven out of town by a mob of citizens.

On October 16, 1887, a Chinaman employed at the Salt Works near Alvarado was outrageously assaulted by a man simply because the Chinaman was walking on the sidewalk, the whole width of which, was claimed by the Caucasian man.

On October 9, 1899, while intoxicated, a Mr. Rose of Hayward knocked down a Chinaman and made deep gash on his eye, and three gashes on his nose. When getting up the Chinaman resented the assault and was wiping the street with Mr. Rose when George Horne separated them. Mr. Rose ran away.

A Chinese laborer was found hung from the beams of a bridge near Alvarado on July 12, 1903. He had been there several weeks. The Chinese community refused to accept the theory of suicide.

The instances cited above are but isolated cases committed by individuals upon an individual Chinaman. The feeling of the communities in the East Bay can best be summed up in a meeting held in December of 1885 in Oakland:

"The Anti-Chinese League of Alameda County met in Germania Hall (Oakland) on December 27, 1885, and the room was filled to the doors. F.W. Hunt presided. Addresses were made by F.W. Hunt, T.D. Hanniford, Mrs. Anderson, D.S. Hirshberg, ex-Mayor Andrus, Judge A.M. Church (formerly of Alvarado), and B.G. Haskill of San Francisco. The following preambles and resolutions were adopted:

WHEREAS, The policy of the National Government which induces Chinese immigration to this country has filled the State of California with Chinese greatly to the detriment of her citizens; and WHEREAS, If the policy of evading and nullifying the law passed by Congress for excluding the Chinese from this country by the executive and judicial branches of the Government is continued, it will rapidly fill the Pacific Coast States and Territories and eventually the whole United States with the class of laborers belonging to a race who are directly opposed and antagonistic to our race and nation, politically, morally and socially, and whose presence is a constant menace to its welfare and prosperity; and, WHEREAS, From our experience with the Chinese we know that unless they are excluded from our country they will ultimately bring upon it a greater calamity than was entailed upon us by the introduction and establishment of African slavery; and, WHEREAS, The further discussion of the subject without action will not only be useless but a waste of time; therefore

RESOLVED, That we have within our power the constitution and laws which are the means to rid our country of this curse; RESOLVED, In mass meeting assembled, that we will not patronize any Chinese. RESOLVED, That we will not patronize anyone who does. RESOLVED, That the Chinese must go."

From:

*Past & Present of Alameda County, California*

BY: Joseph E. Baker; 1914

Although the people felt threatened by Chinese immigration, the government seemed oblivious to curbing the flow of Chinese. It would also appear that the Alvarado employers of large pools of laborers favored the employ of the Chinese.

When the Alvarado Sugar Mill opened in 1870 it employed 70 men, half of these men were Chinese. The Asians were paid 80¢ a day and the Europeans \$1.50 a day, both without board. By 1873 the number of Chinese employed at the Alvarado mill numbered 100, who were kept on the company's farm where they were employed in weeding, hoeing, etc. At this time the Alvarado Sugar Mill leased or owned farms around the sugar to raise beets besides buying beets from independent farmers.

In 1875 it is reported that Benedict & Sherk of Alvarado, raised hops on their ranch on what is today Hop Ranch Road. The harvest lasted for nearly five weeks and employed 150 Chinamen.

Throughout the latter part of 19th century the salt industry around Alvarado, Newark and Mt. Eden employed large numbers of Chinese. This lasted until the beginning of the 20th century when the immigration of large numbers of Japanese came to the Bay Area. They eventually replaced the dwindling number of Chinese in our area. The Japanese influx would last until WWII when they were interned in concentration camps.

Another curse to the Alvarado Chinaman was the visitation of the famous Alvarado floods. Chinatown sat on a particularly low part of downtown Alvarado that always got the worst of the flooding when the waters visited Alvarado. Many homes down Smith Street were built high off the ground or were raised to avoid the almost annual coming of floods.

Homes that were raised or built high off the ground that are still visible today are the Brune's home on the corner of Granger and Smith Streets, and the Sa house next door, Elvin Rose's house next to the Grammar School on Smith Street. Other homes that were raised but are now demolished was the old White Elephant Store home across from Sam Dinsmore's old store, and the Nauert home that stood between the Alvarado Hotel and the old IOOF Hall. Homes similar to these can also be seen down Horner Street.

Chinatown appears to always have had a shady past, just outside the laws of a "gentler general society" of Alvarado. A case in point is the 1880 Alvarado Census by Mr. W.F. Ingalls, who records two houses of ill-repute in Alvarado's Chinatown employing five prostitutes. If Mr. Ingalls could identify these houses and their wayward women by their less than legal "professions" as an outsider of Chinatown, then I gather that open prostitution in the enclave was not a big secret. But for prostitution to be tolerated in Alvarado would have meant that the prostitutes served only the Oriental population exclusively, as the ladies of the town and the township would not have tolerated Chinatown prostitutes consorting with Occidental men.

To prove this point in September 1908, Miss Myrtle Smith, a handsome young woman of nineteen, was arrested in Alvarado by Sheriff Barnett and brought to the county jail. She had been found in Chinatown in Alvarado and was taken into custody on a complaint of the women of Washington Township.

The girl was found by the Sheriff in a house belonging to a Chinaman named Mo Ton, who was also taken into custody on charge of renting a house for disorderly purposes. The women of Washington Township complained to the sheriff that tenderloin characters were coming into Alvarado and making their headquarters in Chinatown.

Apparently what Township women would tolerate among the oriental enclave was tolerated as long as it kept to their own race. You could call this an early 20th century "What happens in Chinatown between the Chinese stays in Chinatown."

But the Chinese could also be a colorful people, whose culture Americans found entertaining. This is especially true of the Chinese New Year. The shooting of fire crackers was enjoyed as well as the Chop Suey feast. In every house their hospitality was extended to everybody visiting them by serving them rice, tea, candles, etc., with a glad heart.

At the start of the 20th century the Japanese influence around Alvarado began to be felt. Some of them gravitated to Chinatown and became merchants and saloonkeepers. It did not take long for the townspeople of Alvarado to become agitated over the business dealings of the newly arrived Japanese. Apparently Japanese saloon owners were able to import liquor (sake) and sell it to Japanese citizens without a liquor license in Alvarado.

In 1909 some of the licensed white hotel and saloon men in town were strenuously complaining because of the alleged invasions of the county's license ordinance by Japanese who were able to import "wet" goods by the barrel and retail the same not only their own countrymen, but also to white citizens. Alvarado and vicinity had a large Japanese population, largely owing to the employment of Jap labor in the local beet sugar mill and the beet fields hereabout.

It also happens that Japanese tradesmen were tenants of many buildings in the older section of town (Chinatown), which buildings are owned by local financiers (mostly by Ed Farley), who look pained whenever anything was said reflecting upon his tenants. So it is stated that though the local constabulary has been complained to in regard to the asserted violations of county license ordinance by the Japanese, no arrests were made.

Local saloon keepers kept up their appeals to the District Attorney's office for an investigation of the matter. It was also pressed that an investigation of the "compound" maintained by the Orientals in one section of their quarter, wherein it was said that a number of Chinese, and an occasional white girl were kept immured for immoral purposes.

Raids on Chinatown continued off and on for years and it seemed Chinatown was more a nuisance than a threat. In 1910, a raid on Chinatown netted 10 Chinese on the charges of gambling.

In March 1915, four Chinese were arrested in night raids at Mt. Eden, and Alvarado on Chinese Opium Dens. The four were lodged in the county jail on charges of violating the Harrison Anti-Drug Act. All were farm laborers.

As the 1920's neared the raids on Alvarado's Chinatown became a more frequent event as Sheriff's deputies and the District Attorney's of Alameda County became more vigilant over the doings in the enclave.

On Sunday morning, March 30, 1919, the inspectors of the State Pharmacy Board, raided Alvarado's Chinatown looking for illicit narcotics. The Chinese declared the inspectors locked them in closets and took away between \$400 and \$500 worth of jewelry and money after breaking down the doors. The men said there was general

commotion as the Chinese had barred the doors and they had to be broken, but the raid went strictly by the law.

In view of the persistent claim of Alvarado Chinese that \$70 in cash and jewelry valued at \$135, were taken from their houses by operatives of the State Pharmacy Board during the raid for illicit narcotics Sunday morning, Sheriff Frank Barnett was continuing the investigation.

On October 4, 1919, three Mexicans were arrested and held in the Hayward jail, while a fourth one was in the hospital there in serious condition from a knife wound in abdomen received during the progress of a fight that took on somewhat the nature of a riot Saturday night at Alvarado.

Sheriff Frank Barnett received a report late that trouble was brewing and went to Alvarado with Deputy Sheriff Joe Soares. Together with Constables Ramage and Rose the situation was investigated but few details ascertained as to the cause of the trouble. The fight occurred in the foreign quarter of Alvarado, and it was believed the wounded man started it. The foreign quarter was originally known as Chinatown. Later it was occupied principally by the Japanese, and now by the Cuban Mexicans. Those involved are of the latter nationality. The man with the cut in his abdomen may possibly die from the wounds.

On October 23, 1921 Sheriff Frank Barnett lead the Vice Squad to Alvarado where operatives had secured evidence against the proprietors of immoral houses in the "old Chinatown district," which are said to rival the worst haunts of vice on the old Barbary Coast (San Francisco). Peter Adelano, alleged proprietor of a brothel, was arrested and was arraigned before Judge Frank Mitchell of Hayward.

At the same time a girl giving the name of Jesse Miller was arrested as an inmate, and was arraigned on a charge of vagrancy, in order that this action might be taken to quickly rid the county of her.

At another resort ("resort" is the term used by the newspapers to denote houses of gambling, ill repute, saloons and narcotics dens in the Alvarado Chinatown district) Anita Garcia, a Spanish girl, was arrested and brought to the county jail, where she was charged with vagrancy as well. A number of other denizens of the red light houses were ordered to dress and leave the county immediately or face the pain of arrest.

As a result of the raid the "old Chinatown quarter" of Alvarado, was silent and almost deserted as a result of the raids on October 26, 1921, when a poolroom operator was arrested and several women of the underworld were placed under arrest, and others were ordered to leave the vicinity. Since the raid shutters have been drawn, frequenters of the row of shacks are few and far between, and the Mexican habitués of the quarter have left for out-of-town ranches.

It did not take long for the district to reform itself into the Chinatown of old. But now it was given new a name, "Little Tijuana," after the Baja California town of raucous repute. Mexicans now ruled the enclave while the Chinese and Japanese tried to keep their shops open.

What ensued was a looming race war involving Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican residents. This was the result of the Chinese move to try to establish a pool room

there. According to officers and those in touch with the Oriental quarter situation, the Japanese and Mexicans have a monopoly on such places here, and the Chinese were looking for a piece of the action. The Japanese and Mexicans were bitterly opposed to the Chinese opening of pool halls and card rooms. Threats and counter threats flew fast, with the Chinese still determined to open the pool room.

At the end of December 1921, "Little Tijuana" was nearly deserted according to Deputy District Attorney Frank Shay when he returned from the place where he had gone to direct raiding parties visiting questionable resorts in the vicinity. The regular immigration of the sugar workers to other fields had practically depopulated the region, and the "For Rent" signs are gathering dust in the windows of the "Oyster Loaf" and the "Bucket of Blood" that once shone brightly and resounded with revelry.

The demise of "Little Tijuana" in Alvarado took a hopeful turn when a sharp drop in the population of the Mexican and Chinese because of the recent gold strike of San Andreas, Calaveras County, where according to reports, a gold strike has been made.

But "Little Tijuana" made its comeback and resumed its normal activities. But the careful eye of the District Attorney's Office in Oakland had the intent of permanently closing down the "city within a city."

In January 1923, with the object of closing up resorts in the Alvarado district that had been the scene of numerous fights, shootings, and stabbing affrays, District Attorney Ezra Decoto Jr. (son of Ezra Decoto one of the three brothers who founded the town of Decoto), instituted two suits under the red light abatement law. The abatement and suits were directed against two houses known as 10 and 15 Smith Street, Alvarado. Edward L. Farley was designated as the owner of both premises, while Ramona Aldena was the reputed keep of number 10 Smith Street, and Marie Valdez was the alleged keeper of the house at 15 Smith Street.

The abatement suite contended that the houses contain numerous musical instruments, which the court was asked to have sold to defray the cost of instituting the suits. The court was asked to close the houses for a period of one year as provided in the abatement law.

The attempt to close down "Little Tijuana" came to naught and the business in the district continued as usual for next few years.

Then in July 1925, violence erupted again in the as 24-year old Silviano Rocha was shot in his side in a quarrel over a dance hall girl. Rocha was found wounded in front of 11 "Little Tijuana Street" (Smith Street). Silviano was admitted to the county hospital, and two men and a woman were lodged in the county jail. Those in custody were Frederick Amador, 27, Fred Garcia, 22, and Marie Gonzales, 22.

Six months later one of the most bizarre incidents in "Little Tijuana" history took place on January 7, 1926. In approved "Wild & Woolly West" style, a dozen supposed bandits took the "Little Tijuana" boardwalk row by storm near midnight. With guns drawn they forced a crowd of nearly 50 American, Mexicans, and Chinese assembled in the dancehalls to stand with hands held high while they drank and caroused. When the authorities approached with sirens blaring the men made off in their autos towards Centerville and lost the police in a dense fog.



Within a week questions began to rise about the "supposed" bandits which held nearly 50 patrons and owners hostage for several hours in "Little Tijuana" on the 7th of January. Tony Points, and Alvarado farmer, accuses Deputy Constable Fred W. Wall as the perpetrator of the hoax that played out in Alvarado. Wall, protests his innocence and calls his arrest a "frame up."

It appeared that there were two factions at play here over the whole matter. One group, supporting Wall, declares that the "rescue party," who were reported to have routed the bandits terrorizing the Alvarado dance hall were themselves the "bandits" who created the original disturbance. The opposing faction maintains stoutly that the rescue party from Niles came in response to a call from Alvarado, and that they did, in fact, put to flight a gang of marauders who had invaded the ball and lined patrons against the wall at the points of revolvers.

Meanwhile, the raids on "Little Tijuana" continued when on the night of February 6, 1926, six persons, two of them minor girls, were arrested by operatives of the district attorneys and sheriffs offices during a raid on an alleged bootlegging establishment in "Little Tijuana". The four adults, Mack Gonzales, Francis Gonzales, Morris Gonzales, and Merced Delgado, were charged with possession of liquor. Additional charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor were placed against Mack Gonzales and Merced Delgado.

Alvarado's Little Tijuana was the site of a gun battle on March 15, 1926 with Theodore Garcia, 28, of Oxnard California who had allegedly kidnapped Mary George 16, of Puente Calif. A statewide chase began when Miss George's father, Peter George, a Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff, who along with his 22 year old son, Leo, trailed Peter Garcia and his daughter from Los Angeles to Alvarado, where he was reportedly holed up in one the shacks in town.

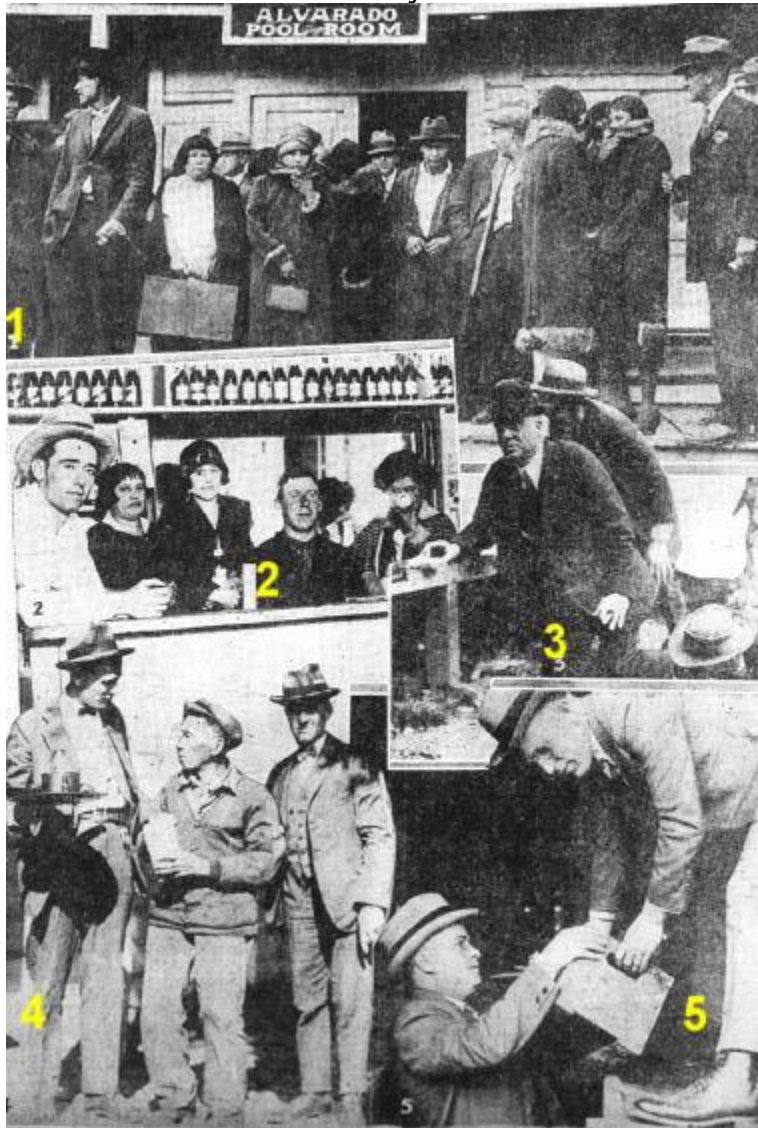
Peter George enlisted the aid of local Constable Jack Ramsell, who assembled a small posse. Mr. George located the house in which his daughter was supposed to be imprisoned. Shortly before daybreak the posse bore down on the resort.

After a short gun battle with a band of men there, the searchers discovered the girl cowering terrified in the high grass back of the row of resorts. A short time later Theodore Garcia was located in a neighboring shack. As the officers battered the barricaded door, Garcia escaped under the house by prying two boards loose from the floor.

The girl told her father and local authorities that Garcia had kept her under the influence of drugs and in fear for her life unless she did his bidding. Mary could not remember where she had been, but remembered being taken first across the Mexican border, and later to a house in Southern California where she was kept with five other girls, all kidnapped from their homes. George, and his son, took the girl home to Puente. The father announced his intention of bringing white slave charges against Garcia.

Violence flared anew on the night of March 25, 1926, when Ah Hing, 73, proprietor of a merchandise store in Alvarado was the victim of two Mexican thugs who stabbed him in the right side and nearly beat him to death. The Chinaman was asleep in the rear of the store when he was awakened by a noise and went to investigate. Two Mexicans wanted to enter and asked for a can of sardines. When their victim's back was turned they attacked him, he said. They robbed the store of about \$39 in cash.

Earl Warren's raid on "Little Tijuana" in Alvarado:



Above Photos:

The notorious vice center of the edge of Alvarado was given a surprise visit on March 31, 1926 by District Attorney Earl Warren and a force of deputy sheriffs, police, and federal immigration and prohibition officers. Above are scenes from the raid snapped by an Oakland Tribune cameraman during the raid. No. 1: A group of prisoners lining up to board the motorbus for Oakland. No. 2: Police inspector Walter Garrett poses behind the bar of one of the "soft drink parlors" with his prisoners and an onlooker. No.3: Deputy Sheriff Jack Collier about to go after a Mexican hiding under the boardwalk. No.4: Deputy County Detective Chester Flint with an opium smoking set, a Chinese prisoner and H.W. Taylor of the federal prohibition squad. No. 5: Police Inspector Eugene Murphy lifts a barrel of booze from a secret cellar to District Attorney Earl Warren. As a result of the raid, District Attorney Warren plans to push abatement proceedings under the red-light, prohibition and narcotic laws with a view to closing more than two score of resorts located across the street from the Alvarado Grammar School.

On March 31, 1926 District Attorney Earl Warren (yes, Earl Warren would go on to be Governor of California and Chief Justice of Supreme Court and headed the famous "Warren Commission Report" on the assassination of JFK) with the aid of the deputy sheriffs, Oakland Police and Federal Immigration authorities, raided and took 10 women and 13 men to jail this morning to await legal proceedings expected to deport some of them and deprive the others of further chance to contribute to the hollow gaiety of "Little Tijuana."

After the raid a dreary stillness hung over "Little Tijuana" at Alvarado following the first dark and dreary evening in 18 months last night.

"Abatement proceedings against a score of resorts which hide behind the stretch of fence across the street from the Alvarado Grammar School and within a stone's throw of the new St. Anne's Catholic Church will be started at once," District Attorney Warren announced today.

"We are going to close up this hell hole once and for all," said Warren, "I was amazed by the brazen iniquity of the 'line' dope dens, gambling joints, and soft 'drink' parlors."

Convinced that the last flame of Alvarado's "Little Tijuana" has flickered and died, five families stole a march on District Attorney's threatened "padlock" proceedings by packing up over the weekend and abandoning their shack abodes in the night. Warren said that abatement suits would be filed within 24 hours. With residents of the notorious settlement rapidly diminishing as a result of a raid by the combined county, state, and federal authorities last Wednesday, the moving of three Mexican families and two Chinese was believed by Alvarado businessmen, to be the "straw that broke the camel's back." That the entire "line" of dives would be vacated within the next ten days was the consensus of opinion.

Saturday and Sunday (April 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926) nights were the quietest Alvarado has witnessed in the last eighteen months, residents said. Where a total of 10 to 50 automobiles lined up along the board walk over the past weekends while owners and guests made merry, resort owners this weekend refused to permit a single patron to trudge over the wooden walk leading to the 26 establishments. Though a powerful spotlight shone on "Little Tijuana" as on other nights, the settlement might well have been "padlocked" for the amount of business transacted, the Mexican and Chinese proprietors asserted. Many operators have made known their intention of vacating the premises before April 15, 1926 when the next rents are due.

On April 6, 1926 *The Hayward Review* wrote:

"Little Tijuana" is a city of desolation these days. No lights are shining a welcome to the weary traveler or the idling stay-at-home. Not even a Chinese lantern glitters through a curtained window, and no elevated lights guide the feet of the stranger through the haunting mysterious way of the modern Sodom.

There's no one to put a nickel in the piano, or a even a piano to put it in, for they are locked up and deserted, says the *Niles Register* whose Editor went around to take a look. There's no one to be seen on the street, and peace, quiet and solemnity pervade the atmosphere.

For the first time in eighteen months there is "nothing doing" in that section of Alvarado, which has been famed far and wide for bootlegging, narcotics, gambling, and various vice resorts.

Wednesday afternoon twenty-three establishments in the town suddenly found themselves surrounded by a veritable army of immigration officials, prohibition officials, Oakland Police, county detectives, newspaper correspondents, photographers, and what have you. There were a few shouts, a shot or two, and ten women and thirty men found themselves in custody.

District Attorney Earl Warren led the posse, which proceeded to confiscate quantities of marijuana, opium, jackass, Chinese Liquors, and gambling paraphernalia. The raid was executed quickly and thoroughly, with little opposition being encountered, though in several instances doors had to be battered down.

The raids climaxed a long series of investigations, it is said. The raiders met by plan at Mt. Eden where ten automobile loads of them swarmed into Alvarado, and quickly surrounded the Chinese quarter."

The move by District Attorney Earl G. Warren, was met with unanimous approval, as witnessed by the Irvington Chamber of Commerce's action, which at a previous meeting had protested the proposed sending of a communication to District Attorney Earl Warren; they commended him for initiating his recent vice crusade on "Little Tijuana," Alvarado's foreign settlement. The chamber adopted a resolution by a majority vote Monday evening thanking the county official for his action. The matter was brought before the organization in a communication issued by the Alvarado Chamber of Commerce and signed by H.M. Springer, Secretary.

District Attorney Earl Warren moved quickly to rid Alameda County of the denizens of the Alvarado resorts with deportation proceedings started against six aliens, and abatement suits filed against owners and operators of 23 establishments. District Attorney Earl Warren then declared that material steps were taken towards the closing of the "Little Tijuana" alleged vice resorts at Alvarado.

In May of 1926, in a move praising the work of the United States Immigration Service inspectors in this section, District Attorney Earl Warren endorsed two congressional bills providing for the promotion and increased salaries for the men that assisted him in recent raids. Warren's endorsement followed the work of E.C. Donson and R.F. Davis, who aided county officers in a recent raid on "Little Tijuana" at Alvarado in which 23 places were closed and a score of persons arrested.

Efforts to permanently dim the once bright lights at Alvarado's "Little Tijuana" were made on October 11, 1926, when the case against Edward L. Farley, as owner of "Little Tijuana," a group of 25 buildings at Alvarado, were aired before Judge James A. Quinn. The state, represented by District Attorney Earl Warren sought to close "Little Tijuana" for one year under abatement proceedings.

Trial of two abatement proceedings against Alvarado's "Little Tijuana" opened October 18, 1926, in Judge James G. Quinn's court with spectators benches crowded with women, public welfare workers, and neighbors of the district subpoenaed to testify concerning the general reputation of the boardwalk establishments where

gambling, drinking and sale of contraband liquor, and narcotics were alleged to have been a constant source of revenue.

Twenty owners of the rickety pool rooms and dance halls, and Edward L. Farley, owner of the land on which they are built, were the defendants in the two suits. Since the passing of the narcotics abatement law at the last legislative session, this was the first instance of prosecution asking abatement for that cause in Alameda County and in the State.

The two suits designated as "The United States versus Edward Farley and others" and "The People versus Edward Farley and others," resulted from a raid of "Little Tijuana" last March, when twenty-six wooden houses, connected by alleys, runways and underground tunnels, were entered by federal and county officials and wholesale arrests made.

Mrs. August May, sister of former District Attorney Ezra Decoto, was among the character witnesses summoned to testify concerning the activities of the notorious "board walk row."

One lady vigorously fought the abatement proceedings. While the state prosecutors and welfare workers joined forces in their fight to have the block of "Little Tijuana" resorts at Alvarado padlocked, Mrs. Wo Lee, an aged Chinese woman, and a veteran resident of the district, raised her voice in a wall of Oriental-tongued protest against being ousted from the place.

Mrs. Lee is 80 years old, and for forty-two years she has lived in Alvarado, watching the inhabitants come and go, get married and die. It was a Chinese settlement entirely when she first came, but in recent years the Mexican element has grown stronger, leading to the nickname "Little Tijuana." It is the Mexicans, Mrs. Lee blamed for the present trouble. She operated a small Chinese merchandise store in the section and insisted that she has never done anything in violation of the law. If she is put out of her old home she will have no other place to go she says. There are now nine Chinese farmers living in the quarter, and all face difficulty if evicted, she says.

District Attorney Ezra Decoto Jr. and the people of Alameda County and the State of California proved their case in a court of law. The abatement proceeding against the buildings in "Little Tijuana" on a ruling handed down on November 26, 1926.

Twenty-seven rickety wooden houses in Alvarado's "Little Tijuana Row" will have padlocks on their doors, following the court order today of Judge James G. Quinn commanding abatement of the entire district. The order ends a ten-month fight by District attorney Earl G. Warren to close the places.

Conviction on violating red-light laws and the liquor regulations was made in the cases of all 27 houses. In five of them convictions for violating narcotics laws were made. The closure of these places marks the first instance in the State in which abatement has been ordered on the basis of the narcotic enforcement law passed at the last session of the State legislature.

Fines or small jail sentences were handed out to the 28 persons arrested in the March raids. Most of these were Chinese or Mexicans.

Suits were brought against Ed Farley, owner of most of the property on which the wooden structures were constructed. William and Joseph Avilla, owners of two pieces of property, "and others." Narrow passageways, some of them underground, connected the structures it is said.

Old habits apparently die hard as T. Kanaka, a Japanese was arrested in a raid near "Little Tijuana." More than 155 gallons of sake, an intoxicating Japanese drink made from rice, which was been sold in "Little Tijuana," was shut off as the result of a raid staged on the night of January 12, 1927, by county officers.

One January 25, 1927, twenty-seven padlocks "hanging in a row" marked the last chapter of "Little Tijuana" of Alvarado. Above each padlock was a printed notice that the building has been officially closed on the order of District Attorney Earl Warren.

On July 3, 1927, in a classic blaze Alvarado's "Little Tijuana" burned to the ground.

As reported by the Newark Fire Department:

"The Newark Fire Department members, seeing the blaze on Sunday evening, rushed to the fire thinking that it was close by, as no alarm had been sent in. They kept following the blaze and were surprised when they arrived at Alvarado to find that "Little Tijuana" had partly burned down. Decoto, Niles, Centerville and Ed Rose's private fire equipment and the Newark Fire Department put the blaze out in a short time. Fifteen building were burned and two are left, one is badly damaged."

Little Tijuana, known for years as the toughest place in Alameda County, was no more. It was destroyed in one of the most spectacular blazes in this part of California, with five Fire Departments fighting the flames. Only by prompt and efficient efforts, did fireman prevent the fire from spreading to an adjoining lumberyard, and for a time the entire Alvarado community was threatened.

The fire is believed to have been started by a group of hoboes who camped in one of the buildings last night. The entire two blocks of buildings comprising that notorious district had been padlocked several months ago, so that aside from hoboes they were unoccupied. The frame shacks proved to be kindling wood, and within a short time they began eating toward the Catholic Church and the Alvarado School across the street.

Little Tijuana obtained its name from the Mexican city where vice was given a free reign. This district consisted of two blocks of shacks in Alvarado, where the prohibition law was openly flouted, the scene of kidnappings, and holdups, and the refuge of lawbreakers. Violation of the law became so flagrant that authorities finally stepped in and padlocked the entire district, at the same time starting abatement proceeding against all of the buildings.

Two positive aspects of the fire were the complete destruction of "Little Tijuana" and the quickening of the pace to organize a Fire Department. Organization of a volunteer Fire Department was already under way in Alvarado, with the purchase of new fire fighting equipment but just a few weeks before the blaze. This caused the Alvarado Fire Commissioners to name officers of the department earlier than they had expected.

The officers of the volunteer Fire department were announced by O. J. Emery, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners were: John H. Ralph, Chief; Jack Boyd, Captain; and Harry Shingler, Tony Santos and W. H. Costa, Lieutenants. The officers of the department were to recruit a force of 12 firemen and regular drills will begin in the near future.

Even years afterward, the Sheriff's Office feared the rise of another "Little Tijuana" in Alvarado. On November 7, 1927, acting on a tip that "Little Tijuana" was reopening in Alvarado, the Sheriff's Department then blanketed Alvarado, which netted some vagrants, some persons with liquor on them, and some illegal aliens. But the town was relatively quiet.

Even as late as September 1929, a small bootlegging operation brought the following article about the notorious "Little Tijuana" of Alvarado:

"Little Tijuana," capable small brother of that brilliant spot across the border, has again flared into activity after a long period of suppression and is causing county officials to cast speculative glances in the general direction of Alvarado. This is the declaration of the operatives of the district attorney's office who have just made liquor raids in the miniature "Tijuana" and who assess that a restless stirring in the sportive circles there is evidence of an eruption unless curbed quickly.

The most recent raid netted Frank Gama, 30, operating a hotel with which a boot legging operation was combined. He pleaded guilty to possession and sentenced to 250 days in the county jail.

Operation of the Alvarado sugar mill and employment of many men in the orchards and fields of this district are responsible for growing activity in "Little Tijuana," according to sheriff's deputies."

"Little Tijuana" never again reared its ugly head, except in the telling of the days of yore, when that part of Alvarado was open to all sorts of vice. To be fair to "Little Tijuana" however, when it came to bootlegging, the little enclave did not have a corner on the market, as bootlegging was to be found around all the towns of the East Bay and was not limited to Orientals or Mexicans. Even after the demise of "Little Tijuana" bootleggers continued to sell prohibited alcohol to general populace.

~~~~~

Written By:  
Anthony L. Gualco  
Alvarado Grammar School  
Class of 1955

January 29, 2012  
veasystreet@aol.com

## **B I B L I O G R A P H Y**

### **"The End of Little Tijuana"**

#### **BOOKS:**

*Washington Township, A Pictorial History*

By: Carrie Carruthers, Published by: The Washington Hospital  
Healthcare Foundation, 2000

*Past & Present of Alameda County, California*

By: Joseph E. Baker, 1914

#### **INTERNET:**

U.S. Census: 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920 & 1930

[www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

Transcribed by Anthony L. Gualco

#### **NEWSPAPERS:**

*The Oakland Tribune, Oakland CA*

*The Hayward Daily Review, Hayward CA*

#### **OTHER:**

1925 Sanborn Fire Maps