UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS Revised

1. STATE	2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO.
California	XV - Mining Frontier

3. NAME(S) OF SITE	4. APPROX. ACREAGE
New Almaden	4,000 acres

5. EXACT LOCATION (*County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet*)

Santa Clara County, 14 miles south of San Jose, via Almaden Road.

6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (*Also administrator if different from owner*)

New Almaden Community Club, Inc., and various private owners.

7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (*Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant*)

The New Almaden Mine, the first quicksilver deposit discovered in North America, was one of the four major sources of the world's supply of quicksilver. Until the discovery of the cyanide process in 1887, quicksilver was the world's chief reduction agent of gold and silver. Metal from the New Almaden mine thus made possible the rapid development of the great gold and silver quartz mining industry of California and the Comstock Lode in Nevada in 1850's and 60's. Ranking as California's oldest mine, the New Almaden Mine has also produced more than $70,000,000 in quicksilver, thus making it the most valuable single mine in that state.

The original discovery of the bright red, eye-catching mineral known as cinnabar was made long before the white man first visited California. Santa Clara Indians used cinnabar to paint their bodies a bright red. In 1824 information from the Indians led Antonio Surol, a Mexican, to New Almaden ore deposit, and believing it contained silver, he made an unsuccessful attempt to extract that metal. Effective discovery of the New Almaden mine, however, dated from 1845, when Andreas Castillero, a Mexican army officer, recognized and proved that the ore contained quicksilver or mercury. On November 22, 1845 Castillero filed a claim with the Mexican government for the land.

During the winter of 1846-47, Castillero sold part of his shares in his New Almaden mine, so-named after the world's greatest quicksilver mine, Almaden, in Spain, to the English firm of Barron, Forbes, & Co. of Tepic, Mexico, in order to obtain the capital required to develop his mine. In November 1847, Alexander Forbes of the English firm arrived, with a corps of Mexican miners and appliances for mining quicksilver. Crude refining methods resulted in a limited production of mercury in 1848.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (*Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works*)

See Page 3.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (*Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, HABS, etc.*)

Historic American Building Survey (Almaden 1936).

10. PHOTOGRAPHS * ATTACHED: YES ☐ NO ☐	11. CONDITION	12. PRESENT USE (*Museum, farm, etc.*)	13. DATE OF VISIT
(12)(9)1234)(240-42)1247) XX	Original Bldgs.-good.	Residence	April, 1959

14. NAME OF RECORDER (*Signature*)	15. TITLE	16. DATE
Charles W. Snell Charles W. Snell	Historian	April 8, 1964

*DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10½ SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
California	New Almaden

The discovery of placer gold at Sutter's mill in January 1848 and the resultant exploitation of the vast deposits of the Mother Lode was soon to enormously expand the demand for quicksilver. During the early placer mining which prevailed in California from 1848 to 1860, mercury was thrown on the riffle bars or cleats of the pan or cradle, sluice box or Long Tom, to amalgamate with the small particles of floating gold.

In the quartz mining, which was developed by California after 1852, quicksilver, which has the property of amalgamating with both gold and silver, was vital. Here the ground or powered gold-bearing ore was mixed with mercury and water, and the gold then separated by gravity process.

In 1850, under the superintendence of Henry W. Halleck, the New Almaden mines began large scale production, producing some 532,000 pounds of quicksilver that year. By 1854 production reached about 1,000,000 pounds a year, and New Almaden was second only to the Almaden mine in Spain, and outranked the Idria mine in Austria, and the Huancavelica mine in Peru in output. The gold mines of California used about 76,000 pounds a month in 1856 and in the 1860's the Comstock Lode in Nevada also became a good market. In 1865, the New Almaden mine contributed 60% of the California and Nevada consumption of mercury. By this date 1200 men, mostly Mexicans, worked at the mine, which had by then yielded a total of some $20,000,000. By 1881 this mine had produced a total of 54,378,418 pounds of mercury. In 1864 the Quicksilver Mining Company of New York and Pennsylvania purchased the mine from the English company for $1,700,000 and remained the owner until 1915. From 1867 to 1873 a combination of mine owners and the Bank of California formed an agreement which gave them a monopoly of quicksilver output in the United States and enabled them to fix prices.

After April 1873, mine production then fluctuated as new "pods" or ore pockets were discovered and exhausted, and shafts up to half a mile in depth were sunk. In 1927 no production was recorded for the first time since 1849 (except for the 1858-61 period), when the mine was closed because of a legal battle over its ownership), but the mine was reactivated during World War II. The mine is still worked sporadically today, as market prices and mining costs permit.

Present Appearance.

There are numerous and well-preserved remains today in the former mining town of New Almaden. Near the northern entrance to the town stands "Casa Grande", a palatial brick, adobe and wood, three-story structure. Erected in 1854 by Henry Halleck as the mine superintendent's residence, "Casa Grande" today serves

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as a club house. Lining the town's main street, which forms a loop in the canyon, are twenty-nine other structures erected in the 1850's: These include one brick and adobe one-story store, one brick house, three adobe one-story miner-residences, and twenty-four board and batten one-story miners' houses. All are original, little changed on the exterior, and are now being utilized as private residences.

Hill Road leads from the southern end of town west to the New Almaden mine on Mine Hill. This area is private property and is not usually opened to visitors, as the mine is still being occasionally worked. On Mine Hill are located the English and Mexican Camps. Near the entrance to Hill Road still stands an oblong building, a brick and adobe one-story structure, which served as the mine office. At English Camp there still stands an original school house and two adobe residences. There are no surface remains left at the Mexican Camp. The top and sides of Mine Hill are dotted with abandoned tall brick chimneys, shafts and flumes.

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8. Bibliographical References

Edgar H. Bailey, "The New Almaden Quicksilver Mines," in Geologic Guidebook of the San Francisco Bay Counties, (Bulletin 154, San Francisco, Division of Mines, Dec. 1951), 263-270; Donald C. Brown, "The New Almaden Quicksilver Mines, 1824-1890," unpublished M.A. thesis, San Jose State College, California, 1958; Henry W. Splitter, "Quicksilver at New Almaden," in Pacific Historical Review, XXVI (February, 1957); Kenneth M. Johnson, The New Almaden Quicksilver Mine, with an Account of the Land Claims Involving the Mine and its Role in California History (Georgetown, 1963); Hubert H. Bancroft, History of California (7 vols., San Francisco, 1884-90), VI, 554-61; VII, 656-57; Rodman W. Paul, California Gold, The Beginning of Mining in the Far West (Cambridge, 1947), 272-76.