

St. Isidore Catholic Church
Name of Property

Orange, California
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH and 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: WOOD POSTS ON CONCRETE FOOTINGS

Walls: STUCCO

Roof: TERRA COTTA and COMPOSITION SHINGLE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

St. Isidore Catholic Church, later known as part of St. Isidore Historical Plaza, is located in the small suburban city of Los Alamitos, in northwest Orange County adjacent to the border with Los Angeles County and about twenty miles east of the county seat of Santa Ana. St. Isidore Catholic Church, referred to as the chapel or simply St. Isidore, is the only contributing resource on the property. Noncontributing resources include one building that does not contribute to the property's significance; and one site, two structures, and one object, all four post-period of significance. The chapel sits at the southeast corner of the lot facing east towards Reagan Street, formerly Main Street. Reagan Street is a fully developed suburban side street primarily containing single family homes, as well as several charitable organizations and some office spaces. When St. Isidore was built in 1926, Main Street was the commercial and social center of a very small rural town, and the church was one of only two buildings developed on the street's southernmost block. St. Isidore is constructed in the Mission Revival style with a simple

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rectangular plan and wood-framed walls featuring an east-facing primary façade marked by a shaped parapet and bell-gable capped by a wooden cross. The building has a gabled terra cotta tile roof, walls finished with stucco and new paint/epoxy coatings applied in 2018, and ten steel-framed stained-glass windows installed to replace the original wood sash windows between late 1940 and early 1950. The existing building was constructed in 1933 after the original 1926 building suffered major earthquake damage. The rebuilt church is identical in style, plan, and materials to the 1926 building except for the decision to use wood-framing instead of brick for the north, south, and west walls. The interior contains a choir loft, two rows of pews arranged along a central aisle, and a raised platform altar. Between 1938 and 1952, a small wood-framed annex, with stucco clad exterior walls and a gabled roof covered by asphalt composite shingles, was built at the west elevation. The chapel retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Integrity of setting has been compromised by the transformation of the surrounding neighborhood from a rural to a suburban community and construction of noncontributing resources on the property, as well as the loss of the original church rectory and detached garage, which existed between approximately 1938 and 1972.

Narrative Description

The property is located at the corner of Reagan Street and Katella Boulevard in Los Alamitos. The 1,871 square foot chapel, with a 125-person capacity, sits at the southeast corner of the lot facing east towards Reagan Street, a quiet side street that used to be the commercial and social center of town. The chapel's south elevation sits alongside Katella Boulevard, a busy six-lane thoroughfare.

Contributing Resource

St. Isidore Catholic Church was built in the Mission Revival style by members of its parish in 1926. The double height, symmetrical building featured a simple rectangular plan and modest massing. Three brick walls, facing north, south, and west, were supported by engaged piers. The east wall faced out towards Main Street and featured a raised curvilinear parapet and bell-gable. The building had a pitched gable roof covered by barrel shaped terra cotta tiles, with projecting eaves, and a set of ten wood framed windows. Four operable sash windows hung with rope and weight hardware were installed at ground level on both the north and south elevations. There were two smaller windows on the east elevation that corresponded with the height of the interior choir loft. Plaster or stucco coated the wood framed façade as well as the upper area of the three masonry walls between the roof line and the tops of the piers. No other buildings or structures were on the property at the time and there are no known records to indicate whether the grounds featured specific landscaping.

During the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, the unreinforced masonry walls collapsed along with the roof and the choir loft, leaving only the wood framed east elevation. Later that year, the parishioners rebuilt St. Isidore in the same Mission Revival style, this time using all wood frame construction. By 1938, the community had also constructed a small rectory and detached garage

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along the north side of St. Isidore. The rectory and garage were demolished in 1972 and to date, no photos of them have been found.

While the east elevation is the only material part of the chapel that dates to 1926, the building's location, massing, plan, fenestration, and overall symmetry are almost identical to the configuration of the first church, with the east elevation remaining as the primary elevation/main entrance into the chapel. The most significant difference between the two buildings is that the perimeter walls were rebuilt using stucco covered wood framing instead of brick.

The existing roof is also similar to the 1926 building's pitched gable roof. The wood trussed framing continues to projecting eaves and exposed straight-end rafters under terra cotta barrel tiles. The tiles are visible from the north and south elevations as are the projecting eaves and exposed rafter tails. A 2014 engineering report notes that the existing roof truss system, "appears to be an initial overdesign attempt by the builders after the damage that occurred from the earthquake."¹ The subfloor and walls are supported by concrete footings and a concrete stem wall, respectively.

A low canopy covered in the same terra cotta tiles projects over the front doors. The canopy is supported by dark wood horizontal support beams with shaped angled wood brackets on either side. The roof canopy is original to the 1933 building. The original horizontal support beams were initially painted white, and shaped brackets were added at a later, unknown date.

Below the canopy is a set of dark paneled double doors topped by a two-light transom window. The window is original to the 1933 building. The doors, though similar in style to the originals, were replaced at an unknown date. There are three non-original concrete steps and two non-original ramps leading up to the entry landing. The ramps are located behind non-original brick planters, one of which contains a statue of St. Isidore added post-period of significance. Based on photographic evidence, the original configuration of steps, ramps, and planters was altered sometime after the 1940s.

All four exterior building elevations feature broad, unadorned stucco surfaces in a light earth tone. In 2018, the exterior walls were treated with new paint and epoxy coatings. The east elevation is the most decorated with its curvilinear raised parapet and simple bell-gable, capped with a modest wooden cross. Three small arched niches sit high on the wall in a triangle formation centered under the bell-gable. The center niche functions as a passive air vent with a wood slatted grill opening into the attic. Just below these niches, at the height of the interior choir loft, are two larger arched openings containing steel-framed stained-glass windows with decorative patterns.

The north and south elevations also contain steel-framed stained-glass windows with designs depicting different religious scenes and Catholic saints. In keeping with the 1926 fenestration, there are four windows on each wall, installed at ground level. The designs depict different

¹ Martell B. Montgomery, *Structural Inspection Report of Single Story, Wood Framed Church Building Located at 10961 Reagan Street, Los Alamitos, Ca 90720* (Carlsbad, CA: April 2, 2014), 4.

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religious scenes and Catholic saints. All ten stained-glass windows were installed between the late 1940s and early 1950s, one by one, as funds became available. No records have been found that reveal the windows' maker. Efforts are being made to discover the source.

The west elevation features three small arched niches within the gable wall identical to those found on the east façade. Unlike the roof line along the north and south elevations, here the ends of the rafters are covered in a non-original barge board. A small single-story annex was added to this elevation sometime between 1938 and 1952, directly against the chapel's rear elevation with a very small footprint and massing. Aesthetically, the addition is unobtrusive and features gestures of compatibility towards the chapel as well as elements that differentiate it from the historic building. Like the chapel, the addition is wood framed covered in stucco, topped by a pitched gable roof with exposed rafters. The asphalt composite shingle roof and stucco chimney differentiate the addition from the older building. The south elevation of the addition is obscured by landscaping and the north elevation features a set of wood sash windows and a single paneled door in the same style as the chapel entry. The addition is used as an administrative office for St. Isidore Historical Plaza.

Interior

At the entrance, a semi enclosed narthex is located below a wood framed choir loft, with simple wood stairs on the north side and two wood confessional booths on the south wall. The choir loft, stairs, and confessionals all date to the 1933 construction. Proceeding west, the space opens to a double height coved ceiling nave with wooden pews on both side of a central aisle. Two additional aisles are located along the south and north walls. At the west end is a central raised platform containing the altar, with two wooden doors on either side leading into the annex. The space is naturally illuminated by the stained-glass windows. Non-original wall sconces and pendant light fixtures are installed throughout the interior. The floors of the aisles, altar platform, and sanctuary are covered in wall-to-wall carpet with the original wood floors extant beneath.

In 1960, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles built St. Hedwig in Los Alamitos and subsequently closed St. Isidore. The original bell from the front gable, interior Belgian marble statues and altar, railings, and organ were removed and given away to other churches.

Noncontributing Resources

Noncontributing resources on the property include a community hall and a trellis, arcade, plaza, and fountain. The hall (building) sits directly west of St. Isidore and the trellis (structure), arcade (structure), and plaza (site) with fountain (object) are between the chapel's north wall and the parking lot.

The community hall is a single-story event space built between 1952 and 1953. The building sits perpendicular to St. Isidore at the southwest corner of the property. The non-distinctive building design includes a few gestures towards compatibility with the historic church. It has neutral unadorned stucco walls with wooden double hung windows on the north, east and south

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elevations and vents in the gables that mirror the location of similar vents in the chapel walls. Like St. Isidore, the hall has as a low-pitched gable roof with exposed rafters, covered in composition shingle rather than tile. Its height is lower than the historic building and the footprint is larger at 2,109 square feet. Though the hall was in use during the last seven or eight years of St. Isidore's period of significance, it does not relate to the property's documented significance, especially with regards to the early development of Los Alamitos. The hall is lacking the design details and quality of workmanship exhibited by St. Isidore.

Four resources were built as part of a post-period of significance site improvement project in 1972. An open plaza sits adjacent to the north elevation of the chapel and contains a ceramic tiled fountain imported from Mexico. A Mission style arcade starts at the northeast corner of St. Isidore, runs east to the sidewalk along Reagan Street, and continues north across the plaza. The stucco-clad arcade features exposed beams and eleven uniform arches that sit on brick piers; two larger arches span the entrance to the center parking lot. A wooden trellis runs along the north edge of the plaza and along the back of the arcade.

Condition/Alterations

In 1972, St. Isidore parish succeeded in convincing Father Quinn of St. Hedwig to resume religious and community services at St. Isidore. Prior to the reopening of the church, Father Quinn sponsored a restoration campaign, resulting in the demolition of the 1930s rectory and detached garage to make room for the plaza, arcade, trellis, and fountain. The chapel received a new altar and other necessary interior furnishings.

The property remained in operation as a church until 1999 when it was closed for a second time. Again, the community rallied, and eventually formed the nonprofit St. Isidore Historical Plaza (SIHP), which succeeded in purchasing the property from the Diocese of Orange in 2014. SIHP leadership is consulting with a team of preservation professionals in order to develop a master plan for restoration, including necessary repairs to St. Isidore. The stained-glass windows are being meticulously repaired and stabilized by a master stained-glass artisan. The south building elevation has severely deteriorated over the years, due to what appears to be framing damaged by water infiltration. The restoration team will recommend treatment to retain as much historic material as possible, replace what is needed in kind, and make the wall structurally sound. A proposed structural retrofit for the entire building will also be included in the master plan for restoration.

Integrity

St. Isidore retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building's setting has been compromised by alterations to the property including the demolition of the original rectory and detached garage in 1972, addition of noncontributing resources, and the transformation of the surrounding neighborhood from a rural factory town to a fully developed suburban community.

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While the noncontributing resources impact St. Isidore's integrity of setting, they do not obscure the two building elevations, including the primary elevation/main entrance, that are in public view from Los Alamitos Boulevard and Reagan Street. The hall sits unobtrusively at the rear of the building and so does not interfere with the chapel's integrity. The house and garage were not part of the original lot and are set apart from the chapel, so they do not interfere either. The plaza, arcade, trellis, and fountain do sit directly adjacent to St. Isidore's north façade, separate and open resources that do not diminish the integrity of the chapel.

The chapel has existed at the same location since 1926, is intact and clearly expresses its sense of history through a combination of well-preserved character defining features including the simple plan and massing, overall symmetry, tiled roof, projecting eaves with exposed rafters, windows, shaped parapet, bell gable, and broad expanses of stucco. Though some original materials have been replaced, their absence does not impact the integrity of the building. Integrity of design and workmanship are clearly conveyed. Maintenance and repair work has been done with sensitivity to the history of the building.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
ETHNIC HERITAGE: HISPANIC

Period of Significance

1926-1960

Significant Dates

1926

1933

1960

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

St. Isidore Catholic Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Religion, Community Planning and Development, and Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic. The property is associated with the early development of Los Alamitos as an agricultural community organized around a large sugar beet processing factory and the Latino community living in Los Alamitos, specifically the Mexican immigrants who worked on the town's farms and at the factory. The period of significance begins with the date of construction of the original church in 1926, continues through the reconstruction of the church in 1933, and ends in 1960, the year of the first closure of St. Isidore by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. St. Isidore satisfies Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties because it derives its primary significance from its association with Latino ethnic heritage as well as with the community development of Los Alamitos, California. As a religious property, St. Isidore Catholic Church meets the registration requirements for property types associated with Religion and Spirituality in Latino Culture in the *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* Multiple Property Submission.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History of St. Isidore Catholic Church

Established in 1921, St. Isidore in Los Alamitos was the fifth Catholic parish to emerge in Orange County since the founding of the Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1776. Founding parishioners included American Catholics as well as Catholic immigrants from Mexico, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, and Ireland.²

At the time, all Catholic Churches in Orange County were part of the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles, presided over by Bishop John Cantwell. The Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles split in 1922, and the resulting Diocese of Los Angeles-San Diego split in 1936. Promoted to Archbishop, Cantwell continued to be in charge of the resulting Archdiocese of Los Angeles until 1947 when he was followed by Archbishop James Francis McIntyre. The Diocese of Orange was not established until 1976.

At first, St. Isidore parish did not have their own church building so members gathered for mass at Felts General Store or the Harmona Hotel, both located on Main Street in Los Alamitos. In 1922, the parishioners asked the town's major landlord, the Bixby Land Company, for land on which to build a Catholic church. The company approved the request and in 1924, a lot on the corner of Main Street (later Reagan Street) and Alvarado Street (later Katella Boulevard) was deeded to the "Bishop of Los Angeles-Monterey" for a \$10 filing fee.

² Information from Census Records and oral histories compiled by St. Isidore Historical Plaza.

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The church was built in 1926 by the parishioners themselves. The quality of their workmanship reflected their unselfconscious labor, as well as their sense of community in coming together to build St. Isidore. The church was completed in the Mission Revival style, a common design style preference for Catholic churches in Southern California after the turn of the century, especially within rural parishes that served large Mexican communities.³ In keeping with vernacular tradition, aesthetic considerations were minimal yet effective. In the spirit of the revival style, the parishioners introduced building materials and methods of construction that would have been economic and readily available including concrete, brick, wood framing, plaster, and terra cotta tile. Once complete, the St. Isidore building conveyed a sense of permanence, simplicity, and comfort similar to the original Franciscan Missions.

In 1933, the Long Beach earthquake caused severe damage to St. Isidore. The parish's Mexican women sold homemade tamales to raise money for repairs and both the Bixby Land Company and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles donated money to the cause.⁴ Three months after the earthquake, the community successfully reconstructed the building in the same Mission Revival style.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, St. Isidore parish initiated a campaign to replace the wooden sash windows with a program of decorative leaded stained-glass. New windows were individually sponsored by members of the community and were installed one by one as donations were secured. The source of the windows is unknown. One local theory suggests that they were imported from Belgium with help from the local network of Belgium farmers.

After World War II, the demographics of Los Alamitos changed as middle-class suburban subdivisions replaced rural farmlands throughout Orange County. In response to these changes, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles began to consolidate parish communities and modernize their church buildings. In Los Alamitos, a large new Catholic church called St. Hedwig was built to accommodate the growing suburban population. Upon the opening of the new church in 1960, diocesan leadership decided to close St. Isidore, explaining that it would be unreasonably expensive to operate both churches. The smaller church was stripped of its existing accoutrements including its bell, organ, Belgian marble altar and sculptures, altar rail, and religious relics. The items were given away to other churches and have not been relocated. This closure marks the end of St. Isidore's period of significance.

In 1972, after more than ten years of advocacy on the part of St. Isidore's loyal parishioners, Father Dominic Quinn of St. Hedwig agreed to reopen the church. It remained open until 1999 when it was closed once again, this time by the Diocese of Orange. An increase in the number of Latino immigrants, coupled with a lack of Spanish-speaking priests and overall desire to integrate smaller ethnic parishes into large mainstream congregations, led to the decision to close

³ Teresa Grimes, Laura O'Neill, Elysha Paluszek, and Becky Nicolaidis, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* (Multiple Property Designation Form, Amended, National Register of Historic Places, 2020), 161.

⁴ "St. Isidore Church," unpublished manuscript, retrieved from St. Hedwig's archive.

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St. Isidore for a second time.⁵ The Diocese also cited the cost of performing an earthquake retrofit as prohibitive to keeping the church safely in operation.

Again, the community united and gradually forged a path to reopen and sustain the property. Supporters formed a 501(c)(3) and after many years of negotiations, successfully purchased the St. Isidore complex in 2014. The nonprofit St. Isidore Historical Plaza (SIHP) operates St. Isidore as a non-denominational chapel within a larger community center complex. Their programming includes weddings and fiestas, English as a Second Language classes, AA meetings, and food and clothing distributions. SIHP's neighbors include several other nonprofits that also serve the community.

Community Planning and Development

St. Isidore is associated with the early development of Los Alamitos as a small agricultural and factory town surrounded by thousands of acres of farms. Named for the patron saint of farmers, the parish served a diverse group of American, European, and Mexican Catholics living in and around the rural enclave. Like their patron saint, founding parishioners were primarily farmers, and field and factory laborers who settled Los Alamitos to either grow sugar beets or to work at the Los Alamitos Sugar Company, which opened for business in 1897.⁶

The sugar industry was a field for major domestic and international power struggles in late nineteenth century America. In 1890, a rivalry between Henry O. Havemeyer, president of the American Sugar Refining Company, and Hawaiian industrialist Claus Spreckels resulted in replacement of the government's high tariff on imported sugar with a subsidy for domestic producers. According to historian D. J. Waldie,

The subsidies and the loss of tariff revenue drove the federal government into fiscal chaos and the nation into the panic of 1893 (setting the stage for the American overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy that same year and the American "liberation" of Cuba from the Spanish in 1898).⁷

Four years later, Congress restored the sugar tariff at a forty percent higher rate resulting in a "boom time for domestic sugar production."⁸

The Los Alamitos Sugar Company and the town of Los Alamitos were developed by members of the local Bixby family, doing business as the Bixby Land Company. The Bixbys, from whose vast collective landholdings emerged present-day Bellflower, Paramount, Signal Hill, Lakewood, and parts of Long Beach, were only the second American owners of the land that became the town of Los Alamitos. Prior to their ownership in the late 1800s, the lands once occupied by the

⁵ Joyce Gregory Wyels, "Holy War," *Orange Coast Magazine*, May 2000, 78.

⁶ Information from Census Records compiled by St. Isidore Historical Plaza.

⁷ D. J. Waldie, "History of Development in LA OC Counties Tied to Sugar Beets," KCET: SoCal Focus, July 22, 2013. <https://www.kcet.org/socal-focus/history-of-development-in-la-oc-counties-tied-to-sugar-beets>.

⁸ Waldie, "History of Development in LA OC Counties Tied to Sugar Beets."

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Gabrieleno-Tongva and other indigenous peoples had been claimed and gradually subdivided in turn by Spanish, Mexican, and early American owners.

The Bixbys were land-rich and cash-poor, so in order to finance the sugar beet operation, they partnered with millionaire industrialist William Clark. Clark came from Montana, where he made a fortune in copper mining and was considered a contemporary of other famous late nineteenth century capitalists including Henry Osborne Havermeier, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller.

As part of the agreement between Clark and the Bixbys, “partners in the Bixby Land Company put 3,000 acres of [land] under sugar beet cultivation and Clark agreed to buy all the crops that could be raised in the surrounding 70 square miles of territory during the next five years.”⁹ Additionally, the Bixby Land Company, “laid out house and business lots in [the] small township [of Los Alamitos] and sold sections of the remaining ranch at \$130 an acre to farmers. With the land, farmers got a crop contract with the Clarks’ processing plant.”¹⁰

During this boom period of domestic sugar production, the U.S. Department of Agriculture actively promoted the processing of sugar from sugar beets, saying that, “sugar beet factories were beneficial economically in rural areas by providing jobs, towns and improved social opportunities.”¹¹ The Los Alamitos Sugar Company as well as the Bixby Land Company provided all three benefits to the citizens of Los Alamitos between 1897 and the mid-1920s. Both companies supported the local economy, provided worker housing, sponsored construction of recreation facilities, and hosted social events like “hot pancake breakfasts and barbeques to celebrate the start and finish of each sugar beet processing season.”¹² The Bixby Land Company was also St. Isidore’s largest patron, donating both land and money to build the church in 1926, and money to restore it after the 1933 earthquake.

Aesthetically, early Los Alamitos was referred to by one resident writer as, “A typical sample of those pyrotechnical Western settlements that yesterday were a wilderness and today are thriving towns.”¹³ The town fit the part so well, that it was often used as a location for Hollywood westerns, most famously *Bond of Blood* starring outlaw-turned-movie-star Al Jennings.¹⁴

Not much about Los Alamitos deviated from its original wild west aesthetic until the late 1920s when the streets and sidewalks were finally paved. The town’s Main Street was still filled with straightforward wood-framed buildings that, like St. Isidore, were built with available materials

⁹ “History of Los Alamitos,” City of Los Alamitos <https://cityoflosalamitos.org/community/history-of-los-alamitos/> (accessed August 25, 2020).

¹⁰ Waldie, “History of Development in LA OC Counties Tied to Sugar Beets.”

¹¹ Sherri Gust, Lynn Furnis, Molly Valasik, Courtney Richards and Kim Scott, *Paleontological and Cultural Resources of Los Alamitos for the General Plan Update, City of Los Alamitos, California* (Orange, CA: Cogstone, December 2013), 19.

¹² Strawther, *A Brief History of Los Alamitos & Rossmoor*, 75-76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴ St. Isidore does not appear in the film.

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by the town's settlers to serve local needs. St. Isidore fit right in among the surrounding vernacular buildings with its modest proportions, simple plan, and lack of formal affectation.

The location of St. Isidore is also consistent with the early plan of Los Alamitos as a rural one-street town. The town's original plan as built in 1897 was just eight blocks east to west and four blocks north to south. The sugar factory occupied the entire northeast quadrant and commercial establishments were concentrated along Main Street, the north end of which terminated at the factory. St. Isidore was built on Main Street's south end, on the corner between Main and Alvarado Street. At that time, Alvarado Street marked the town's southern boundary.

According to census records, the population of Los Alamitos grew from about 250 residents in 1900, to 500 residents by 1910 and 620 residents by 1920. By 1915, Main Street featured, "a land office, several pool halls, barber shops, a drug store, several inexpensive rooming houses, two hotels, a lunchroom, saloons, two general stores, a harness shop, lumber company, bakery and meat market."¹⁵

St. Isidore was one of the last buildings to be constructed on Main Street while it was still the center of town. As the parish worked to build their church, the sugar factory was winding down after twenty-nine years of continuous operations due to "the end of protective tariffs, increased foreign competition, higher labor costs, and the greater profitability of other crops,"¹⁶ as well as a nematode infestation. In addition, automobiles had become affordable to middle class Americans, leading to major developments in urban planning throughout Southern California. Two blocks long, unpaved and ending at the gates of the sugar factory, Main Street was oriented directly towards the sugar factory and not designed with automobile traffic in mind. The town's westernmost boundary Myrtle Street, on the other hand, was paved in 1921 and renamed Los Alamitos Boulevard. With these economic and infrastructural change, Main Street gradually lost its original purpose and development shifted west to Los Alamitos Boulevard.

Very little of early Los Alamitos survived the second half of the twentieth century. A Ganahl Lumber retail center operates on part of the land where the sugar factory once stood, and none of the town's original Main Street buildings are still standing except the St. Isidore chapel. Extant historical resources also include six private residences built between 1898 and 1925, the town's historic volunteer fire station, and over thirty buildings and structures on the Naval Reserve Air Base, later known as the Joint Forces Training Base.¹⁷

Los Alamitos' history is kept alive by the community through properties like St. Isidore and events like 2013's Sugar Beet Festival. An anecdote from this event demonstrates how the stories of both the sugar factory and St. Isidore continue to overlap in the context of the city's

¹⁵ Marilynn Poe, "Los Alamitos History for Presentations," (PowerPoint Presentation, Los Alamitos Museum, Los Alamitos, CA, 2018).

¹⁶ Strawther, *A Brief History of Los Alamitos & Rossmoor*, 85.

¹⁷ Gust, Furnis, Valasik, Richards and Scott, *Paleontological and Cultural Resources of Los Alamitos for the General Plan Update, City of Los Alamitos, California*, 31-32.

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heritage. During the festival, “parishioners from tiny St. Isidore won the cooking contest. The winning recipe was a spicy salsa that included diced sugar beets.”¹⁸

Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic (Latino)

Since its construction in 1926, St. Isidore Catholic Church has served the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of Los Alamitos’ Mexican Catholic community and meets the registration requirements for property types associated with Religion and Spirituality in Latino Culture in the *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* Multiple Property Submission. St. Isidore provides an important tangible reminder of the town’s original Mexican immigrant settlement and occupies an interesting position in the historic debate about the function of ethnic parishes within the American Catholic Church.

Los Alamitos’ Latino population kept pace with general trends in Latino immigration and settlement in early twentieth century California.¹⁹ The wave of immigration from 1900 through the 1920s marked the period of formation of the town’s Mexican community, which was itself a major factor in creating demand for a Catholic church. During this period, most Mexicans traveled from rural areas in central and southern Mexico to work at the Los Alamitos Sugar Company and surrounding farms.²⁰ Census records show that the town’s permanent Spanish-speaking population grew from only a handful of first-generation Mexican Americans out of a population of 250 in 1900, to 310 immigrant and first-generation Mexicans and Mexican Americans out of a population of 625 in 1920.²¹

Latino settlement in Los Alamitos followed a slightly different pattern than was noted elsewhere in early twentieth century Orange County, where, “Anglo Catholics [were] concentrated in the larger towns... while Mexican Catholics were rural or dispersed along the rural fringes.”²² While documentation identifies Mexican immigrants living in migrant camps throughout the surrounding farmlands, census records also show many Mexican families permanently settled in concentrated areas throughout the town itself.²³ In one of the oral histories collected by SIHP, an older parishioner recalls that Los Alamitos was so small that everyone knew and associated with one another regardless of their ethnic background.²⁴

¹⁸ Waldie, “History of Development in LA OC Counties Tied to Sugar Beets.”

¹⁹ Grimes, O’Neill, Paluszek, and Nicolaides, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California*, 2-4.

²⁰ In the absence of specific historical information about the settlement of Mexican sugar beet workers in Los Alamitos, much of what is understood about the general character of their community has been informed by Professor Gilbert González’s study of Mexican citrus worker enclaves in Orange County published in, *Labor and Community; Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950*. Every effort has been made to balance comparisons against known differences and similarities between the sugar beet and citrus industries.

²¹ These numbers do not include migrant laborers living in temporary camps.

²² Gilbert González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 88.

²³ Strawther, *A Brief History of Los Alamitos & Rossmoor*, 65.

²⁴ Hortensia Breton (member, Board of Directors, St. Isidore Historical Plaza) in discussion with various members of the St. Isidore community, 2017-2020. Collection of St. Isidore Historical Plaza.

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One description of the early setting of St. Isidore refers to the evolution of a Mexican community in the direct vicinity of the church:

This part of Los Alamitos bloomed before the turn of the century as a rough-and-tumble labor camp, a cluster of tents and one-room cabins for workers in the beet fields and the old sugar factory. By the time the church was built in 1926 on property donated by the Bixby Land Company, it had become a settled and closely woven neighborhood of Mexican families.²⁵

Upon completion in 1926, St. Isidore became the site of religious and social events that directly served the Mexican community including Las Posadas and other Christmas celebrations, fiestas, *las jamaicas* (a traditional Mexican church fair and fund-raiser), and Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe. Mexican church music was introduced in 1930 when Miguel Flores became the first choir director, a tradition carried on after 1972 by his son Manuel. Even construction of the building was a community affair, a reflection of the traditional rural Mexican lifestyle, which was noted for reliance on “voluntary reciprocal self-help activities.”²⁶

From this point of view, St. Isidore resembles many other small Mexican Catholic churches founded throughout California in the early twentieth century. The Los Alamitos church is also documented as serving an interethnic community including Mexican Catholics, American Catholics, and Catholics from several first-generation European immigrant groups. This fact places it somewhere in the middle of two national trends that emerged as the American Catholic Church attempted to minister to the growing Latino population. One trend encouraged Spanish-speaking Catholics to celebrate Mass in large, interethnic churches while the other sought to minister to Mexican Catholics in small ethnic missions created under a larger mother church.

The latter strategy was embraced by the local Archdiocese under the leadership of Archbishop John Cantwell. Cantwell’s legacy is marked by extensive outreach to the area’s growing Spanish-speaking population, including the creation of more than fifty Latino missions. “The earliest church buildings constructed specifically for Latinos... were often referred to on Sanborn Maps and City Directories as missions, implying that these were outposts designed to serve foreigners.”²⁷ Under Cantwell, mission operations were characterized by persistent and controversial attempts to Americanize Mexican Catholics through a variety of programs. While St. Isidore’s small scale and Mission Revival style are typical of these smaller ethnic missions, it has always operated as a fully formed church and never under a mother parish.²⁸

Details about the ministry during the St. Isidore’s period of significance are few and it is largely unknown what Americanization methods took place within the parish. According to one historical source, “more Bishops have celebrated Mass at St. Isidore than in the Cathedral in Los

²⁵ Strawther, *A Brief History of Los Alamitos & Rossmoor*, 47.

²⁶ González, *Labor and Community*, 11.

²⁷ Grimes, O’Neill, Paluszek, and Nicolaidis, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California*, 161.

²⁸ On the 1929 Sanborn Map of Los Alamitos, St. Isidore is marked as a church rather than a mission.

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Angeles.”²⁹ This is because in addition to its regular clergy, St. Isidore provided temporary sanctuary for members of the Mexican episcopate fleeing the Cristero crisis between 1926 and 1929. At least one example of Americanizing efforts has been documented by the Catholic order of St. Columban who established a mission station at St. Isidore between 1942 and about 1949. The order’s explicit goal was to minister to the large number of Mexican laborers living in the U.S. under the Bracero program.³⁰

The most notable Columban priest to serve at St. Isidore during the 1940s was Father John McFadden. In a memoir published in 1976 he recalled that upon arriving in Los Alamitos he and his colleagues, “went into high gear, speaking Spanish, visiting homes, getting catechism classes under way, validating marriages, getting lapsed Catholics back to Mass and the Sacraments. There were happy times—the Twelve Nights before Christmas when we would pray at twelve homes in succession; the ‘Posadas’ it was called.”³¹ Another, anonymous Columban priest recalled that, “Better than ninety percent of the people were California-Mex. [I] would say that in ’42 we had around thirty Anglo-Saxon families in the whole area to be found in Los Alamitos, Westminster and Garden Grove.”³²

After the war, the nature of Los Alamitos’ Mexican community changed from a rural village-like neighborhoods to a suburban “blue-collar barrio” where, “occupation gradually shifted from the groves to industry, construction, and other nonagricultural lines.”³³ Despite these changes, St. Isidore continued to serve as the center of Los Alamitos’ Latino community until it closed in 1960. The closure caused much heartbreak, especially for Mexican parishioners who did not feel comfortable at the nearby St. Hedwig church, which ministered a more mainstream American Catholicism. In 1999, St. Isidore again became a flash point in the conversation about small ethnic parishes when it was closed for the second time. As in 1960, the 1999 closure followed a regional trend toward, “integration of ethnic churches into larger multicultural churches.” Again, the closure hit the Latino community particularly hard.

The second closure resulted in protests organized and attended by both Latino and non-Latino parishioners, Los Alamitos residents plus outside supporters including clergymen from other faiths, and politicians at the local, state, and national level. The community’s united efforts also attracted national media attention. A writer covering the story for *Orange Coast Magazine* in 2000 correctly guessed that “In the case of St. Isidore, the decision-makers may have underestimated the congregation’s strong spiritual and cultural ties to the church built by their own grandfathers and great-grandfathers.”³⁴

²⁹ “St. Isidore Church,” unpublished manuscript, retrieved from St. Hedwig’s Archive.

³⁰ Angelyn Dries, *Be Centered in Christ and Not in Self: The Missionary Society of Saint Columban: The North American Story (1918-2018)* (Xlibris US, 2017), 124.

³¹ Dries, *Be Centered in Christ and Not in Self*, 124.

³² *Ibid.*, 125.

³³ González, *Labor and Community*, 15.

³⁴ Gregory Wyels, “Holy War,” 78.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: St. Isidore Historical Plaza, St. Hedwig, and Los Alamitos Museum Archives

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 33.803350 Longitude: -118.069601

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is shown as the red dotted line on the accompanying **Assessor's Map**.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the original town lot on which St. Isidore Catholic Church was built.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kelly Sutherlin McLeod, FAIA; Catherine Azimi; Lauren Postlmayr
organization: Kelly Sutherlin McLeod Architecture, Inc.
street & number: 3827 Long Beach Boulevard
city or town: Long Beach state: CA zip code: 90807
e-mail: kelly@ksmarchitecture.com
telephone: (562) 427-6697
date: August 2020; Revised December 2020, June 2021, September 2021

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:	St. Isidore Catholic Church
City or Vicinity:	Los Alamitos
County:	Orange
State:	California
Photographer:	Stephen Schafer
Date Photographed:	December 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 17 Plaza, east elevation, facing southwest
- 2 of 17 Plaza, east elevation, facing west
- 3 of 17 Plaza, east and south elevations, facing northwest

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- 4 of 17 Plaza, west elevation, facing northeast
- 5 of 17 Church, south elevation, facing north
- 6 of 17 Church, east elevation, facing west
- 7 of 17 Interior courtyard, facing southwest
- 8 of 17 Plaza, east elevation, facing east
- 9 of 17 North elevation, facing southwest
- 10 of 17 Plaza interior, facing west
- 11 of 17 Parking lot, facing south
- 12 of 17 Church, north elevation, facing southeast
- 13 of 17 Church interior, facing west
- 14 of 17 Church interior from choir loft, facing west
- 15 of 17 Church interior, facing northeast
- 16 of 17 Stained-glass windows, facing south
- 17 of 17 Stained-glass windows, facing north

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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Location Map

Latitude: 33.803350

Longitude: -118.069601



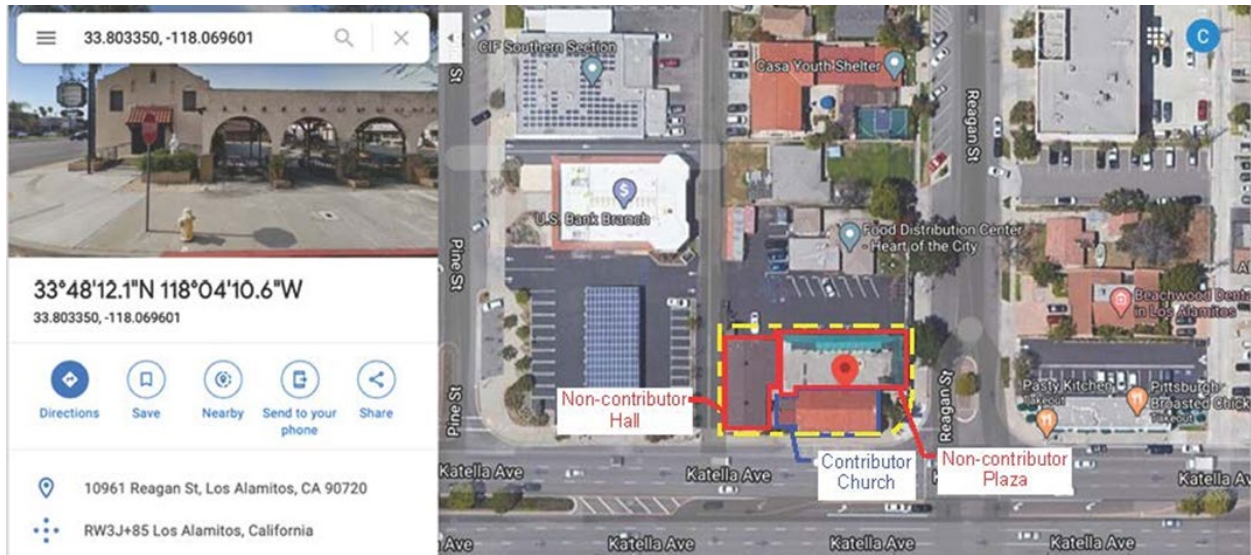
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Vicinity Map

Latitude: 33.803350

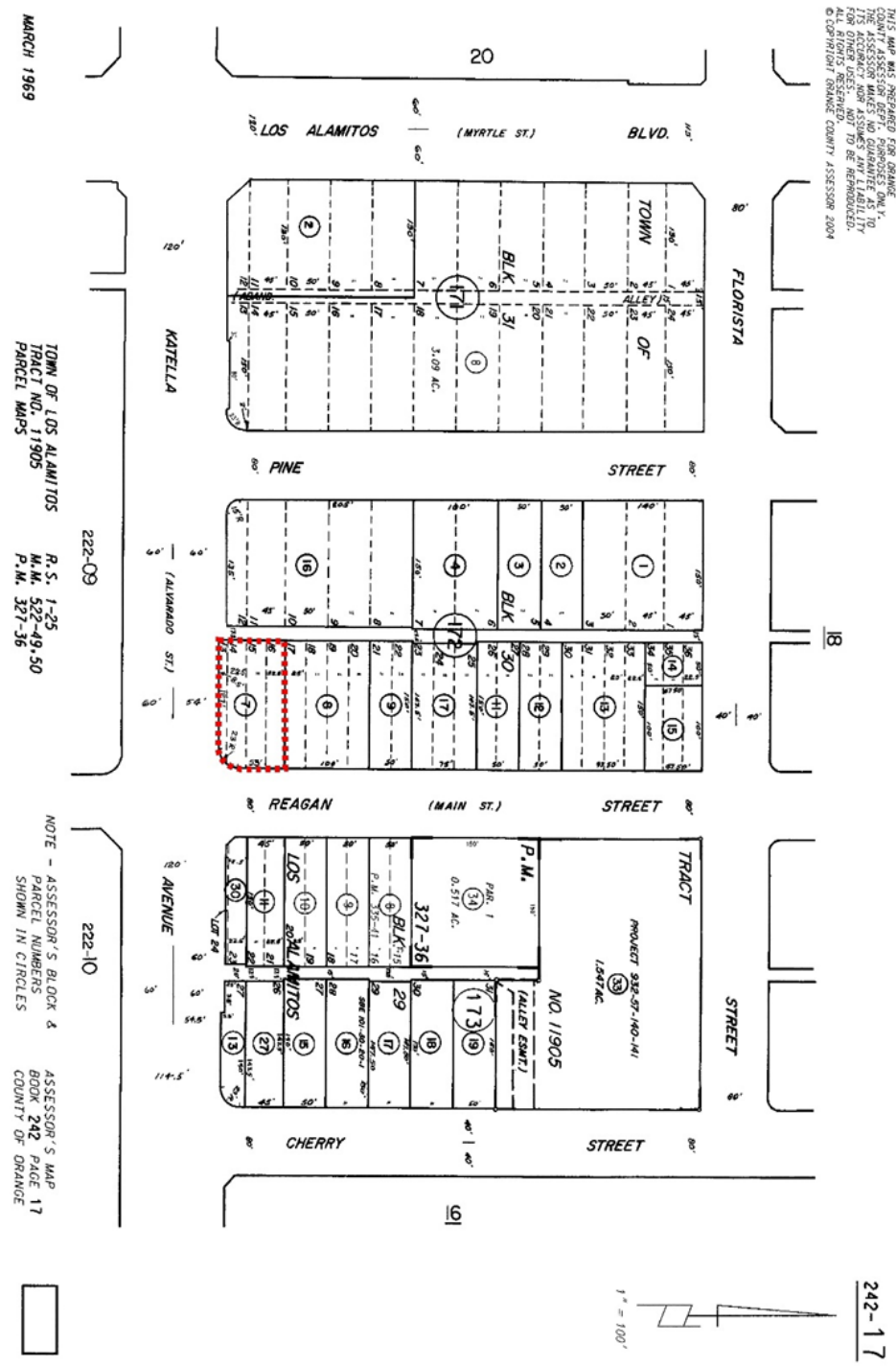
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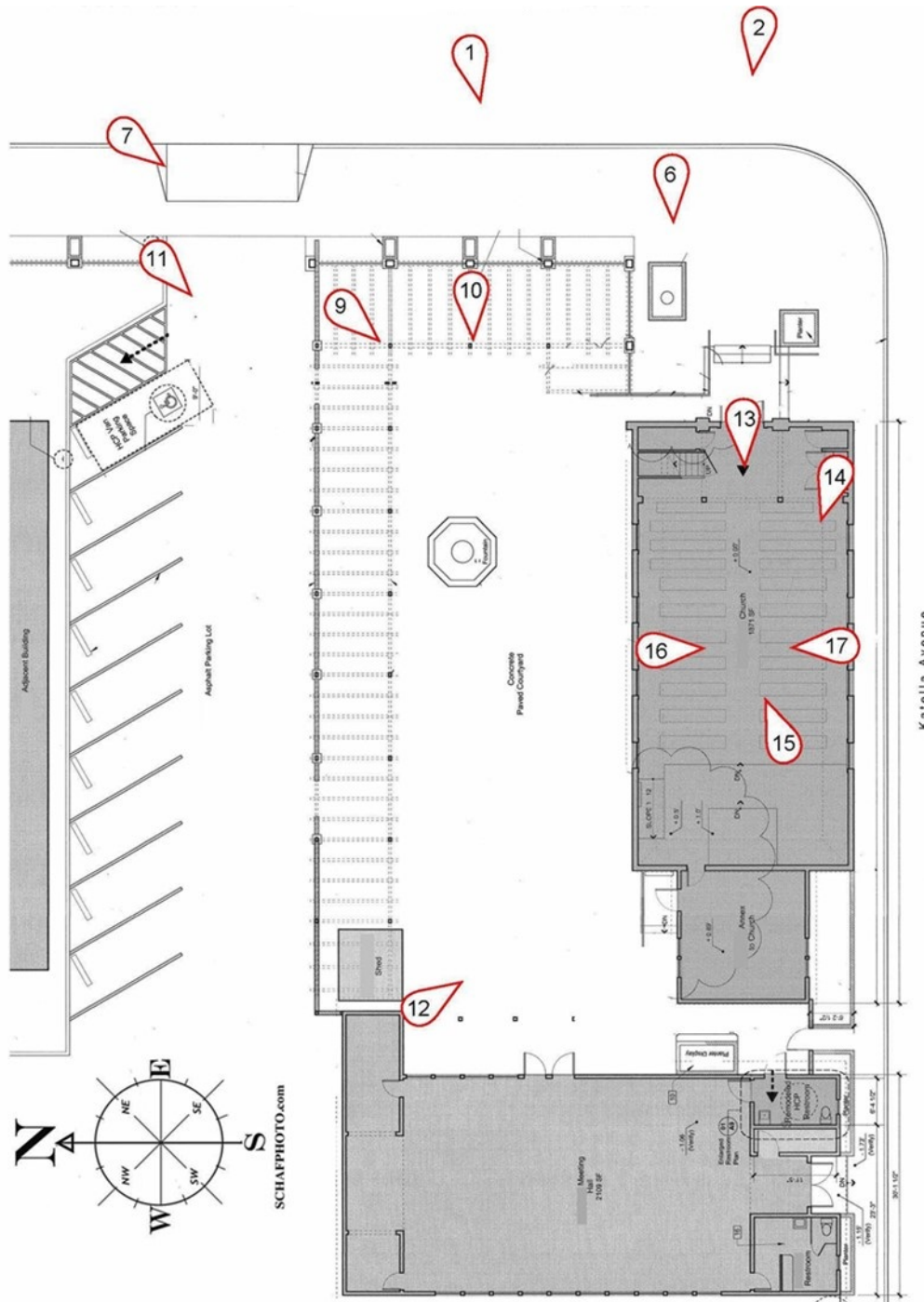
Assessor's Map



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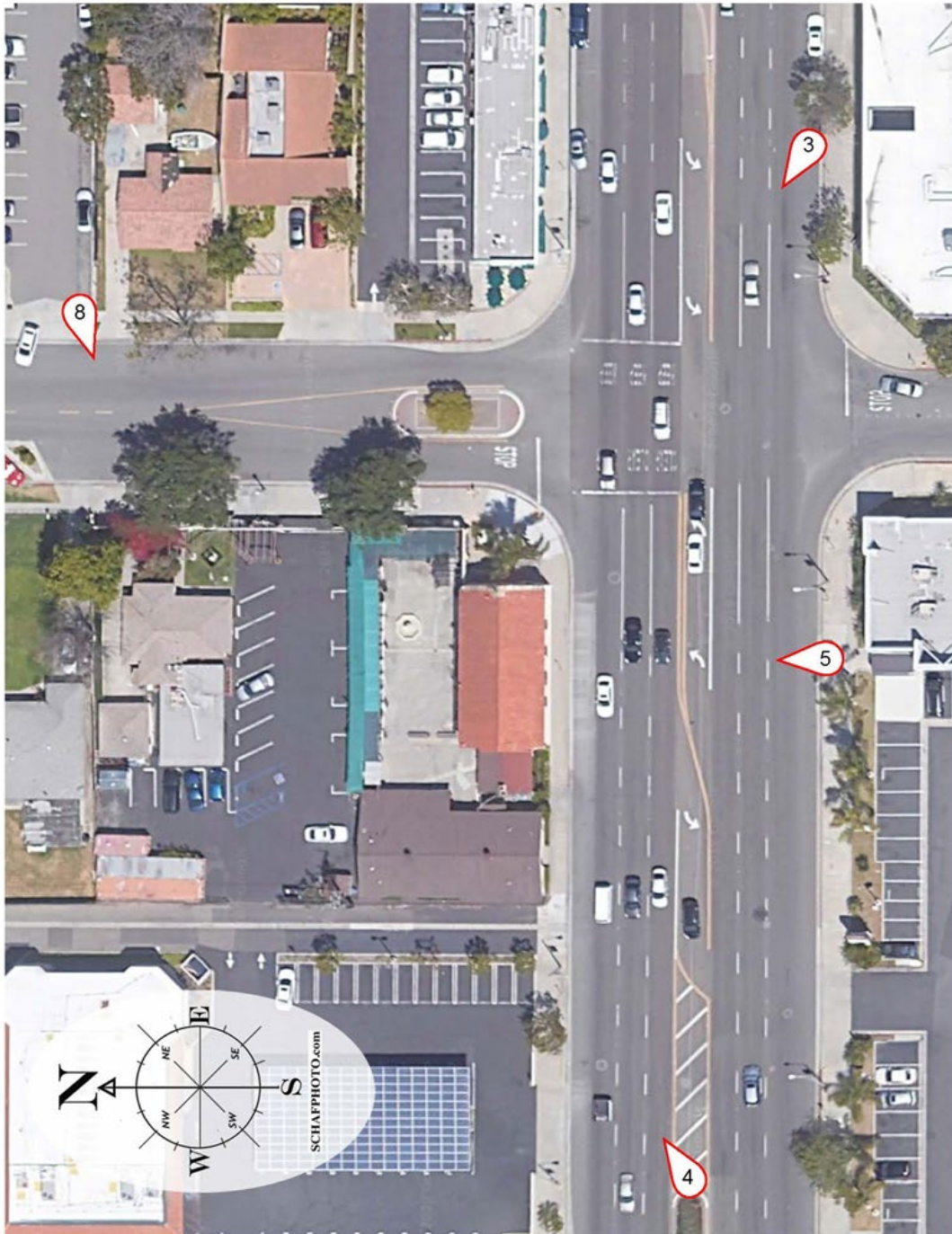
Sketch Map/Photo Key 1 of 2



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Sketch Map/Photo Key 2 of 2



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Figure 1 Original plan of Los Alamitos, 1897. Reproduced in *A Brief History of Los Alamitos and Rossmoor*, original source unknown.

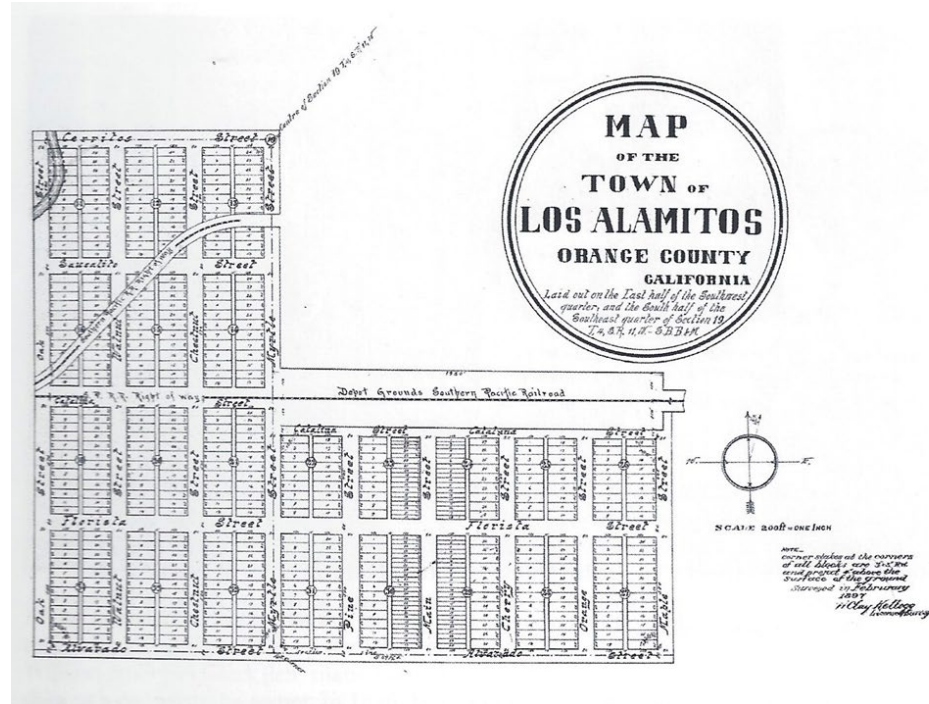
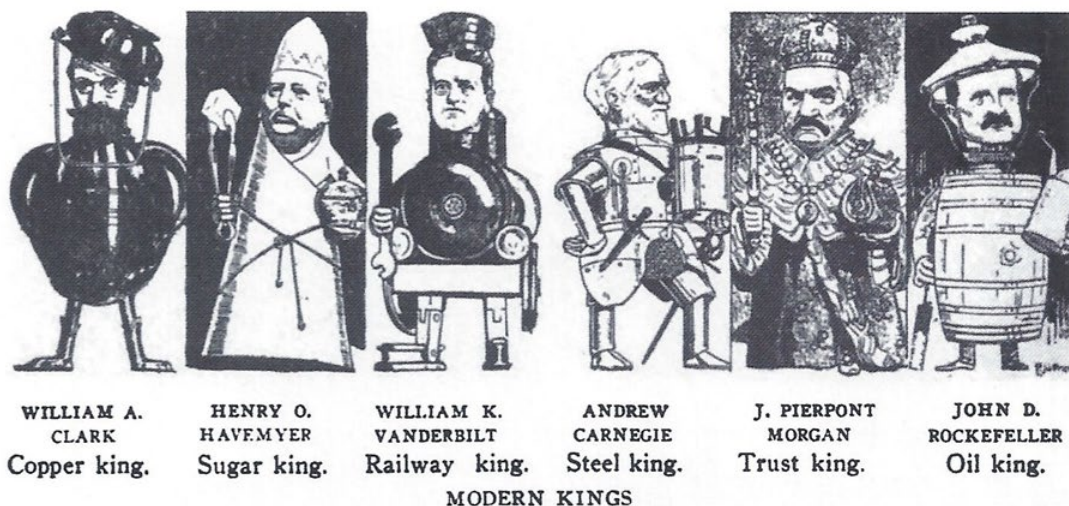


Figure 2 Political cartoon from the late 1890s featuring copper king William Clark pictured among his contemporaries. Reproduced in *A Brief History of Los Alamitos and Rossmoor*, original source unknown.



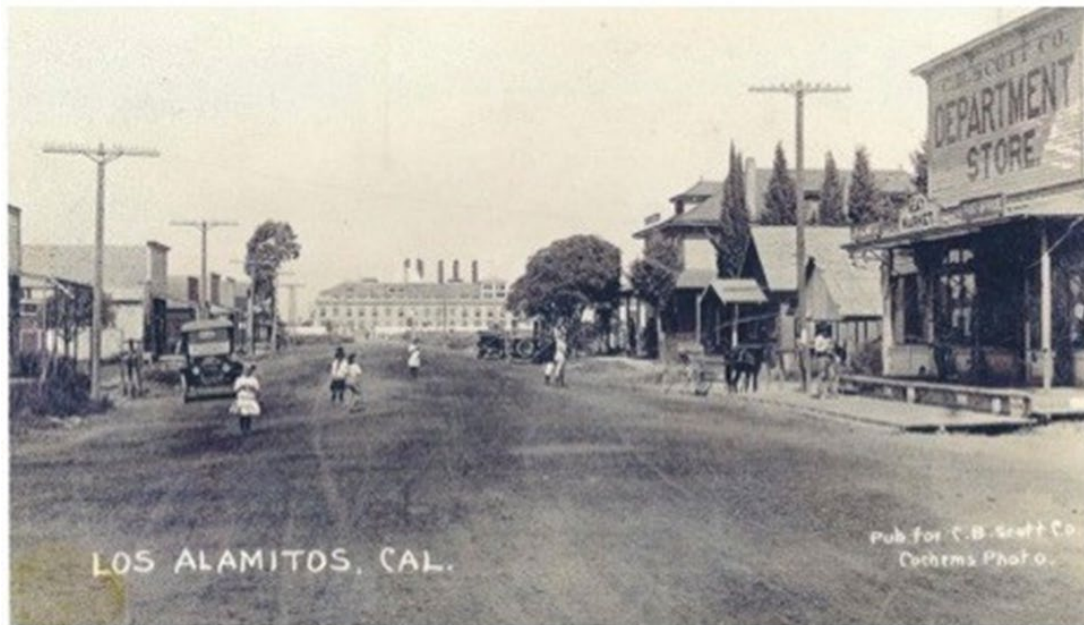
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Figure 3 Los Alamitos Sugar Company, date unknown. South elevation, facing northeast. Photo courtesy of the Los Alamitos Museum.



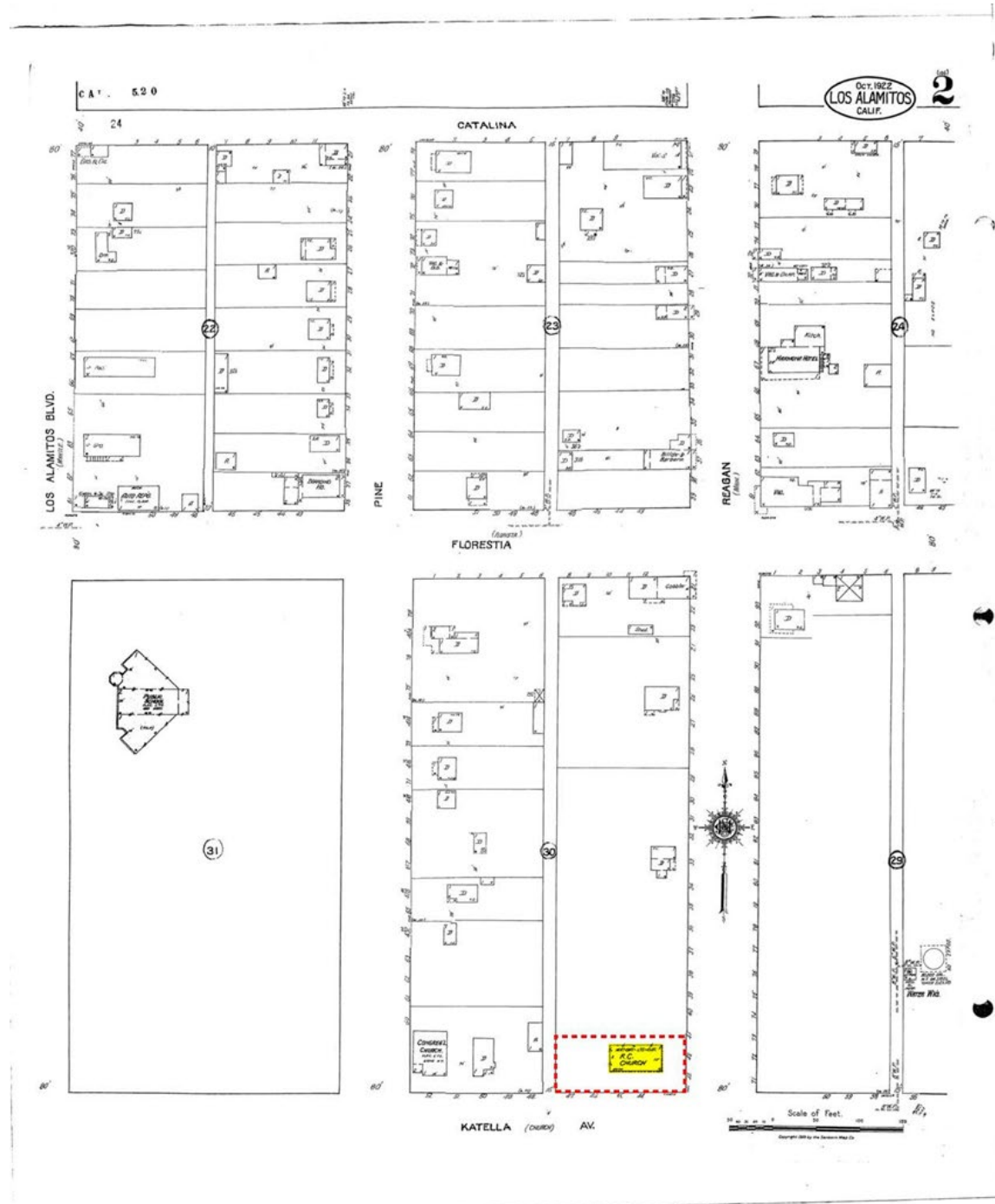
Figure 4 Main Street, facing north, 1915. Los Alamitos Sugar Company at the end of the street. Before their church was completed one block south of this view, St. Isidore parish met in the C.B. Scott Co. Department Store on the right, renamed Felts Market shortly after this photo was taken. Photo courtesy of the Los Alamitos Museum.



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Figure 5 Sanborn Map of downtown Los Alamitos, 1922, updated 1929. St. Isidore is located at the bottom of the map, on the northeast corner of Main Street and Katella Avenue. The 1929 update shows many vacancies (Vac.) and residential properties (D) on the once-commercial Main Street. Map courtesy of Environmental Data Resources, Inc.



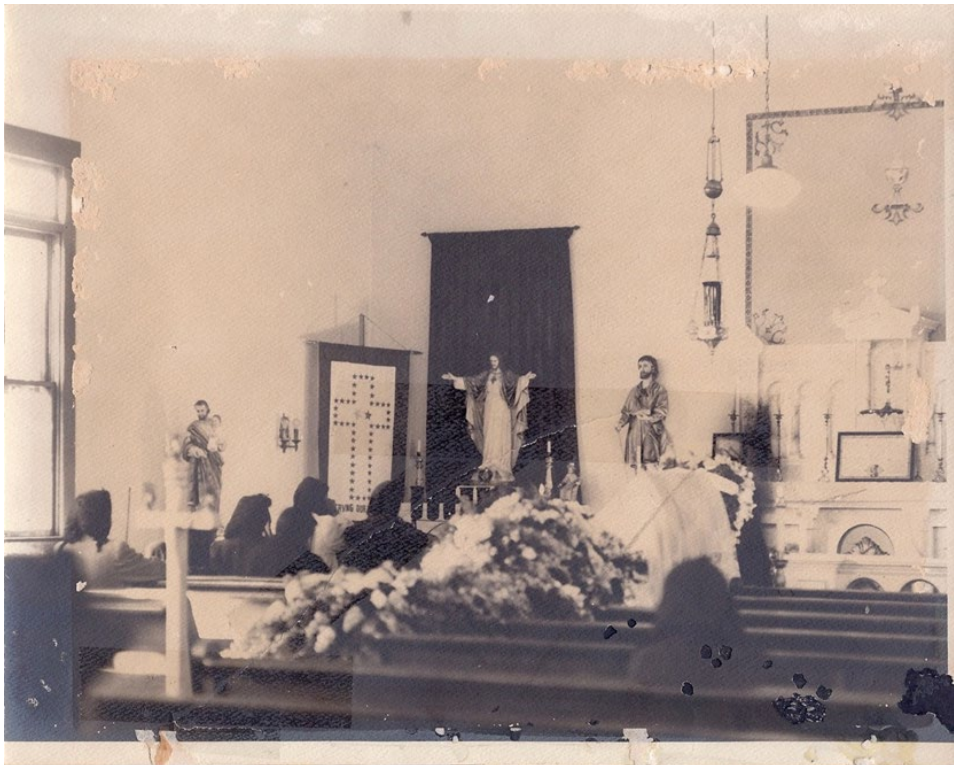
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Figure 6 South elevation, 1930. Parishioners from left to right: Maria Torres, Leon Vasquez, Dominga Nazarro and Paula Cano. Photo courtesy of St. Isidore Historical Plaza.



Figure 7 Interior, taken facing southwest, 1940s. Photo courtesy of St. Isidore Historical Plaza.



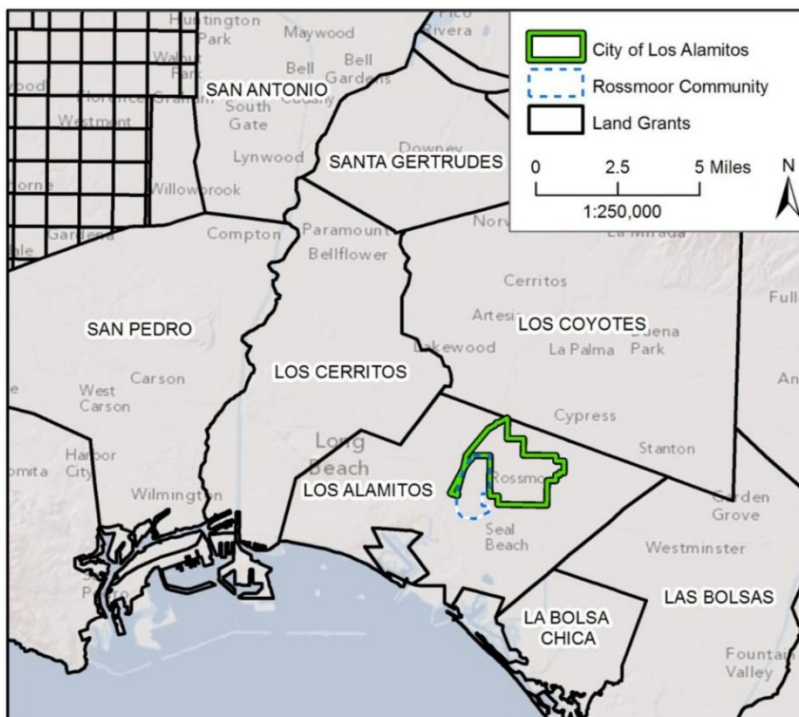
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Figure 8 Father McFadden’s First Communion class at east elevation, facing west, 1948. Photo courtesy of St. Isidore Historical Plaza.



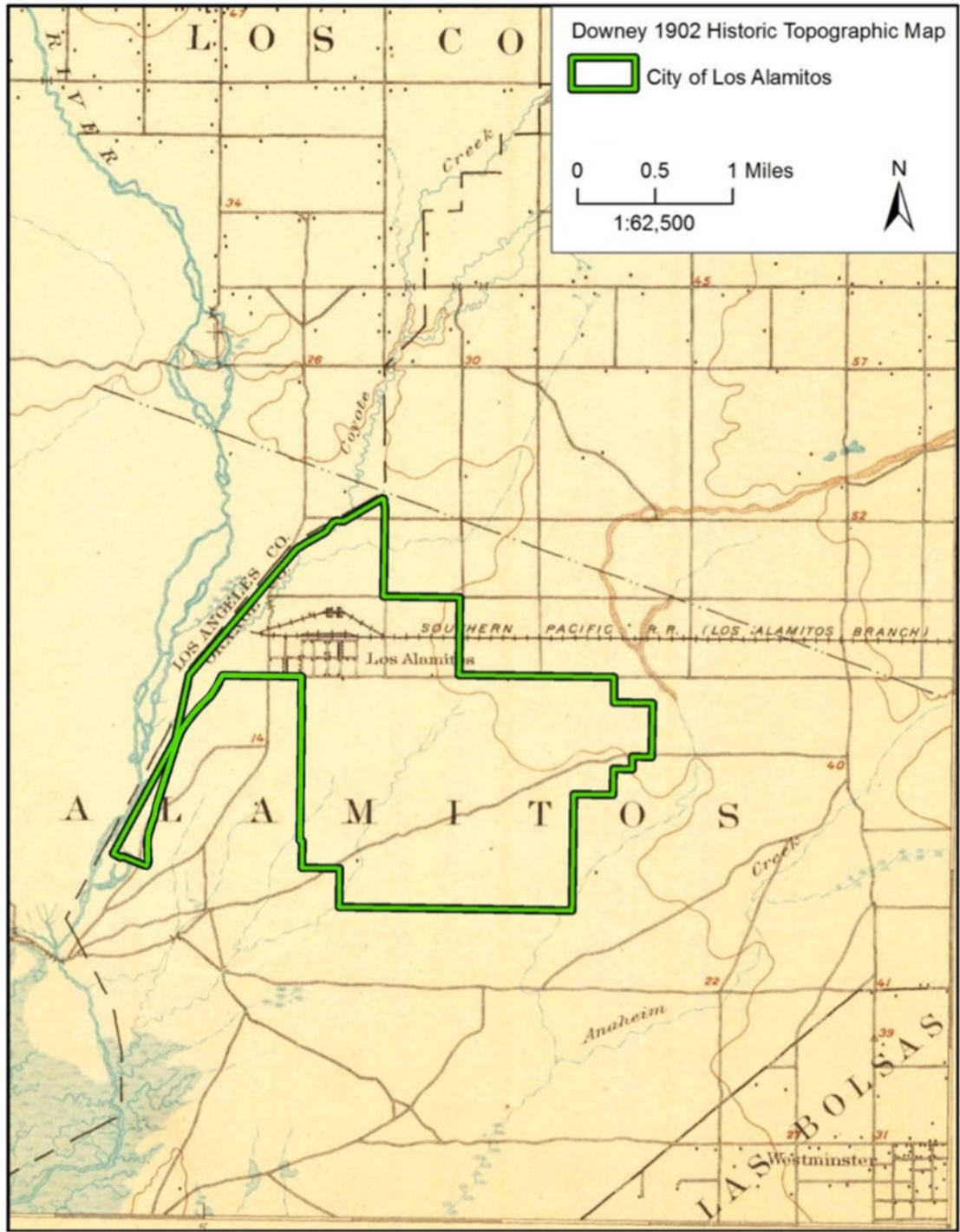
Figure 9 City boundaries of Los Alamitos superimposed on a map of the region’s Mexican Era land grants. Photo courtesy of Cogstone.



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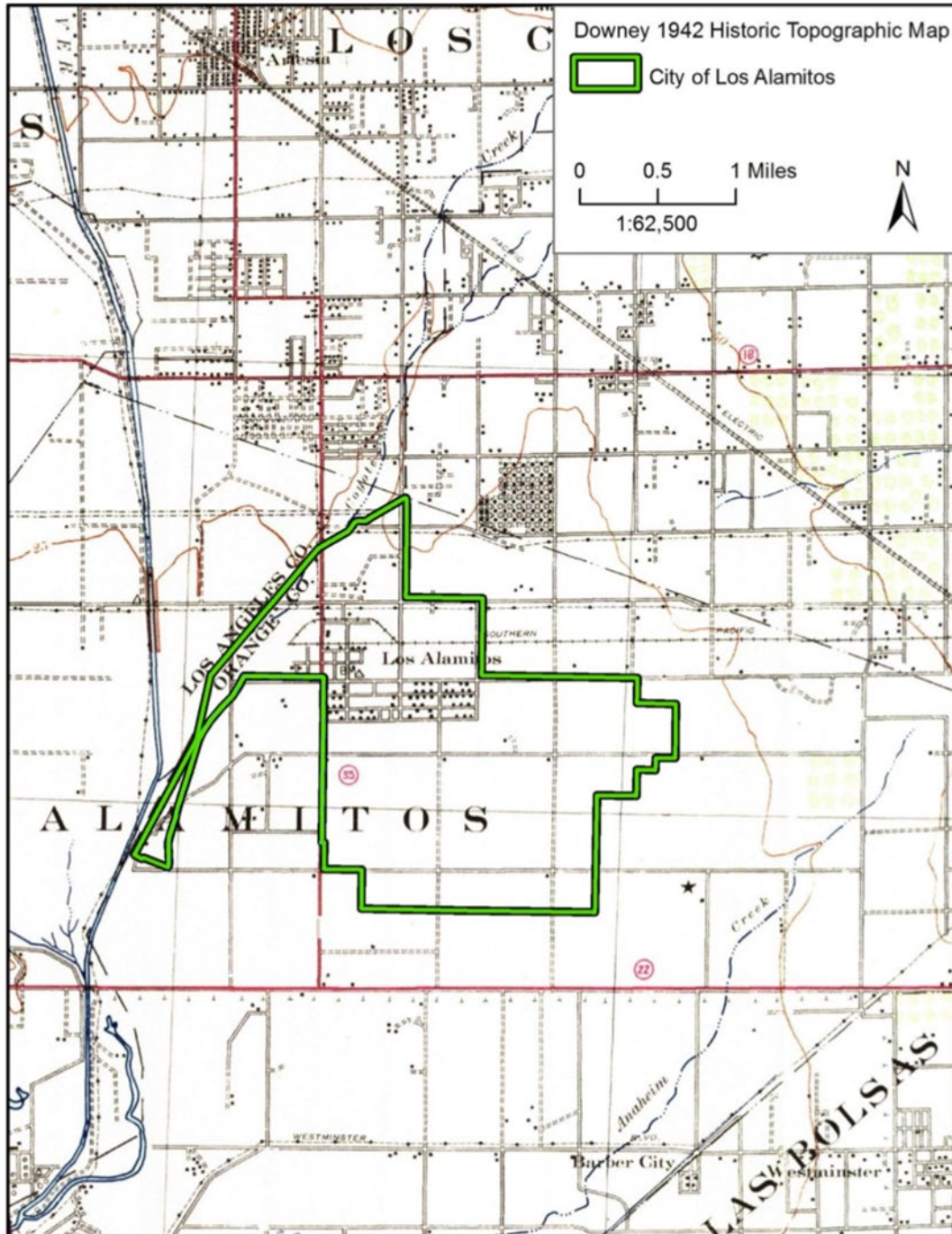
Figure 10 City boundaries of Los Alamitos superimposed on a 1902 USGS Topographic Downey map that features the original townsite. Photo courtesy of Cogstone.



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Figure 11 City boundaries of Los Alamitos superimposed on a 1942 USGS Topographic Downey map. Los Alamitos Naval Reserve Air Base was built in 1942 within the large undeveloped area located south of the original townsite. Photo courtesy of Cogstone.



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Photo 1 Plaza, east elevation, facing southwest



Photo 2 Plaza, east elevation, facing west



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Photo 3 Plaza, east and south elevations, facing northwest



Photo 4 Plaza, west elevation, facing northeast



St. Isidore Catholic Church
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Photo 5 Church, south elevation, facing north



Photo 6 Church, east elevation, facing west



St. Isidore Catholic Church
Name of Property

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Photo 7 Interior courtyard, facing southwest



Photo 8 Plaza, east elevation, facing east



St. Isidore Catholic Church
Name of Property

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Photo 9 North elevation, facing southwest



Photo 10 Plaza interior, facing west



St. Isidore Catholic Church
Name of Property

Orange, California
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Photo 11 Parking lot, facing south



Photo 12 Church, north elevation, facing southeast



St. Isidore Catholic Church
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Photo 13 Church interior, facing west



Photo 14 Church interior from choir loft, facing west



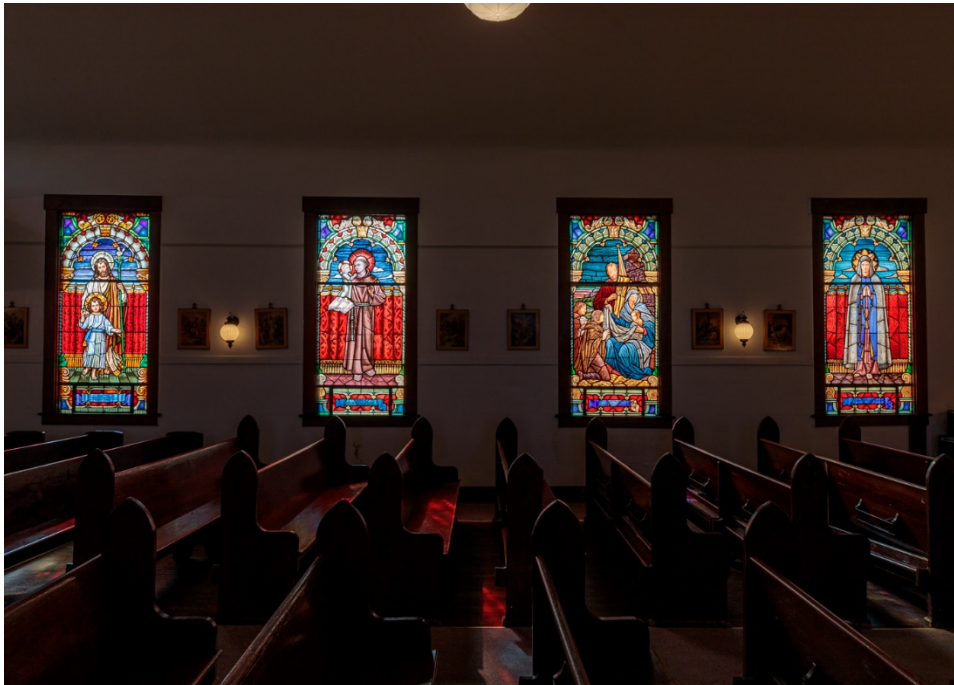
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Photo 15 Church interior, facing northeast



Photo 16 Stained-glass windows, facing south



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Photo 17 Stained-glass windows, facing north

