

# Corona History



## *Welcome to Corona*

**The City of Corona is located approximately 45 miles southeast of Los Angeles in western Riverside County. The community is ideally situated at the base of the mountainous Cleveland National Forest on an alluvial plain leading down or north to the Santa Ana River.**

**According to the US Census, Corona grew from a mid-size town of 37,791 residents in 1980 to a large urban community of approximately 125,000 in 2000 and continues to grow.**

**Corona is a General Law City. Five Corona citizens make up the Corona City Council and each is elected to a four year term of office.**

Historical Research by Sandra Falero, research assistant  
Kyle Gibson. Based on Gloria Freel's *The History of  
Corona*. Please credit the Corona Public Library if you use  
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# Early History

The local Luiseño Indians were known as hunters and gatherers. They hunted for such animals as black bear, snakes, rodents, coyote, rabbits, birds and fish. They made straw baskets from wild grasses, constructed clay containers and gathered acorns, seeds, wild berries and roots for food. These Native Americans used the hot waters in the Temescal Canyon to bathe on a daily basis and as part of their religious ceremonies (current residents and visitors still enjoy the rejuvenating mud baths and hot springs at the Glen Ivy resort). Luiseño religious ceremonies were strictly followed and remnants of some of their artistic pictographs and petroglyphs can still be found on some of the rocks in the undeveloped areas.



Luiseño Indian artifacts on display in the Heritage Room Gallery.

These Indian tribes came under the influence of the Spanish settlers at the Mission San Luis Rey, and they were given the name Luiseño. As Spanish settlement progressed inland, the land soon was taken over by Spanish ranchos. Sheep and cattle dotted the hills from ranchos run by the Serrano, Cot, Sepulveda and Botiller families. Remnants of the Serrano tanning vats are still found on Old Temescal Canyon Road. This is also the route that was taken by the Butterfield Stage Route that brought many Americans to California along the southern route between 1858 and 1861. Plaques marking the sites of Indian petroglyphs, the Butterfield Stage stops and the Serrano adobes are still found along this road.



# Timeline - The Spanish-Mexican Influence



*Bernardo Yorba*

**1818** - Leandro Serrano became the first Spanish settler in this area.

**1849** - Bernardo Yorba took over the Prado property and established a cattle & sheep ranch.

1800

1820

1830

1840

1850



*Serrano Family Portrait*

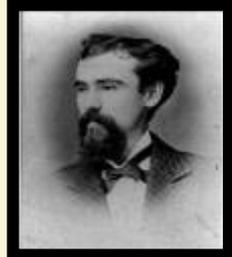
**1819** - Leandro Serrano began a cattle ranch in Temescal Canyon.

**1838** - Juan Bandini took possession of the land where Prado Basin is today.

# Town Founders



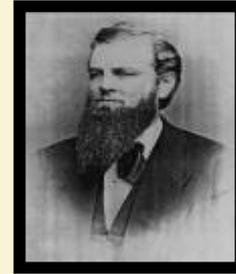
A.S. Garretson



Adolph Rimpau



Robert Taylor



George L. Joy



Samuel Merrill

In 1886, developer Robert Taylor persuaded his partners, Rimpau, Joy, Garretson and Merrill to form the South Riverside Land and Water Company. Together they raised approximately \$110,000 to purchase approximately 12,000 acres of good agricultural land. Taylor realized the importance of water for the soon to be developed community, and additional funds were used to ensure that sufficient water rights were obtained. Taylor hired Anaheim engineer H. C. Kellogg to design a circular Grand Boulevard three miles round. Early residents used to parade their fancy buggies on this circular street that enclosed the main functions of the community: schools, churches, residences and stores. To the north along the railroad tracks were the manufacturing plants and packing houses. The southern end of town was left to the citrus industry, and the mining companies were established just outside the city's southeastern and eastern city limits.

The town's founders initially named their development South Riverside after the successful citrus community of Riverside, just a few miles away. Almost all of the new settlers planted orange and lemon trees in hopes of gaining future profits. New groves continued to spring up and by 1912 there were 5,000 acres of established lemon and orange groves.



The old Taylor building in Corona, which housed a meat market and real estate office.

# Old Corona

On July 13, 1896 residents voted to incorporate and change the name of the community to Corona, which is Spanish for "crown," in honor of the City's circular Grand Boulevard. Grand Boulevard and its surrounding area still proudly display many of the homes built in the early days of Corona. During the teens and twenties, Corona citizens built numerous churches, a library and a new city hall.



Old St. Edward's "Rock" Church, 1923.



Old City Hall (no longer standing)



Old Main Street, 1936.



Laying down sidewalks and curbs, 1911.

# Road Races



On September 9, 1913, in observance of California's Admissions Day, Corona residents celebrated with an international automobile race on the Boulevard. The event attracted such auto racing greats of Ralph De Palma, Barney Oldfield, Terrible Teddy Tetzlaff and Earl Cooper. More than 100,000 people came to the town of 4,000 to watch Cooper win the race and a prize of \$8,250. It was so successful that races were held again in 1914 and 1916. The demise of the road races were due not only to the tragic deaths which occurred in 1916, but because of the cost and local effort needed to stage such an extravagant event.



# Citrus Industry



By 1913 Corona shipped more fruit than any other town in Southern California. In 1961 citrus was still considered the backbone of Corona's economy, and the largest source of revenue. In that year citrus covered 7500 acres.

By 1915 the production of lemons was exceeding national demand, and local businessmen worked together to form the first Lemon Exchange By-Products Company in the United States. Located on Joy and the railroad tracks, this co-operative was eventually bought out by Sunkist. In 1954 they employed over 700 people and marketed a variety of lemon products for worldwide disbursement. The plant produced citric acid, lemon oil, lemon juice and pectin which helped Corona gain the nickname "Lemon Capital of the world." As housing developments began to overtake the Southern California citrus orchards, Sunkist found that the lack of a local supply was forcing them to move. They closed their Corona plant in 1982.



Sunkist factory on Joy Street.



Citrus workers at Jameson packing house.



American Fruit Growers farm workers



Ladies in Packinghouse

# Corona's Citrus Laborers

## Labor History in Corona

The backbone of the citrus industry has always been its labor force, and laborers have a rich—and fairly well documented—history in Corona. For the most recent and detailed research, consult Dr. Jose Alamillo's dissertation manuscript *Bittersweet Communities: Mexican Workers and Citrus Growers on the California Landscape, 1880-1941*:

**“At one point, Corona planted over 7,500 acreage of citrus fruit in seven ranches, and processed over 30,000 fruit daily through a dozen packinghouses and a lemon by-products factory, and employed over 80% of the total city population.” (p.4)**

## The Field



Mrs. Munoz picking fruit.



Laborers in Corona picking fruit

The winter of 1912-1913 was a chilly one for the Riverside area. This time, known as the “Big Freeze,” brought snow to Corona's citrus crops, with temperatures as low as 20 degrees Fahrenheit. According to Dr. Jose Alamillo, “While some citrus districts used the latest orchard technology to save their crop, a majority had to rely on their employees who were awakened in the middle of the night to light up smudge pots. The oil in the heaters would burn out completely during the night and they had to be refilled the next day. This required much labor and the men were forced to work day and night with almost no sleep.” A smudge pot is on display in the Heritage Room gallery.



Old adobe homes (no longer standing) used to house laborers in Corona.



Men lighting smudge pots during the Big Freeze of 1913.

# Corona's Citrus Laborers

## Packing Houses



Jameson Packing House.

## Workers



A group photo of Corona Bracero laborers. The Bracero Program was instituted in 1942 to encourage workers in economically stressed Mexico to work in the United States. Bracero contracts were controlled by independent farmers associations and the Farm Bureau. After the program closed in the early 60s, many Braceros were forcibly sent home. Some managed to remain in the U.S. and continued their work as migrant laborers.



Loading Crates onto Boxcar.



On February 27, 1941, Corona's packinghouse workers went on strike to protest citrus growers refusal to meet with the newly formed Corona Agricultural Workers Union. Within a few days, over 800 strikers surrounded the city's packinghouses. City council members responded by enacting anti-picketing ordinances, but citrus growers were unable to stop the strike. Finally, over two months later, after gaining representation from the AFL-CIO union, negotiations began and the strike ended.

# Leisure & Society

Corona is a town built around labor, but that does not mean that workers spend all of their time working. Many Corona laborers and their families enjoyed diversions provided by local theaters, dances, sports teams, clubs and organizations.



*El Teatro Chapultepec*, located on Main Street between 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.

According to Dr. Jose Alamillo, "Compared to larger cities like Los Angeles, with more established theatre district, Corona was relatively isolated with only one movie theater. However, Mexican patrons were routinely segregated into separate seating arrangements. For this reason, *El Teatro Chapultepec* became an important social and recreational space for the entire Mexican community."



A picnic by the roadside, 1939.



The Ambassadors Auto Club and their cars, c. 1950s.



Leonard Colbern & Lucille Lloyd at their engagement party, 1918.



The Varelas and Aparicios at a LULAC party, c. 1940.



Corona Cubs baseball team, c. 1940.



The Corona girls softball team at City Park on Sixth Street.



Corona residents at a local tavern.



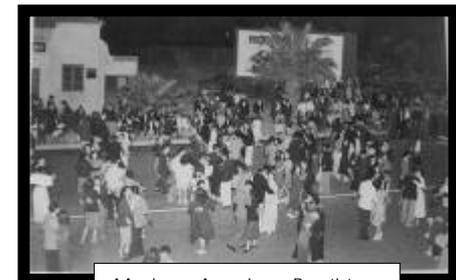
Cinco de Mayo parade on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, 1945.



Clement Joseph Todd and children reading in their living room, c. 1935.



Mary Tucker's Birthday Party, 1931. Mary Tucker's annual party is the precursor to the Old Timers Annual Picnic.



Mexican-American Baptist Church, street dance, c. 1950s.

# Mining, Dairy & Agriculture



Agriculture has always played a significant role in Corona's history. The land to the northwest was more suitable for alfalfa, grain, sugar beets, tomatoes, beans, walnuts and dairy land as far back as 1914. In the 1930s the average dairy consisted of 5-10 acres with 35 to 70 cows. By 1982 operations had become highly mechanized with almost 500 cows per 60 to 200 acres. With increased development the future of agricultural pursuits within the city limits is significantly decreasing.

Mining has always played a secondary but vital role to the more prominent citrus industry. Now that citrus has declined and the mines remain, they have again become a focal point in Corona industry.

Historically this area is known for having the only productive tin mine in the country, and it produced tin until 1893. Other more successful mining ventures included the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (previously Blue Diamond mine,) the Pacific Clay Company (organized in 1886,) Redlands Clay Tile, Maruhachi Ceramics, Monier Roof Tile and U.S. Tile.

By 1954 the city had more than 11,000 inhabitants and was home to such industries as the Corona Clipper Company, Liston Brick Company, Borden Food Products and Tillotsen Refractories. The only oil wells in Riverside were located in this area.



**Day crew at the Blue Diamond mine, 1926.**

# War Years

Like any other city, Corona has been affected by war. Here are just a few photos of those turbulent years.

## Civil War



Though Corona was not founded until after the Civil War, one veteran was known to have lived here. Mr. Henry Cunningham is the only known Corona veteran of the Civil War.

## World War I



Soldiers and friends visiting San Diego during WWI.



Women knitting for the Red Cross during WWI.

## World War II



A group of soldiers at the Corona ammunition dump take a break for a photo.

Corona resident Joe Dominguez was killed in combat in 1943. The local American Legion named their post "The Joe Dominguez American Legion Post" in his honor



Father of Corona resident June Wong.

Corona's Grand Ave was seen as a possible target for enemy bombs (because of its target-like shape). This lookout tower was used to spot enemy planes.



# Korea



John Zarate was a paratrooper in the Korean conflict.



**If you have photos of yourself or loved ones that you would like to see in our collection, please stop by the Heritage Room. We can take the photo itself or make digital scans so that you don't have to part with your family treasures.**

# Vietnam



Rudy Felipe. Photo taken in Vietnam.

In 1996, Corona was invited to participate in the City of Riverside's Military Roll of Honor memorial, which recognizes the men and women of Riverside County who died while on active military duty. The names were compiled and sent in by Mayor Andrea M. Puga. A copy of the document is available in the Heritage Room. The following Corona men and women were killed while on active duty:

## World War I

Maxfield A. Baird  
Charles M. Craig  
Chester Husted  
John E. Provensal  
Eaton W. Blickhahn  
Robert Curl  
Laning R. MacMillan  
Floyd Sandifer  
Harry Weibel  
William E. Colven  
George Georgakis  
Charles I. Nichols  
Elmer Tye

## World War II

Clyde E. Agee  
Wilmer L. Buzan  
Edward J. Casey  
Joe S. Dominguez  
Ralph F. Garton  
Joe S. Hurtado  
Marion J. McDaniel  
Milton M. Miguel  
Frederick G. Moffett  
James L. Olmsted  
James H. Pate  
William A. Reed  
Wesley S. Self

Neal E. Snipes  
Lloyd H. Stewart  
Frank J. Tomer  
Franklin N. Anderson  
Sewell F. Carter  
Russell P. Cunningham  
Alfred A. Esquibel  
Clifton L. Hammond  
Marvin L. Lamb  
Arthur F. McDonald  
Conrad C. Mills  
Lyle Munger  
Tiburcio Parks  
Louis B. Perez

Kenneth S. Roof  
Darrel Skinner  
Charles E. Spiess  
Arvil A. Thorn  
Gustavo R. Villapando  
Louis R. Avalos  
Tereso J. Cisneros  
John N. Diaz  
Ralph Fife  
Byron Holcomb  
Truman Luga  
Charles R. McGregor  
Abel C. Mosqueda  
Denby D. Noble

Wyman Parks  
Norman Pierson  
Claude Sanford  
Thomas B. Smith, Jr.  
Fred J. Speiss  
Edward Tomer

## Vietnam

Miguel Z. Contreras  
Robert E. Jones  
Rudolf O. Nunez  
Manuel V. Torres  
Mack Wooley, Jr.  
Phillip H. Sauer  
Luey V. Holland  
Frank Daniel Leal  
Larry J. Orosco  
Robert Weller II  
Bruce W. Paulson  
Joseph Trejo Jr.  
Narven O. Whitman, Jr.

George A. Ingalls  
Edward G. Mathern  
Kenneth W. Tingle  
Charles G. Woods  
Archie J. Roberts, Jr.  
Robert L. Wilkes

## Desert Storm

Adam Hoage



# 1950s & Early '60s



Like many communities across the country, Corona enjoyed a postwar boom that included an increase in population which created a need for family dwellings or housing tracts.

Below are a few ads from the Corona High School yearbook (1953 & 1955) for appliances and services in Corona.



175 Best Philco television set in the country with 14" TELEVISION CENTER 475 Home Phone 1544 W



196 Assembly car line 3C DRIVE-ON-SELF 1500 Home Phone 1544 W



"Double space." ROBINSON and BENEDICT STATIONERS 519 S. Main St. Phone 556



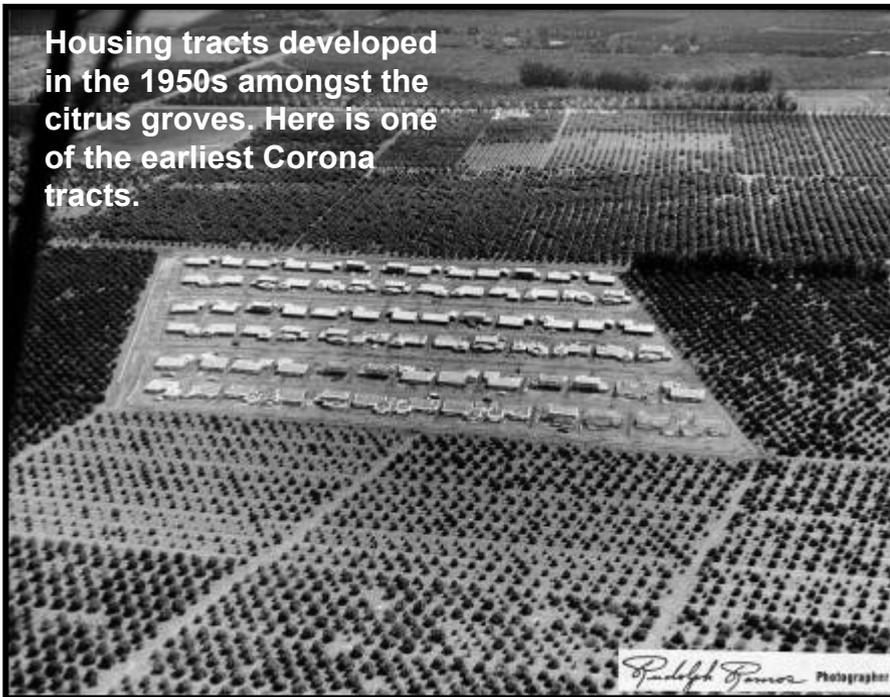
"The milliner always sings twice." GRABNER FURNITURE and APPLIANCES 501 S. Main St. Phone 1576

Many Mexican American veterans and their families formed clubs and organizations in Corona after the war. Clubs such as Los Amigos and the Corona branch of the American Legion were founded in the post-war years.



Los Amigos Club members, c. 1950.

Housing tracts developed in the 1950s amongst the citrus groves. Here is one of the earliest Corona tracts.



Between 1940 & 1960, Corona's population skyrocketed!

1940 – pop. 8,756

1950 – pop. 10,223

1960 – pop. 13,336



# 1960s – 1970s

As Southern California began to grow, so did Corona. The Riverside Freeway (Highway 91) was constructed through Corona in 1961. Downtown Corona went through urban renewal in the late 60s and 70s, razing the old and putting in a new downtown. Buildings such as the Opera House (pictured) and the Carnegie Public Library (also pictured) were demolished. By 1963, 4,000 new homes were planned by developers. The Lemon Products Plant ( a division of Sunkist) was the largest employer in town in the 60s, employing over 600 people.



**Corona's population continued to shoot upward between 1960 and 1980.**

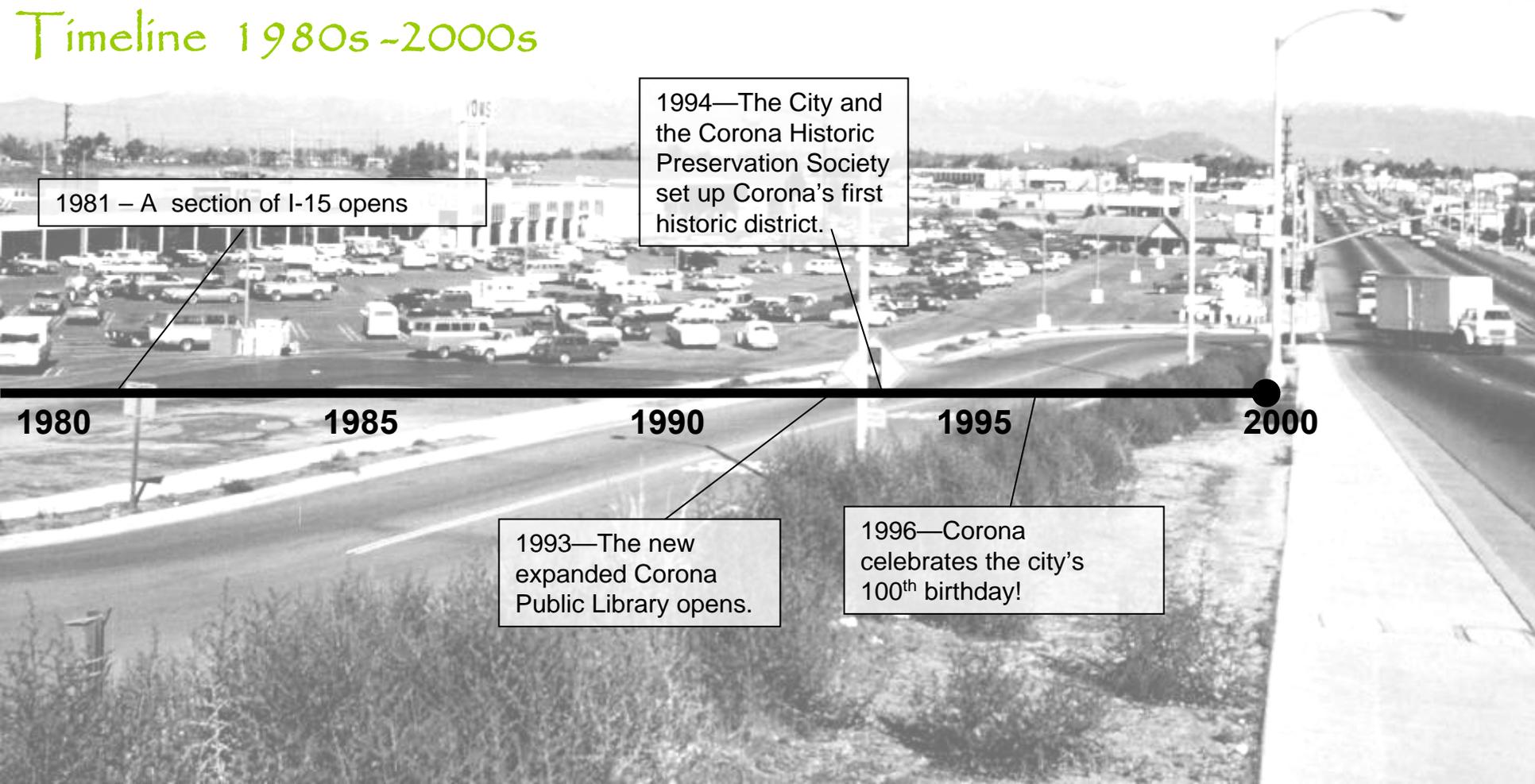
**Population 1960 – 13,336**

**Population 1980 – 37,400**

# 1980s-Present

By 1989, the I-15 went in to the east of town, and development of Sierra del Oro, Corona Hills and South Corona were in full gear. New commercial developments began opening on Lincoln Avenue, McKinley Avenue and in Sierra del Oro. The population had grown to 61, 035 people and the old Corona raceway was sold to make room for the development of the McKinley shopping area.

## Timeline 1980s-2000s



1981 – A section of I-15 opens

1994—The City and the Corona Historic Preservation Society set up Corona's first historic district.

1993—The new expanded Corona Public Library opens.

1996—Corona celebrates the city's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!

1980

1985

1990

1995

2000

# Traffic!

## History of Highways Around Corona

By **Chris-Tina Smith**, Heritage Room Senior Librarian

**“I remember when there was no one on Interstate 15”**

Every casual conversation in Corona seems to turn to traffic. The Corona Crawl has made Corona famous during both morning and evening drive time traffic reports. A 1962 Chamber pamphlet states “No traffic problems occur on this well designed modern divided highway.”

The story begins with 1956 Interstate Highway Act established by the federal government to help states find new modern highways. The first section was completed in 1957 near the 60/215 interchange in Riverside. (This section is currently getting \$317 million facelift) The Corona section opened to much fanfare on April 16, 1961, taking traffic off Sixth St. which had been the main traffic route since the founding of Corona in 1886. In December 1970 and November 1971, the final two sections were completed connecting Corona and Riverside to Orange County through the Santa Ana Canyon. This opened Orange County residents to the cheaper housing in Corona. Today, the freeway is as wide as gets through the canyon. Another favorite traffic lament is “I remember when there was no one on Interstate 15”

The creation of I-15 is a 30 year saga beginning in 1959 when the California Highway Commission selected the route for a highway between Devore and Corona. US highway buffs note this eliminated US 395 south of Adelanto, which was replaced in whole by I-15E and I-15. It appears that initially (in 1963) there were no plans to eliminate any portion of US 395, so it would have continued all the way to San Diego with I-15 ending at I-10 in Colton. The State of California pulled off a major coup in 1972 by having unconstructed state routes 31 and 71 (slated as 6-8 lane freeways) designated as I-15. This meant that the State saved hundreds of millions of dollars by having I-15 transferred from an already existing freeway to almost entirely new alignment.

In Corona this was heralded with joy. The residents of Corona had been protesting the amount of traffic on its streets on Sunday, because of the lack of a highway. In Norco, this new plan resulted in a law suit to halt construction between Mira Loma and Norco. The southern section connecting Corona with Temecula and San Diego was in 1981 with a temporary connection between Highway 91 and Highway 15. In 1982, the judge lifted the injunction and the construction begins on the Norco section and the complete connectors between Highway 91 and Highway 15. Not until June 1989, the freeway was completed through Norco with all the connectors. Finally, Highway 15 was complete to Canada.

### **INTERSTATE 15**

**Number of Miles**-1435 miles

- California- 290 miles
- Nevada- 122 miles
- Arizona- 29.40 miles
- Utah- 402 miles
- Idaho- 195 miles
- Montana- 397 miles

**Southern End**- San Diego, CA just south of I-8

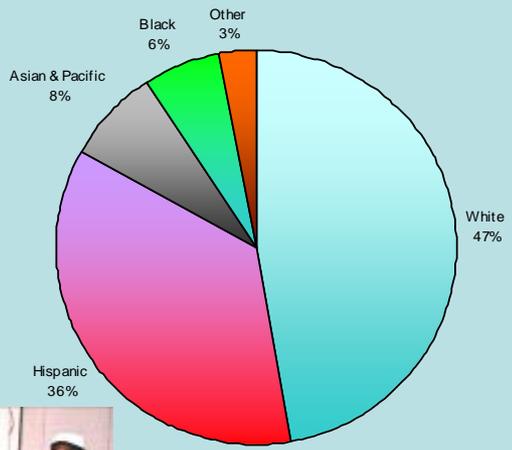
**Northern End**- Sweetgrass, MT at Canadian border



# Corona Today...

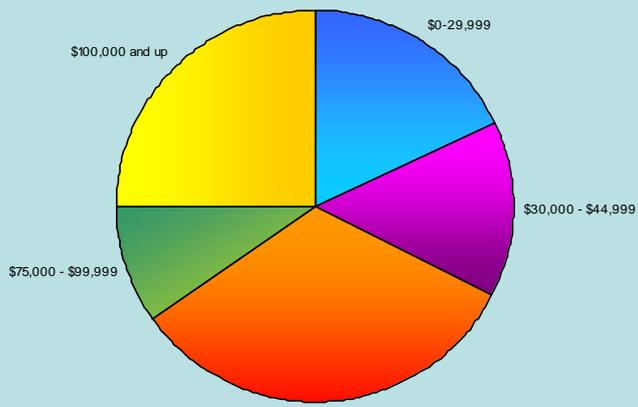


Race/Ethnicity Distribution



US Census, 2000.

Income Distribution



US Census, 2000.

**Corona continues to be one of the fastest growing cities in California. Over 70% of city dwellings are single-family detached homes. The city has over 32 parks covering 260 acres. Since 2000, Fender Music Museum of the Arts built its new facility on Main Street & Harrison. Main Street began an architectural and sculptural revitalization that continues today. A Metrolink station opened in Corona at North Main Street. Crime has consistently declined in the past 10 years with a 40% decline from 1993-2000!**