

Lake Elsinore Valley

How the lake was formed

Our lake was formed by faults in the Elsinore Fault Zone that filled with water from the San Jacinto River. It is the largest natural lake in Southern California. Numerous hot springs exist in the region. Lake Elsinore is a natural aquatic environment that supports abundant life. The healing qualities of the hot springs brought many to the valley.

Early Settlers

The Payómkawichum or Luiseño are indigenous people who migrated from the Great Basin and lived along the Pacific Coast as well as in the inland hills and valleys. Those that stayed near Laguna Grande, (a name given our lake by the Spanish), lived in a village they called Páayaxchi. Spain controlled this area between 1521 and 1821. From 1810 to 1821, the Mexican War of Independence freed Mexico from Spanish rule and the area became part of what was called Alta California.

In 1844, a Mexican land grant was awarded to Julian Manriquez for 13,340 acres which included the lake. He named this area Rancho La Laguna. He built his home on the north end of the west side of the lake near what is now Grand and Macy. In 1851 Abel Stearns acquired Rancho La Laguna, and, in 1858, sold it to Augustin Machado, owner of Rancho Santa Rosa. Machado built an adobe ranch house near the Manriquez adobe. In 1865, Augustin died. He left the rancho to his wife and 13 children. The family maintained the land until they sold it to Charles A. Sumner in 1873. Juan Machado, son of Augustin, chose to keep his portion of 500 acres and built his adobe near Grand and Riverside Drive. In 1884, Juan sold his ranch to G.S. Irish and retired to his cabin in the hills. Over the next 80 years, additions and renovations were made. It served as a ranch and as a private residence through the 1960's. Falling into disrepair, it was removed in 2021. There are plans to mark this area to honor the history of that location.

Overland Mail Company

In 1857, John Butterfield and his Overland Mail Company was awarded the contract to carry the U.S. Mail from St. Louis, Missouri to San Francisco, a distance of 2700 miles. The first eastbound stage from San Francisco stopped at the Laguna Grande Station House in 1858 which was the old Manriquez adobe. This became a regular swing stop for the company. It is said this first trip took 23 days. The Overland Mail Company closed in 1861 due to the Civil War.

Overland Mail Company (Continued)

The station house was eventually used as a post office for the small settlement of Willard from 1898 until 1902, when the city of Elsinore took over the mail service. The building was razed in 1964.

Founders of Lake Elsinore

In 1883, Franklin Heald, William Collier, and Donald Graham purchased Rancho La Laguna for \$24,000 from the Sumner brothers. With Margaret Collier Graham, they established the town site and began selling lots. Ms. Graham gave the town its name as it reminded her of the Danish town of Elsinore in Shakespeare's play "Hamlet".

The Early Days

Elsinore became an official link in the transcontinental railroad in 1885. The original station had been located near Mission Trail off Railroad Canyon Road. However, that route was often washed out. The new station was built by the Santa Fe Railway Company in 1896 and now is home to the Lake Elsinore Chamber of Commerce.

The city was incorporated in April 1888. Elsinore gained prominence as people learned of the curative hot springs in the area. The Crescent Bath House was built where the first artesian well was located. It produced water as hot as 126 degrees. Other bath houses followed, and Elsinore grew. The Crescent Bath House was designated a historical landmark in 1976. Over the next several decades, Elsinore continued to attract many visitors due to its enchanting beauty and natural recreational amenities.

Present Day Lake Elsinore

In 1972, residents voted to change Elsinore's name to Lake Elsinore. The population skyrocketed in the 1980's, According to the 2020 Census, Lake Elsinore had the fastest growing population over the prior decade of any California City and the fourth fastest in the Nation. We are looking forward to what the next decade will bring.

Lake Elsinore Historical Society

The Lake Elsinore Historical Society was created on March 5, 1996, by Madonna Morin and dedicated to preserving the rich history of the Elsinore Valley and encourage public interest in our history. To this end, the Society established a museum to display artifacts that span over 300 years. A visitor will be able to enjoy exhibits of from the Elsinore Naval and Military Academy, rare photographs of the area, sports memorabilia, antique household items, early farm tools, and a glimpse of inside Aimee's Castle.



Lake
Elsinore
Historical
Society

Historic Downtown Walking Tour

Museum

183 North Main Street
(Entrance on Heald Street Side)
Lake Elsinore, CA 92530

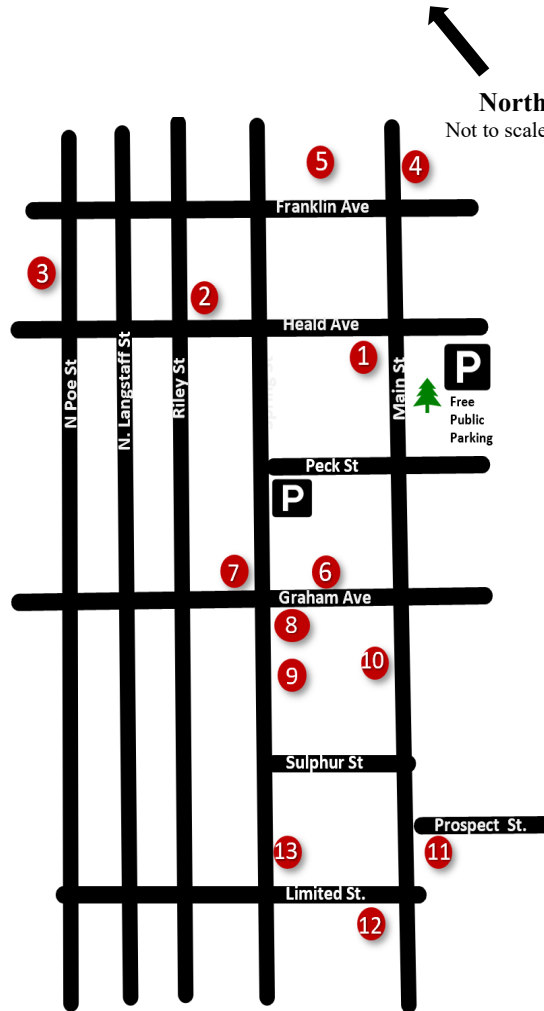
Museum Hours

Wednesdays and Saturdays
11 am – 3 pm
Sunday
1 pm – 4 pm



Downtown Walking Tour

Historic Walking Tour



1. **Cultural Center** – 183 N. Main St. - In 1923, the Cultural Center was built by the Methodist Church. Sold to the city in the 1990's, it is the official meeting place for all city meetings and community events and houses the History Museum
2. **Mary McDonald Gazebo** - West Heald Ave. & Riley St. A historic landmark, Mary McDonald financed and donated this gazebo to the city in 1931.
3. **The First Christian Church** - 503 W. Heald Built in 1887, it is one of the earliest churches in the city. Wyatt Earp and his brother, Colton, were said to be present on the day this church was dedicated.
4. **GAR Building** – 252 N. Main St. Also known as Armory Hall, this building was built in 1887 to serve the **Grand Army of the Republic**, a fraternal organization of Union Army, Navy and Marine veterans of the Civil War.
5. **The Creswell Bath House** – 115 W. Franklin St. Built in 1917 by Captain Creswell. The bath house served over 20,000 individuals between 1917-1920 when it was sold to Alfred Johnson and Matilda Hall. They owned and operated it until 1940 when it was again sold. This time to the Nakai family.
6. **The Wreck** – 117 W. Graham Ave. Originally, a recreation center which served business luncheons. Its name was shortened to “Rec” which was later changed to The Wreck. The mural over the entrance was painted by local muralist Robin Golden. If you look closely, you will see Ruth Atkins, past LEHS president, standing with the Honda Elsinore Motorcycle named for Lake Elsinore’s Grand Prix.
7. **The Crescent Bath House** (aka The Chimes) - 201 W. Graham Ave. Franklin Heald commissioned Frank Ferris to design and build this health spa in 1887. The Crescent Bath House served visitors to the Lakeview Hotel, which had been located on Spring and Limited St. before it burned down. The original rock wall that surrounded the hotel is still there. The Crescent is currently privately owned.

8. **Santa Fe Depot** – 132 W. Graham Avenue
 The Depot was built in 1896. Currently the home of the Lake Elsinore Valley Chamber of Commerce. The Depot was said to be the heartbeat of the town. Farmers and ranchers would bring produce and cattle to be loaded onto freight trains. These trains also dropped off needed supplies and other goods for the area.

9. **Tank House** – behind the Santa Fe Station
 This building was moved to this parking lot in 2012 from the lake side of Lake Shore Drive and Line St. The original Tank House was a single-story structure built in the 1880's to house equipment that pumped water from hot springs to a local health spa. Interestingly, in the 1930's another story was built but was placed on the first floor and the first floor was moved to the second floor.
10. **Elsinore Theater** – 117 S. Main St.
 This 2-story building with its unique white façade opened in March 1924. In the 1950's, the owners built a bigger, more modern theater on Graham Street where the Lake Community Center is now. The original building was gutted by fire in 1961 and was rebuilt as an office complex. However, the front exterior was preserved except for the top triangular section.
11. **Ambassador Hotel** – 164 S. Main St.
 Originally built as a bank in 1887, Franklin Heald served as president. Called the Exchange Bank of Elsinore until it merged with the Bank of Elsinore in 1890 and became the Consolidated Exchange Bank of Elsinore. In 1947, the building was renovated and made into a hotel. Two stories were added. It operated as a hotel and restaurant for several decades before closing in the 1970's.
12. **City Park** – 125 Library St.
 Seven parcels of land were deeded in 1906 to the City provided the land was used as a city park only. In the 1880's, the land was used to temporarily house railway construction workers. The rock wall around the park was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the fall of 1938.
13. **Jewish Synagogue** – Across from City Park is a vacant lot with a white brick archway. This is all that remains of the Jewish synagogue that burned down in the early 1980's.