

2 ABOUT CALISTOGA

This chapter provides a brief introduction to Calistoga. Additional background information is contained in each of the Plan Elements in Chapters 3 through 13.

A. Physical Setting

Calistoga is located in the northern part of the Napa Valley, which is framed on its east and west sides, respectively, by the Howell and Mayacamas Mountain ridges. The Napa River and its tributaries drain the Napa Valley, and Calistoga lies in the uppermost portion of the valley. The Napa River flows southward through Calistoga and gradually widens as it flows through the Valley and eventually into San Pablo Bay.

The area within city limits covers approximately 2.5 square miles. Most of the land within city limits is located on the Napa Valley floor, which is punctuated by small hills, including Mount Washington and Mount Lincoln. The western city limits extend into the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains, and the eastern edge abuts the dramatic Palisades, which lie at the foot of nearby Mount St. Helena. The Planning Area is approximately four times as large as the city itself and includes higher terrain, extending almost to the mountain ridgelines.

In addition to the dramatic visual setting provided by nearby hills and mountain ridges, local geology provides Calistoga with unique geothermal resources including its famed hot-springs. Local volcanic and alluvial soils also combine to provide the basis of the city's abundant and longstanding agricultural tradition.

B. Climate

The climate in Calistoga and the Napa Valley is warmer than that in the rest of the Bay Area. Nevertheless, in summer, Calistoga and the rest of the Napa Valley are protected from the hot weather of the Central Valley of California by the coastal mountain ranges. The Pacific Ocean provides a source of cool, moist air in the summer, and this steady flow of marine air holds temperatures at a moderate level. The greatest variation in temperature occurs in summer. In Calistoga, average high summer temperatures are in the upper 80's to the mid 90's. Winters are generally mild, but there are occasional cold spells. Average high winter temperatures are in the high 50's to low 60's, while the minimum temperatures are in the upper 20's and 30's. Frost is common during clear, calm mornings in the late fall and winter.

The growing season, which is the period between the last freezing temperature event in spring and the first in fall, ranges from 215 to 260 days in Calistoga. Most of the annual precipitation falls during the period of November through April. The greatest amount of rainfall in one hour is expected to range from 0.9 inch in one hour once in two years to 2.1 inches in one hour once in 100 years.

Calistoga and the rest of Napa County receive about 50 percent of the total possible sunshine in winter and about 80 percent in summer. Most of the cloudiness in winter is associated with storms that move inland from the Pacific Ocean. The cloud patterns of these storms are nearly the same in all parts of the county. In summer the cloud patterns are more localized, with clouds moving inland over the Napa Valley late in the afternoon and then dissipating by late morning.

C. History

Calistoga has had a rich history from the times of the Native Americans through its early settlement as an agricultural and resort community.

Native American and Spanish Colonial Eras

Calistoga and the rest of the Napa Valley are endowed with natural beauty, fertile soil, a river fed by numerous streams, abundant vegetation, and plentiful fish and game. Hence the valley supported one of the largest concentrations of Native Americans in the Bay Area for many centuries. Early estimates by Europeans placed the native population at 3,000 to 6,000. Native Americans from other areas also visited the valley to bathe in the hot springs and trade for obsidian.

Under Spanish colonization during the period from the 1770's to the 1820's, the Napa Valley came under the jurisdiction of Mission San Francisco Solano, which was founded in 1823 in what is now the City of Sonoma. Following Mexico's independence in the 1820's, the Mexican government pursued a policy of secularizing the California missions and disposing of their property. In the 1830's and 1840's, much of the Napa Valley was partitioned into private ranchos covering thousands of acres.

The northern end of the valley, including present-day St. Helena and Calistoga, fell within the boundaries of Rancho Carne Humana. Covering nearly 18,000 acres, the rancho was granted in 1841 to Dr. Edward Turner Bale, an English physician who married into the family of General Vallejo. Bale established a grist mill to grind corn and wheat several miles south of present-day Calistoga.

Early American Settlement

Bale and other English-speaking landowners in the Napa Valley encouraged settlement by Americans to counter the power of the provincial Mexican government. The first wave of American settlers began arriving in the valley on overland wagon trains in the mid-1840's. The first American to settle in the area that became Calistoga was John T. York, who erected a house of redwood near the intersection of present-day Foothill Boulevard and Kortum Canyon Road in 1845. Other settlers began establishing farms and ranches on the surrounding valley lands.

Samuel Brannan and Calistoga Hot Springs

Samuel Brannan (1819-1889) was the leader of a Mormon expedition that arrived in California by ship in 1846 seeking new land to colonize. Brannan became a central figure in early California history. He established San Francisco's first newspaper, played a leading role in publicizing the Gold Rush, and made himself rich through shrewd business ventures. A street in San Francisco bears his name.

Between 1859 and 1863, Brannan acquired more than 2,000 acres at the north end of Napa Valley, comprising much of present-day Calistoga. Included in Brannan's land holdings were the area's famous hot springs, which Brannan intended to develop as a spa rivaling New York's elite Saratoga resort. He coined the evocative name "Calistoga" to mean the "Saratoga of California."

Brannan's Calistoga Hot Springs opened in 1862. Covering about 100 acres, the landscaped grounds were contained within an octagonal plat encompassing Mt. Lincoln.¹ The facilities included a grand hotel, bathhouses, and 25 guest cottages. An oval race track with stables adjoined the grounds. Brannan was also one of the principal promoters of the Napa Valley Railroad, which began service to Calistoga in 1868. The rail line extended south to Soscol, providing connections to San Francisco via bay steamers.

Brannan suffered business reversals in the 1870's, and all of his Napa Valley property, including the Calistoga Hot Springs resort, was sold at public auction in 1875. The resort, much rebuilt, has remained in business up to the present. It has operated under various names over the years, and is now known as Indian Springs. Since the founding of Brannan's Calistoga Hot Springs Resort, many other spas have been opened in the city.

The City of Calistoga

In the 1860's, Brannan subdivided blocks of land to the west of his resort. Lincoln Avenue, which connected the resort to the main road (today's Foothill Boulevard), began developing as a business district in 1866, when the first store was built. Residential lots were laid out along Washington Street and in twenty blocks west of the river. Brannan gave away many lots to prospective settlers and merchants, thereby encouraging the town's growth.

The railroad also stimulated the area's tourism and agriculture economies, bringing many new residents to the area. Between 1869 and 1875, the first churches and fraternal societies were established, the first newspaper was founded, and the first public school was started. Houses and commercial buildings began to fill in the landscape. Calistoga was first incorporated as a Town in 1876, and then was reincorporated and designated as a City in 1886.

Calistoga enjoyed modest prosperity over the following decades which was sustained by the area's tourism and agriculture economies. Prior to World War II, the population remained less than 1,000, and did not exceed 2,000 until the 1970's. During that decade, the city's population doubled, and by the turn of the 21st century grew to over 5,000.

D. Demographic Information

According to the 2000 US Census, Calistoga's population is 5,190. This is quite similar to the Association of Bay Area Government's (ABAG) calculations, which are used in regional planning efforts and for the analysis required in the Housing Element. ABAG calculated that the city had 5,100 inhabitants in 2000.

¹ A plat is a map showing actual or planned features such as streets or subdivisions. It is the predecessor to the modern subdivision map.

Calistoga is a population that reflects the ethnic diversity of Napa County and the wider region. As shown in Figure AC-1, almost 45 percent of the city’s population is non-white, with the majority of this group being Latino.

Figure AC-2 shows a breakdown of Calistoga’s population by age group. The median age in Calistoga is 38.1 years. Calistoga has a relatively large number of residents over the age of 85 (4%), and almost 30% of the city’s population is over the age of 55. These statistics reflect Calistoga’s popularity as a retirement location.

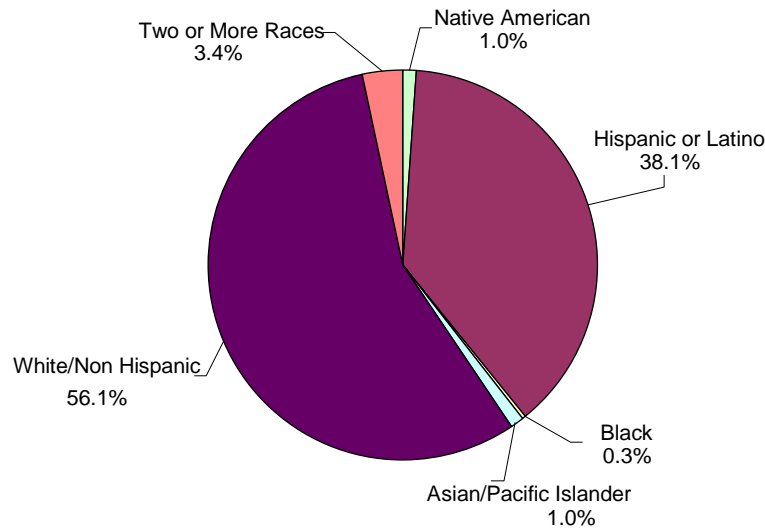


FIGURE AC-1 CALISTOGA POPULATION BY RACE, 2000

Source: United States Census, Census 2000

Note: Total population = 5,190

Percentages assume that all Hispanic respondents identified themselves as either “white” or “other,” and that all respondents identifying themselves as “other” were Hispanic

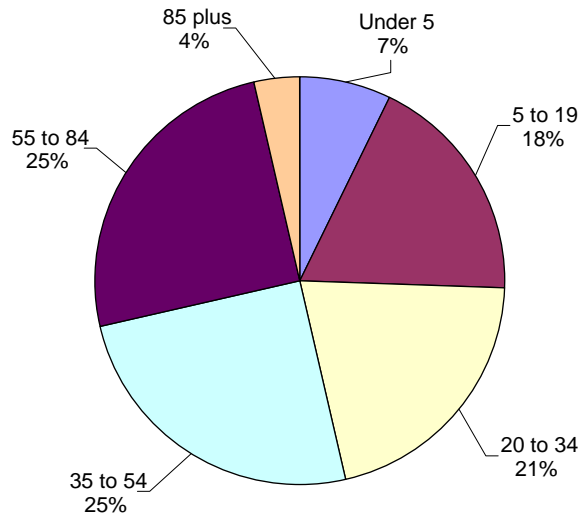


FIGURE AC-2 CALISTOGA POPULATION BY AGE, 2000

Source: United States Census, Census 2000