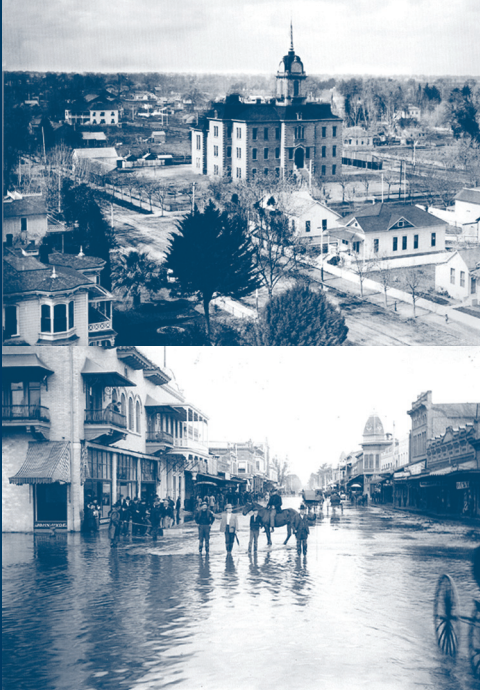


# Historic Visalia

WALKING TRAIL



# Historic Visalia Walking Trail

## 1 *First Church*

The Methodist Episcopal Church South was organized in 1852 as soon as the settlers arrived. It was not until 1857 that James Persian, prominent member and donor, undertook the task of providing a permanent meeting place for the congregation. A small brick church was constructed. Other denominations shared the use of the church.

The first pastor was Reverend E.B. Lockley, and according to history, there were 15 people in the congregation.

After a flood in the 1860's caused damage to the brick church, it was condemned, and used as a warehouse. Members met in their homes or at the school until 1872 when a new church was built at School and Court Streets.

## 2 *Early Hotel*

The Visalia House, a brick hotel, was built in 1859 by Dr. Will Davenport, who leased it to two men named Warner and Strong. The Visalia House was described as having a dining room on the first floor and large open sleeping quarters on the second floor. The patrons had their own "turkeys," or blankets, according to historians, and the absence of bedsteads and furniture made no difference to them. Later, the second floor was modernized and individual sleeping rooms provided.

At the beginning of the Civil War, the Equal Rights Expositor, a violently anti-Union paper, was published from an office on the second

floor of the Visalia House. The publication was referred to as the "Secesh" paper since its editor was in favor of secession. Dr. Davenport, a rabid Union supporter, fearing violence might occur, ordered the publisher to vacate his building.

In 1863, at its new location, the plant of the Expositor was wrecked by an unidentified mob.

In 1879, L.A. Johnson bought the building. The Visalia House was razed in 1916, and was replaced by the Hotel Johnson, which burned in 1968 and was replaced by a modern structure.



## 3 *Butterfield Stage Station*

Visalia's first real contact with the outside world was on October 8, 1858, when the first Butterfield stage, straining to make a record run with the U.S. mail from St. Louis to San Francisco, arrived in town. Its only passenger was W. L. Ormsby, special correspondent for the New York Herald, who wrote a diary later published in the Herald.

It was written in his diary: "The next town of importance is Visalia, which is 47 miles from White River and about 100 from Tejon, and the first town from Tejon. There are a few adobe houses, and the population is about 500. The place is situated in an oak grove, sometimes called the Four Creeks, which seldom have much water. There are a number of New Yorkers in the town, and I took a glass of lager, which made me feel quite at home."



"Though it was nearly midnight when we arrived, the news spread rapidly and we soon had a cordial greeting. Before we left they gave us the anvil salute, which was quite new to me. The powder is placed in a hole in one anvil, and a train laid to the edge. A card is then placed over the hole, and another anvil on top of that. The reports were quite as heavy as those of an eight-pounder.

"This was the first evidence of any enthusiasm along the route since we left Fort Smith, and the rousing cheers they gave us as we drove off at 11:50 p.m. on Friday, the 8th of October, ought to be remembered in the history of the town, so I here immortalize them."

It is believed that the stage station was housed in a hotel known both as the Exchange House and the Overland Hotel. The horses used were stabled and corralled in an area across the main street, south of the hotel.



*Red brick courthouse built in 1857*

## 4 First Newspaper & Courthouse

A statement by I.W. Carpenter, "Proprietor," of Visalia's first newspaper, the Tulare County Record and Fresno Examiner, in its first issue, June 25, 1859, explained its policies:

"A journal for the people; devoted to news, miscellany, agriculture, and to the local interests of Tulare and Fresno Counties. The organ of no party-independent on all subjects. Published every Saturday, at Visalia, Tulare County, California (Overland Mail route from St. Louis



*Courthouse built in 1876*

to San Francisco). Office-front basement of the courthouse.

"Terms of the paper: for one year, \$5; six months, \$3; three months, \$2; single copies, 25¢. Persons subscribing for two copies (one for mailing to their friends in the Atlantic States) a deduction will be made."

Court business in Visalia was first conducted in a rented house, then in a temporary building. In 1857, a red brick courthouse was built at this location, with the upper story serving as a courtroom and community center, being "commodious enough to hold 1,000 people." The lower floor had six jail cells, and a gallows stood behind the courthouse. (The basement contained the local newspaper office.) The red brick courthouse was used until approximately 1876, when a neo-classical courthouse replaced it at the same location. This courthouse served until damage from the 1952 earthquake caused it to be torn down.

## 5 First House

In 1853, Samuel C. Brown built the first log residence outside the Fort Visalia stockade. On July 5, 1853, Mr. Brown was admitted to the bar at Woodville, and in August he acted in the capacity of district attorney for Tulare County's first official murder trial.

The first Brown residence was rebuilt and remodeled several times and became a mansion and noted Visalia social center. In its rooms and gardens were entertained the area's elite.

## 6 Little White Schoolhouse

Visalia's first school was known as the "Little White Schoolhouse" and was constructed in May, 1857. In 1872, this building was replaced by a two-story wooden school, and it was during the dedication of this second school building that Jim McCrory, a man who had shot his best friend, was hung by the citizens from the Court Street bridge above Mill Creek. Parents and children, returning from the dedication ceremonies, passed by the body.

Later, a third school, the Tipton Lindsey grammar school, was built on this same site. It continued to serve until 1920 when it was razed to provide space for a city park.



*Tipton Lindsey Grammar School*

## 7 Fort Visalia

In the Fall of 1852, a group of pioneers built a stockade on the north bank of Mill Creek, which came to be known as Fort Visalia.

A description of the fort is given by Ed Reynolds who helped build it: "The lumber for this stockade was obtained by cutting down mammoth oak trees which grew in profusion, splitting them in half, and setting them on end, side by side, in a trench three feet deep.

"The curved sides of the logs were turned to the outside and the earth tamped in around the bottom in such a manner as to make them secure against a battering ram.

"At each corner of the stockade an extension of four feet was built out, across and back. Indians attempting to scale the walls would be in the direct fire of riflemen stationed at these extensions.



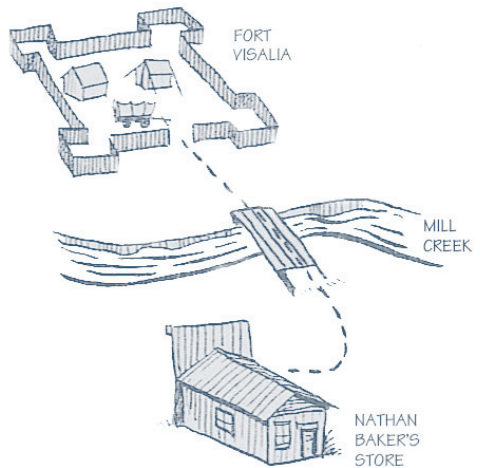
*Two-story wooden school built in 1872*

"This stockade was about 60 feet square and the tents of the party were pitched inside, and a tunnel dug underneath the wall, for admittance purposes. In this crude structure the first civilization was established, a dance floor was constructed from puncheon timbers and the settlers amused themselves in the evenings by dancing to the music of an old fiddle."

A bridge was constructed over Mill Creek south of the stockade and it was over this crossing that the first street in Visalia was later surveyed and designated Bridge street.

History relates that during the winter of 1852-53 these individuals lived in the stockade; Judge Cutler, Tom Baker, Samuel C. Brown, Calhoun Roberts, Early Lyons, a Mr. Russell, and Nathaniel Vise, for whom the town was named. Also there were Robert Stevenson, Abe Murray, Osee Mathews, Reuben Mathews, Warren Mathews, the Glens, and their families.

*(continued on back side)*



## 8 *First Grist Mill*

The first grist mill in the southern San Joaquin Valley was built in 1854 on this site by the Mathews brothers who spent the first winter in Fort Visalia. Water was diverted from Mill Creek to provide the needed power.

Indian labor was used in constructing the mill, and the Indians would accept only meat in payment of wages. Ed Reynolds, a nephew of the Mathews brothers, was employed for \$4.00 a day to undertake the dangerous mission of shooting elk in the Tulare Lake area.

Grist mills were essential for pioneers. Corn or wheat was ground for meal or flour, and rolled oats and bran were produced for cattle and poultry food. The 1860 census shows that the Mathews' mill was taking in 20,000 bushels of grain/corn a year. The mill was operated continuously on this site until 1967 when it burned, and was razed.

## 9 *First Store*

Visalia's first store was built on this site about 1854 by Nathan Baker. It was located across Mill Creek from Fort Visalia and served all of Tulare County which then encompassed almost the entire lower San Joaquin Valley.

The building next housed a restaurant, then another retail store, later a brewery, and finally became a saloon. This saloon was known as a "deadfall of the worst class." Here, a famous train robbery was conceived and planned. In the 1890's one of the proprietors of the saloon was sent to San Quentin for complicity in the robbery. The building was destroyed by fire in 1905.

## H *istorical Background*

Visalia is the county seat of Tulare County. Founded in 1852, it is the oldest town between Stockton and Los Angeles. It is located at an elevation of 300 feet above sea level. The Kaweah River enters the broad plain east of Visalia and divides into four branches, forming a delta which was known in the early days as the "Four Creeks" country. Visalia grew steadily in the decades which followed, spurred on by gold rushes, livestock, railroads, hydroelectrical power and irrigation water, which was good for agriculture. Population figures show how Visalia has grown through the years:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1860	548
1870	913
1880	1,412
1890	2,885
1900	3,085
1910	4,550
1920	5,753
1930	7,263
1940	8,904
1950	11,749
1960	15,791
1970	27,268
1980	49,729
1990	75,636
2000	91,565
2010	124,442

*This concludes the walking tour. Now relax and enjoy the ambiance of Visalia at the Garden Street Plaza, or take time for some shopping or refreshment at a nearby eating establishment. If time allows, visit some of the additional points of interest in this brochure.*



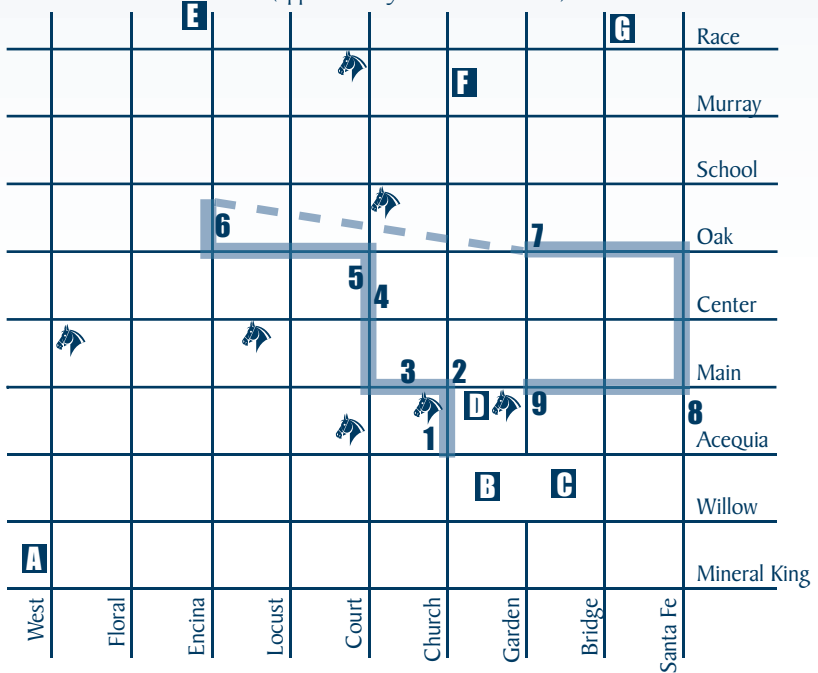
# How Visalia Got It's Name

**N**

athaniel Vise gave his name to Visalia. He was an eccentric fellow who opened a restaurant in San Francisco in 1852. He featured bear meat on the menu and advertised as "Nat Vise, alias The Bear Hunter." Just what he was doing in the Four Creeks area is a matter of conjecture, but he did vote in the organizational election of Tulare County on July 10, 1852. He was restless and did not stay in one location very long. At various times he was a preacher, horse trader and fur agent, and in Tulare County he was a land promoter. On November 1, 1852, Vise and Mr. O'Neal let it be known that they "had located and surveyed a new town called Visalia, in the finest part of the Four Creeks." Nat Vise originally came from Visalia, Kentucky, named for his family. He gave the same name to his new town. Vise did not stay in Visalia for long. He moved to southern California and worked for a fur company. In that job he traveled to the eastern states several times. In 1882, he was staying in Texarkana, Arkansas, when the town was hit by a tornado. He took refuge in a brick building which collapsed, killing those inside.

## Historic Visalia Trail Map

(approximately a 45-minute walk)



# Additional Points of Interest

## Horse Rings

Horses were the early means of transportation around downtown Visalia. When stopping to do business, a traveler would tie his reins to a horse ring. There are twelve known original horse rings from the late 1880's-early 1900's still located in the downtown area. They are marked on the map by a 🐾 symbol. See how many of them you can locate.

## A Mill Creek

To the early California settlers, this area was known as the "Four Creeks" country. Visalia was built around Mill Creek (one of the four creeks), which was a ready source of water, both for the Yokut Indians and the new settlers. Water from Mill Creek was used to create a mill race which powered the grist mill. In the early 1900's, Mill Creek was "planked over" so that the waterway flowed under the growing city. In the 1950's and 60's, there were discussions that the Mill Creek channel might be used as a bomb shelter. Mill Creek also channeled flood waters through town on a recurrent basis, until Terminus Dam was completed in 1962. Enjoy a stroll in this park-like setting, to view where modern-day Mill Creek reemerges from under ground, as well as native valley oak trees.

## B Brick Firehouse

In 1869 the Visalia Fire Department was organized. In 1872, D.R. Douglass (see Douglass tree) donated a lot on the southeast corner of Acequia and Church Streets for a firehouse, which was eventually used as city hall also. The cornerstone was laid October 7, 1872 at this location. In 1876 a second story was

added to the brick firehouse and the cornerstone was moved to the front of the second story. The two-story firehouse was torn down in 1909 to make way for a new city fire station/ city hall complex, and the cornerstone was placed in that building. Subsequently, the Visalia Convention Center was built at this location, and the original 1872 cornerstone was incorporated in it. (To locate the cornerstone, go to the main entrance of the Convention Center and look up and to your right.)

## C Douglass Tree

One of the first trees planted in Visalia was a eucalyptus tree, planted by David Douglass next to his home in 1860. In recent times, the Visalia Convention Center was built at this location and the eucalyptus tree stood within its courtyard until November 13, 1988, when it fell. Adjacent to where the tree once stood is the Vietnam War mural.

## D Visalia Saddle

Around the 1860's, the Mexican saddle makers of this area developed a new saddle for the working vaquero. In 1870, a saddle shop was opened at this location. It was known as the "Visalia Saddle Shop." The "Visalia Saddle" was produced and very successfully marketed from this location. The local newspaper in 1887 described the shop as "the largest of its kind with saddles, bridles, spurs, bits, harness here displayed and of the best kind. The saddles are everywhere, being shipped to all parts of the country." The Visalia Saddle is known throughout the world even today.

## E

### *Historical Homes*

Because Visalia is the oldest city in the San Joaquin Valley south of Stockton, it has many beautiful homes from the 1800's and early 1900's which still remain and reflect major architectural styles of that period. A few of these beautiful old homes and styles are found at this location.

## F

### *Father Dade's Academy Of The Nativity*

The Visalia Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the first Catholic parish in the lower San Joaquin Valley. On August 1, 1861, the following announcement appeared: "A new school under the title 'Academy of the Nativity' will commence next week, under the supervision of the Rev. Father Dade. The building was originally intended as a stable, hence the birthplace of our redeemer suggested the name to the Rev. Father." The following day, a second announcement was made: "This academy will be open for the registration of school Monday, August 26, in the commodious building at the northern boundary of the town, and will be under the personal supervision of the Rev. Father Dade." Father Dade left Visalia in 1872, and shortly thereafter the academy was closed.

## G

### *Camp Babbitt*

Three companies of union soldiers arrived in Visalia and were stationed at Camp Babbitt in the year 1862. California was important to the Union cause, because of its gold and livestock. Since the town was southern in sympathy, the troops were quartered here throughout the Civil War. These soldiers did not have to do any

fighting in the war, but they did keep order in the community. (See an additional Camp Babbitt monument around the corner at 539 North Santa Fe.)

## T

### *Thank You To Our Contributors*

Historian Terry Ommen  
Gubler, Koch, Degn & Gomez LLP  
Downtown Visalians and Alliance  
City of Visalia  
Tulare County Historical Society  
Judge Lloyd Hicks  
Vice Mayor Phil Cox  
Visalia Heritage Inc.  
Charter Oak Lions  
Visalia Host Lions  
Sequoia Kiwanis  
Soroptimist International of Visalia, Inc.  
Breakfast Rotary  
Kauvaka General Construction  
Ron Westbrook  
Kristi Patterson, Graphic Designer  
Dru Quesnoy  
Josten's Printing & Publishing  
Jim Barnes



*Eagle Scout project of  
Edmund W. Gubler, Jr., 2005*