

The South Bay's Rush For Crystalline Gold

"It takes five years for a 'pondman,' who works the salt ponds, to gain the basic knowledge needed to do the job. Even then, Mother Nature will throw you a curve. The weather changes everything."
Butch Paredes, 3rd generation salt worker

Gold! News of its finding in the Sierra Nevada in 1848 brought a global rush of hopeful humanity to the Bay Area. Most followed the gold, but one man who stayed, John Johnson, started a South Bay "salt rush" in 1854 when he realized he could grow salt crystals from bay waters.

By 1901, the California Salt Company had built a complex of grand buildings, machinery, salt ponds, and jobs near the outlet of Alameda Creek to your right.

Today, Cargill harvests 500,000 tons of salt each year, using solar and wind power to crystallize the salt from bay brines. This is one of only two coastal salt works in the entire United States.



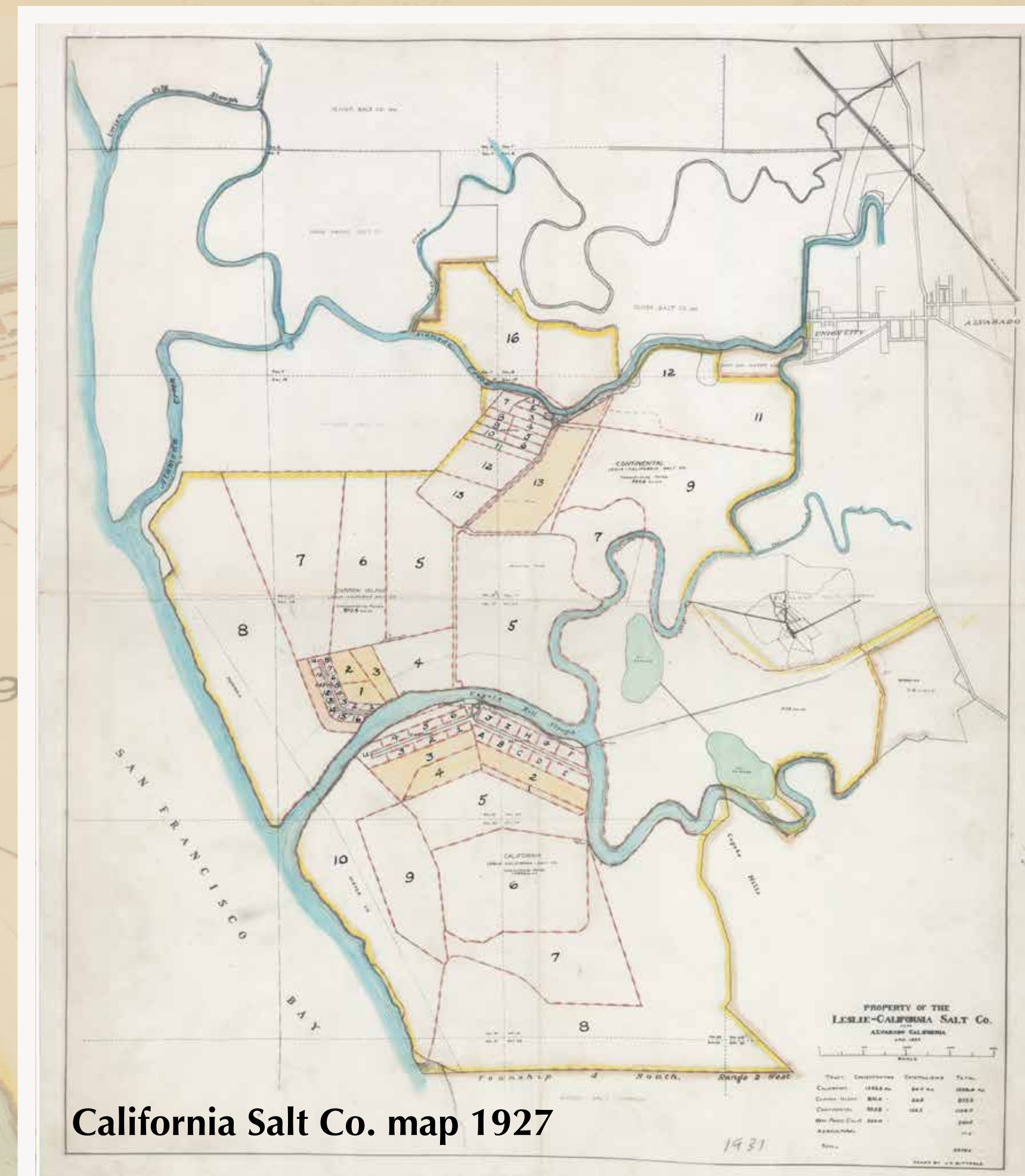
California Salt Company Refinery at the mouth of Alameda Creek 1917: as salt purity improved, California's food markets expanded.



Archimedes Screw Pumps: Pioneer salt makers used these windmills to move salt brines through the salt pond system.



Harvesting by pick and shovel continued until 1936, when the mechanical harvester was invented.



California Salt Co. map 1927



Salt was used to refine silver ore. Discovery of the Nevada silver lode drove salt demand.