History and the South Bay. Prior to Euro-American development, the South Bay landscape reflected a combination of natural processes — tides and currents, salt and fresh water, evaporation and submergence — and the influence of indigenous peoples. The native Ohlone used the bay and its marshlands extensively, hunting fish and waterfowl, harvesting salt, and collecting shellfish—the dominant component of the massive shellmounds built along the bay and creeks. Remnants of the shellmounds, representing habitation for hundreds or thousands of years, are still encountered today. The map illustrates general locations of some of these larger sites.

When the maps were compiled, the region was in the late 1840s, and navigation and commerce were expanding. The San Francisco Bay was the site of several major land sales, including the large claims made by John S.guérand and William H. I. Van Arsdale. The region's strategic importance for navigation and commerce became apparent as it was converted to privately owned ranchos in the 1830s, establishing many of the persistent place names shown in the early maps. While the early surveys by the U.S. Coast Survey and the California Topographic Surveys produced useful maps, they were not drawn to the same standards, and the maps showed much less detail about the inner edges of the marshes. The maps showed only a few large Sloughs and creeks. Many of the small creeks and sloughs that are visible today were not named until the late 19th century. The maps show that only a few of the Sloughs were named. When the Spanish colonized the region in the late 1700s, the broad expanse of shallow bay waters bordered the tidal mudflats. When the South Pacific Coast Railroad crossed Coyote and Guadalupe Creeks in 1848, one of the important tasks was to accurately map potential routes of navigation and commerce in the burgeoning Bay Area wetlands and salt ponds. The railroad was a major route for transportation and commerce in the region. It formed a network of public roadways that linked the towns of the region. The railroad also had an early and lasting role in the development of local infrastructure. Prior to its advent and automobiles, the long roads were the primary means of transportation. The railroad provided the links between land and sea that helped form the pattern of early maps.

BAYLANDS & CREEKS OF SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO BAY

SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO BAY LANDSCAPE THROUGH TIME

CONVERSION TO SALT PONDS, 1850s to 1950s

Between these larger scales were many smaller creeks that did not naturalize the way the larger tidal Sloughs instead, they remained and disappeared in the backlands. The bay’s busy edge, natural and altered, formed a complex pattern of migrating salt ponds and creeks, the latter often millions of acres. The earliest evidence of human activity in the marshes. During the twentieth century, there were two hotels and almost 100 cabins built on the shores of the bay. The area is now part of the National Wildlife Refuge. Photographs courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.