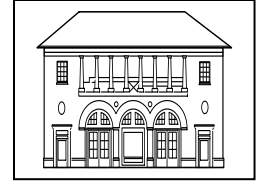


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Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library
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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Local History Room will be closed at the end of September. It will open again with volunteer help on Mondays through Thursdays from 1 PM to 4 PM. We hope this will not affect the production of the "Journal of Local History" but it will not make things easier that's for sure. We continue to try to raise money in hopes that we can ease this process and get Molly back on board. Times are tough and they don't seem to be getting better very fast. However, I personally and the Archives Board wish to wish all our friends the very best and hope your situations are not as dire as ours.

John G. Edmonds

CRYSTAL SPRINGS AND LAGUNA

By John Edmonds

The beautiful lakes that make up the San Francisco Water Company's Crystal Springs Lake System are a pleasure to look at and the water that comes to our houses from that wonderful system is sweet and clean and safe to drink. It is cold and pure, a real pleasure to consume.

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But the dams that hold back this water were not always there and the story of the people and towns that preceded them is one of special interest to all who visit the pristine water. The original creeks that drained into the Crystal Springs basin were San Mateo Creek from the north, San Andreas Creek also from the north and Laguna Creek from the south.

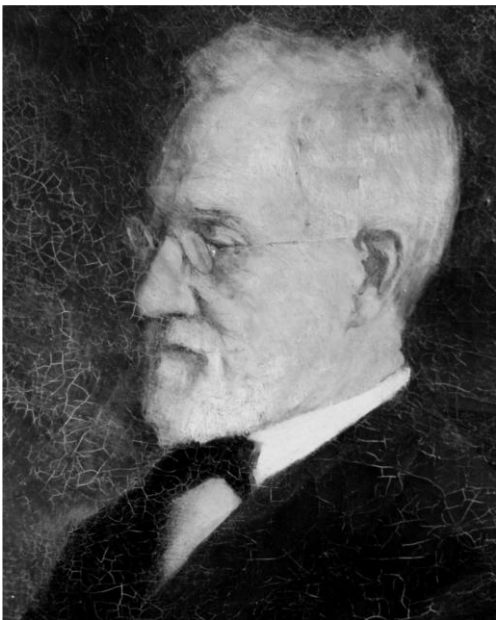


The Town of Crystal Springs

The town of Crystal Springs sprang up about the middle of the 19th century. It was associated with a Mr. Pollard. But he was not the first to place his footprints on this land.

The Spanish land grant that encompassed this area was given to Domingo Felix (name was also spelled Feliz sometimes) who established a ranch in one of the most beautiful spots south of San Francisco. The original land grant was owned by Jose Antonio Sanchez and was part of the Buri Buri land grant. Sanchez received this grant because of his role in the army at the Presidio in San Francisco. Felix got his title of the land in 1844.

Originally there were several small gathering places in the Crystal Springs Valley and the valley of the Laguna Creek which ran to the south. The Town of Laguna which was discussed earlier was closely connected to Crystal Springs especially through the school which stood, in a sense, on the line between the two villages. The school had as many as 72 students which is stark evidence of the relationship with Laguna. On April 16th, 1870 the school house burned down, the San Mateo County Gazette on that date said, "The school house in the Laguna District was totally consumed by fire on last Monday morning between four and five o'clock, together with all of its contents... We were informed by E. A. Boyden, the teacher, that the fire was discovered by Mr. Casey who resides but a short distance from the school house about half past four in the morning.... The fire was unquestionably the work of an incendiary."



James Byrnes

James Byrnes, an Irishman, came to San Mateo County in 1852. He settled in the Crystal Springs area constructing a store and residence on the grade up to the top of the hill. It was located about half way between San Felix Station and the top.

Byrnes was an energetic man: developing a small ranch at his store and representing his area on the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors for a number of years. The stage coaches which traversed the early paths from San Mateo to Half Moon Bay always stopped at the Felix ranch and at Byrnes store. The Byrnes Store survived until 1937: out living its owner by a number of years.

While the Crystal Springs Hotel was bathing in popularity in the San Francisco market place it was changing hands and with each change of hands more improvements were made. Eben Niles was instrumental in the original establishment but by the end of the year of 1860 it had apparently changed hands according to the Gazette of December 15th 1860, "Crystal Springs Hotel" "The undersigned has leased the above house and farm for five years and will spare no endeavors to make it one of the most attractive places out of San Francisco. His friends and the public can rest assured he will leave nothing undone to make it worthy of their patronage. Signed: Lewis Whittingham."

The area was known for its produce. A Mr. Sawyer whose name is perpetuated in the present picnic grounds called Sawyer's Camp was a favorite figure at the Crystal Springs Resort. He was a trainer of circus horses and the stock from many a circus wintered at the Sawyer Camp. The area was a great watermelon producer for the San Francisco market but it was known too for its corn, tobacco and many dairy items.

Count Agoston Haraszthy arrived eventually from his original home in Wisconsin. He arrived first in San Diego traveling from Missouri as many did during these gold rush years.

Haraszthy made no effort to dig for gold; after all, he had substantial money from his European ancestors and the successes in Wisconsin so much so that the town he lived in, with his parents, was named Haraszthy. In San Diego Agoston was elected sheriff and his father was elected mayor. Agoston imported Zinfandel and Muscat seeds and plants from his native Hungary. He then came north to Redwood City where he settled very briefly for a few months before he purchased 320 acres of land in Crystal Springs. He later purchased an additional 645 acres buying the land from Domingo Felix. Here he planted his vines and, after a period of time, produced the wines from the grapes. After a number of years Haraszthy moved lock, stock and barrel to Sonoma where he established the Buena Vista Winery the first winery and the foundation for the wine industry in California.

By 1861 the Gazette was reporting, in June, "A survey was made last week of a tract of land, near Crystal Springs, lately sold by Colonel Haraszthy to Mr. Sherwood of the firm of Barrett & Sherwood, jewelers in San Francisco. The tract consists of sixty acres of that beautifully wooded land, thickly covered with groves of trees, situated near the commencement of the new road from Crystal Springs to Half Moon Bay. There will be, it is understood, soon erected upon this property a splendid mansion and appurtenances, a park laid out etc." Thus the Count was gone and a new road established from San Mateo to Half Moon Bay. The road, or wide trail, had already been established and in the area of Crystal Springs the new and old roads came first to the gates of the Haraszthy property then made a sharp uphill turn stopping next at the Byrnes' store then traveling over the hill to Spanishtown or Half Moon Bay.

The Crystal Springs Valley was a spectacularly pretty valley with a beautiful stream running through dense oak and madrone. The rocky surface with natural asbestos, which can still be found along road cuts, added to the stunning beauty of the area.

The San Mateo County Gazette wrote, on August 14, 1863: "Laws of the Crystal Springs Mining District. A meeting of the citizens and miners was held at the Crystal Springs Hotel in San Mateo County on July 22, 1863 for the purpose of organizing and locating the boundaries of a mining district.

J. H. Small was elected chairman and P. L. Hall was elected secretary of said meeting. It was moved and carried that the boundaries of the district shall be limited to eight miles each way, Crystal Springs Hotel being the center of said district and shall be known as the Crystal Springs Mining District." A substantial ledge of quick silver, or cinnabar, was located in the Valley and a number of people thought they were going to get rich. The vein all too quickly fell apart and the venture was nothing like what they had hoped for.

By the mid 1870s the Spring Valley Water Company was organized and the proposed dam construction was becoming more than just a rumor. While the visitors to the Crystal Springs Hotel were still making their spring, summer and fall journeys from San Francisco and other locations, the numbers were getting smaller and smaller to the point that the business was no longer viable. The Gazette, on August 22, 1874: "Auction Sale of the entire furniture and fixtures of the Crystal Springs Hotel, Thursday September 3, 1874. Sale to begin at 10 am. The furniture consists of, as follows: parlor furniture, Brussels carpets, sofas, chairs, marble top tables, French mirrors and curtains, hat racks, what-nots, stoves etc. Fifty chamber sets as follows: black walnut, mahogany and cottage, bed room carpets curtains, toilet sets etc. spring mattresses, hair mattresses, pulu mattresses. Extra heavy white blankets, pillows chamber linen, etc. Dining room furniture as follows: seven fine extension tables, first class and heavy; ten dozen chairs, crockery glassware in endless variety. Bar room furniture as follows: one superior French mirror, 4x6 feet, glass racks, one clock, two office desks, bar glasses, chandeliers, lamps etc. Kitchen furniture as follows: two French ranges, broilers, kitchen utensils. Also wagons, horses, cows etc. Sale positive. Terms cash. William A. Clark, auctioneer."

September 12, 1874: "'San Andres Valley – Crystal Springs Lake In 1851 was erected the old Crystal Springs Hotel which has undergone a varied experience having to battle with time and flood and never a pecuniary success although at times visited by immense numbers of people from San Francisco who were drawn thither by the attractions of charming scenery, healthful climate and pure

water. The grounds were laid out with much taste; the gardens abounded with rare plants, arbors and fountains. Slowly but surely, the locality lost its importance to pleasure seekers and one year ago the hotel was permanently closed. Last week this roomy and handsome building was dismantled, its furniture disposed of and its doors closed never to be opened till torn from their hinges.”

The Times and Gazette on January 1, 1887: “An iron bridge will be built across the valley above the dam of the upper Crystal Springs Reservoir before the water in the new reservoir rises to that level. The new road constructed by the water company leaves the Crystal Springs road at the Polhemus gate and ascends the canyon at a steeper grade, attaining an elevation many feet higher than the old road. From the lower road it has a dizzy look particularly where it passes the high and precipitous bluff which is so conspicuous an object from the old road. At that point the new road has been widened and its outer side walled with rock. From the old road the lower edge of this wall seems to be resting on a long piece of timber and suggests the possibility of future danger and expense to the county. The road runs from the Polhemus gate across the dam of the upper Crystal Springs reservoir to Byrnes’ store, a distance of less than three and a half miles.”

As early as 1860 the San Francisco Water Company began investing in and acquiring land in the Crystal Springs Valley. They first acquired the rights to the Pilarcitos Creek area and built a small earthen dam. They also built a 32 mile pipe taking the water to a termination point at Laguna Honda reservoir in San Francisco. During this period the company also leased 95 acres which included the area where the town of Crystal Springs was located.

By 1874 the company was ready to become more serious about owning the entire lot so they purchased the town tract for \$37,500 and this area was the most strategic. The company was upset with themselves because they could have purchased the same 95 acres in 1860 for \$9,000. Unfortunately the large amount of money spent to purchase the property required them to postpone construction for a number of years thus leaving the businesses and farms to

continue in their prosperity.

In a somewhat bitter statement the Redwood City Standard wrote on July 29, 1830: “All of these activities ceased when the needs of San Francisco made the full development of these excellent water resources imperative. Hotel, farms, fields, dairies, everything had to go in the end the entire 35 square miles of catchment were swept clean of all human habitation. Today this is regarded as the most highly developed catchment area in the country.”

In March of 1890 the laborers and cement began arriving in San Mateo. The men were employed in cleaning up the grounds and preparing the Spring Valley roads for the heavy loads of cement and other materials which would be using soon. They could not start working on the dam itself until the flow of water could be stopped or diverted. The men filled up the hotel and boarding houses of San Mateo and were transported by large buggies to the work site each morning and back after work. The cement was shipped from England to San Francisco where it was transferred to smaller ships for working in the bay. The first shipment contained 8,000 barrels of cement and two more ships were following close behind. The holding area was off Coyote Point where the barrels had to be held until they could be shipped to the work site and put to use.

On May 31, 1890 the Standard wrote: “The engines which furnish power to work the rock, crusher, mixers etc at the site of the Spring Valley Dam above San Mateo Were begun last week. Excavations have been made to bed rock on either side of the structure, the debris and lumber cleared away and new trestles built. Everything is in readiness to commence work in raising the dam thirty feet higher which has now begun. The force of men at work at present numbers about 150 but as the progress of the work advances additions will be made until the number reaches 400 or 500. The work of handling sand was begun Monday when a dozen six-horse teams arrived in San Mateo for that purpose. The sand is brought from North Beach San Francisco to Coyote Point by schooner. Three vessels are now engaged in this service. Each vessel is provided with a donkey engine which unloads the sand in buckets after the manner of unloading coal vessels in San Francisco. A large bin and circular platform at Coyote Point have been put in place and each team drives out upon the platform and loads by means of a chute.

Herman Schussler, an engineer of some fame, was hired to build the dam and supervise the construction. The dam consists of hundreds of individual cement blocks all of slightly varying sizes. They are six to ten feet high, up to forty feet long and ten to fifteen feet wide. They were all cast in irregular, interlocking geometric shapes.

The dam which withstood the great earthquake of 1906 is the closest thing to the San Andreas Fault line, which runs in the bottom of the valley. In geologic terms the ponds that existed before the dam was built are called "Sag ponds." The expertise of Herman Schussler is beautifully displayed by the pristine lake that was created.

"Messers O'Malley and Warren have a contract with the Water Company to deliver at the dam not less than 100 cubic yards of sand per day and to accomplish this with the employment of 12 to 14 six horse teams pulling two wagons each. At the present time there are about 12,000 barrels of cement in the company's warehouse in San Mateo and several thousand barrels in addition are expected almost daily to arrive by ship from England." The new barrels will be landed at Long Wharf in San Francisco and transported to San Mateo by railroad."

On Wednesday February 12, 1890 the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors took a fact finding trip to the new dam. They had a terrible and long trip on the muddy roads that took them from the train station to the dam. They found the dam to be 120 feet high and work continuing until the 176 feet that had been committed too. They were aware that this would give the City and County of San Francisco 1800 days of water during average consumption: and that consumption, being about 20,000,000 gallons, without replenishing. "The point selected for the work could not have been better chosen, it is where the canyon or gorge narrows down to a width of about 700 feet, certainly its most narrow spot for construction." This from the Times-Gazette on February 12, 1890.

The company was awaiting a shipment of 26,000 barrels of cement that had been contracted for originally.

When the work presently at hand is completed, the dam will be completed. When the dam was finally completed and the water company agreed to supply the County of San Mateo as well as San Francisco and there was no longer any memory of the beautiful city that existed where the lakes are now, people forgot the town and now drink and use the finest water in California.

But roads were a problem especially those around the lakes. It took the brilliance of Mr. Fred Drake, a resident of San Carlos to devise a solution to the problem. It seems that during the depression there were quite a number of unemployed lawyers, doctors and dentists and Drake talked to the County Board of Supervisors and they put several hundred to work building a road that joined Canada Road and Skyline Boulevard. Prior to his efforts Skyline connected with Ralston and in order to get to Woodside it was necessary to travel all the way into Belmont, then Redwood City then, via Woodside Road to the town of Woodside. 300 men worked mornings with coffee breaks. The men were brought from Redwood City and San Mateo by bus to the work site. They built this 8 foot wide road about half a mile long and they changed Woodside forever as the town had a regular boom as more people shopped the business and purchased property. Fred Drake helped hundreds of men and families. He helped a town during the depression and he solved a problem for the San Francisco Water Company.

I must add this little bit of trivia about the Water Company; it seems that when they started purchasing property for the dam it did not sit well with everybody in this county. There was only one newspaper, the San Mateo County Gazette and the editorials were definitely not to the water company's liking. The company solved the problem by buying the newspaper and installing their own editor. Suddenly the name of the paper changed to the San Mateo County Times Gazette and the tone of argument fell more favorably to the company.

In 1903 the Redwood City Democrat announced the death of Tony Oakes, a well known cook from the old days of Crystal Springs, "Tony Oakes tickled the palates of the bon vivants of this county during the pioneer days. Old timers will recall memories of the hot birds and cold bottles of long, long ago, when

the modern modes of travel were not thought of and the county road leading down from San Francisco was made gay with dashing equipages of the city's fast set.

Oakes was then conducting a fashionable place near Crystal Springs and piled up money at a phenomenal rate.

Oakes was a native of Lisbon, Portugal who came to this area after the Civil War. He served as the commissary sergeant and made himself very popular. He developed friendships with a number of generals among them Scott, Taylor, Sherman, Cadwalder and Bragg. People were drawn to him for his piano playing as well as his cooking. And they continued to be drawn in just such a fashion long after the War.

W.C. Ralston was a friend and brought Oakes to the Crystal Springs Hotel and the hotel benefited greatly for this effort. Oakes died in Sunnyvale, California in late March, 1903."

Laguna

It is very difficult to call Laguna a town as it was largely a substantial group of farms spread over a rather large area. The general location is on the south side of the bridge over the lake on highway 92 looking at the water in that valley you are looking at where the town of Laguna stood.

The community of Laguna came into existence primarily as a farming and dairy community. It was the second stop of the Levi Brothers stage coaches as they proceeded over the hill to Spanish Town or Half Moon Bay.

Laguna was different from West Union and Summit Springs in a number of ways. To begin with it was not a lumber town, it was a dairy town and most of the men who settled there had wives and children unlike the loggers who were mostly single men, or if married their wives were not present. The men who settled in Laguna were able to purchase substantial property in order to have good grasses for their cows to graze on. There were not a lot of men in Laguna as the amount of space available for them was limited.

The name "Laguna" comes from the lagoon found on the creek that was named Laguna Grande. The creek runs along the canyon provided by the San Andreas Fault.

The creek was actually called a sag pond in geologic terms and Raymundo Lake, which was part of the Laguna system, was a larger sag pond." You can see where these names come from because they were all on the map. The Creek joined with the San Mateo Creek at a place called "Las Juntas."

The San Mateo County Times and Gazette described the Laguna School District as follows on October 27, 1877, "Laguna district is bounded on the east by San Mateo and Belmont districts; on the west by Pillarcitos district. The original school house was located a short distance from the San Mateo and Half Moon Bay toll road. (Remember this is the same school house used by the Town of Crystal Springs discussed earlier) At the point where the road begins to work its course gradually up the San Mateo side of the mountain, a number of years ago the school house which stood farther up the valley was burned and since the present building was put up, Mr. Michael Casey, who has always taken a deep interest in the school, has given a lot upon which the school house stands free of rent, Messrs Casey, Throwell and Torpy compose the present Board of Trustees. Mr. Casey was elected district clerk at the beginning of the present school year. Miss Kate Fallon has been engaged in the school since last January."

LA HONDA AND BELLVALE

By John Edmonds

"Orahora Junction" was the first name for the small town that started at the junction of La Honda Road and Pescadero Road or close to that location. It was Andrew Rice Sausman who established a store at the junction, a 20 by 32 foot one story structure that was fully stocked by May 25, 1872. William H. Sears assisted in the store by purchasing one half of the inventory. Sears was the son of John H. and Nancy Sears, after whom the town of Searsville was named.

The property became known as "Sausmans." The people in that area immediately applied for a post office and promptly wrote to their congressman for assistance.

The federal government was very slow in responding to the frustration of a growing number of people who were taking up residency in the vicinity.

Let us, before we go much further, figure out where the name La Honda came from. There was a creek on several *disenos* (Spanish maps) named Arroyo Ondo. These were land grant maps of the Rancho Canada de Raymundo in 1856. The Hoffman map of the San Francisco Bay region of 1874 shows the valley of the San Gregorio Creek west of the town area as La Honda Creek. The post office was named La Honda in 1880. After 1895 the name was spelled Lahonda as one word but the original was restored in 1905.

John Howell Sears moved from Searsville in 1862 and settled in La Honda. He had purchased the Sausman store where he and his wife and their daughter, Ada J., resided and ran the store. In 1877 the Sears decided to move the store from the junction to an open area across from the bear pit to the present location of La Honda. The structures that Sears built, presumably with the help from two of the infamous Younger brothers, were a one story store and saloon 40 x 24, the addition of a two story hotel 40 x 20 in a "I" formation, a two story stable 36 x 32 half of which was especially fitted for the needs of the Knights Stage Line and their stock. Sears later built a substantial separate residence. The store was run by William Sears and the running of the hotel was leased to and independent employee. Incidentally, the Kansas State Prison Authorities said all four Younger brothers were in their custody in 1877 following a particularly botched bank robbery.

John Sears also built a blacksmith shop across the street. Blacksmithing was John's original trade and he worked that trade at Searsville before getting into the hotel business and becoming the postmaster for the town that took his name. Shortly after he received the post office job and became the town's name sake he left and came to La Honda. The blacksmith shop is all that is left of the hotel business and it is now a saloon called "Applejacks."

In the same year the population of La Honda was growing and the religious needs were increasing. The San Mateo County Times-Gazette wrote on June 16, 1877: "Church Building at La Honda

After the usual afternoon services of last Sabbath at the Bell District School a small but pleasant and harmonious meeting was held at which the constitution and by-laws of the Congregational Society at Fairview San Gregorio Creek was read, re-adopted and signed by about twelve persons with a goodly prospect of quite a number more signers before the constitutional time set for the election of Church and Society officers, viz, the first Sabbath of July."

The Times-Gazette announced the death of Captain George Watkins in an article November 23, 1878: "He came to San Francisco in 1851 as master of a ship. His crew deserted him to go to the mines and he decided to remain here himself and sent his ship home to Liverpool in charge of another man. He remained in San Francisco until the next year when he came to Redwood City. At that time there was only a crude landing. He built the first frame building erected on the present site of the town on the west side of Maine Street first north of School Lane. His family was with him at that time and they removed to Pomponio Creek. He remained there but a short time and then purchased and moved onto the farm known as the "Watkins' place" on San Gregorio Creek near La Honda where he continued to reside until the time of his death... (Captain George Watkins was buried in Union Cemetery)

Captain Watkins is mentioned here to illustrate his role in both Redwood City and La Honda. He was very well known in both places and he played a special role in La Honda where he had many friends.

Robinson Jones Weeks, who came to California from his native Maine, purchased 2,300 acres of land from the federal government in 1853 about three miles east of La Honda. He and his wife Cordelia farmed these acres for many years. Robinson invested in a saw mill on San Gregorio Creek. He also received a contract for and built a road from La Honda to San Gregorio. On July 4, 1879 he built a dance hall on his ranch property to celebrate his appointment to the La Honda School Board. Weeks ran for election in 1872 and won a seat on the Board of Supervisors that he held for 3 years.

By 1880 Robinson J. Weeks had removed the machinery from his sawmill and shipped it to an employee in Washington Territory where the cutting of timber was plentiful, supplying Robinson with substantial income.

He lived on his ranch on the La Honda Road just west of the intersection of Alpine Road. The beautiful red barn he built stands today. The ranch quickly became a stage stop for Simon Knights Redwood City to Pescadero Stage Line.

In 1880 another well known business man came to La Honda. The Times & Gazette 6-12-80: "Michael Kreiss, the famous brewer of this place (Redwood City) has taken the old stand formerly kept at La Honda by Franklin Todd which he is thoroughly overhauling and refitting and will soon reopen. He plans to have an extensive and entirely new stock of general merchandise purchased exclusively for that market. The stock will consist of groceries, provisions, boots and shoes, hats and caps, clothing, hardware, woodware, wines, liquors, cigars, tobacco etc. The new establishment will be under the charge of Charles Kreiss, Michael's oldest son who will be assisted by Mr. Todd."

The Congregationalists had been worshipping in their church for quite some time. The Catholics had to travel to Half Moon Bay for services so there was great excitement when a decision was made to search for space to erect a Catholic Church in La Honda. The Times & Gazette announced on September 1, 1883 "The Roman Catholics will be able in a short time to hold services in a neat church of their own at La Honda. Mr. John Sears kindly gave one acre of his land for the purpose and a building 20x40 feet and about twenty feet high will be erected as soon as work is completed on the Half Moon Bay church." Then, two months later: "The new Catholic Church at La Honda will be dedicated on Saturday (10/25) by Reverend J. S. Alemany. Confirmation and first communion will be administered. All are cordially invited."

Let us return to Old La Honda back at the junction. John Sears and his son William decided to sell the store that Andrew Rice Sausman built. It was purchased by brothers Armand, August (Gus) and Valentine Kieffer in 1875. The Kieffer brothers came to La Honda from France. They named the now updated store the "Alpine House," adding such needed accessories as a saloon and a dance hall. Bastille Day was celebrated with vigor at the Alpine House. The business was run primarily by Armand and August Kieffer. The original La Honda post office was at this building, but, as the New La Honda grew with increasing structures and residents, the post office was moved

to Sears' store.

The store at Old La Honda closed in 1897 when Gus Kieffer died after he was thrown from a horse team he was driving and Valentine took his own life. Brother Armand died the following year. All three brothers are buried in Union Cemetery in Redwood City.

The Alpine House was replaced by the "Bonzagni Lodge" and Old La Honda continued to thrive. The palm trees that the Kieffers had planted were removed and some beautiful roses were planted in front of a greatly improved building. The restaurant was added and the building became a definite destination. Ivy grew up the walls behind the roses and tall redwood trees framed the building, giving it a dramatic setting. The Bonzagni family owned and operated the restaurant and lodge until retiring in 1931.

The restaurant was destroyed by fire in 1922 but was rebuilt immediately. The fire did not destroy the wonderful roses. In 1931 the business was sold to Tony Fedora, who attempted to dynamite it for the insurance money. The dynamite failed to go off and Fedora was caught and sent to prison. The Catholic Church took over the building and held services in it until the new church was built in La Honda.

The Boots and Saddles Lodge took over the property, and it was operated by Grace and Mac McCarty. The restaurant became very famous under the McCarty's efforts. The steaks were famous from San Francisco to San Jose. Saturday afternoon jazz concerts brought hundreds of people to town into the 1960s. The building finally succumbed to fire in 1984 and now nothing remains from what was a very special place for a lot of people for many years.

The San Mateo County Gazette on January 1, 1875 reported the marriage of Ida J. Sears, daughter of John Howell Sears to Charles Bowers Sears in La Honda. Charles Sears was from New York and living in San Francisco at 526 Howard Street. He was a photographer for the New York Gallery. He moved to La Honda and spent most of his time in town. Charles and Ida had a son a year later.

Charles Bowers Sears fought through the entire Civil War with the 14th Regiment of United States Infantry. He was promoted to Quartermaster

Sergeant and fought in that capacity through much of the war. When he came to La Honda, he also came to Redwood City where he joined the George Evans Post of the Grand Army of the Republic which held all its meetings in Redwood City.

The Blomquist brothers sold their store which was constructed west of Sears hotel and across the street about a quarter of a mile. The Cavalli brothers, who purchased the property, took over the building on January 1, 1904. The Cavalli brothers had been successful in the lumbering industry in Mendocino County for some time and immediately stocked the store with general merchandise, wines, liquors, cigars and camping equipment. Charles Cavalli was the principal merchant in the business.

The Redwood City Democrat September 5, 1912: "Mr. and Mrs. Wetherbee have sold their place at La Honda consisting of three acres to Charles Cavalli. The property is the former site of the Redwood Villa that was destroyed by fire some time ago. In years gone by the villa was the scene of many gay parties and many San Franciscans found rest and recreation there. Mr. Cavalli will move his store." In the same article, same paragraph, "much land in and about La Honda has been bought by George Pope, the millionaire lumber man."

In a separate article, the same issue of the Democrat reported that George Pope had purchased a large tract of land in La Honda. The expectation that he would cut down all the trees was calmed by the statement that he intended to convert the property into a private estate. "It will be welcome news to all lovers of nature to know that the mammoth redwood trees on the place will not be cut down."

The same issue talked about the number of camps being developed in the surrounding countryside and gave the list: "Camps Lonesome, Fern, Carman, Starvation, Deer Camp, We Three Camp, //Camp Vacation, Forest Home, Camp Laurel, Camp Fernbrook, Fairmount Camp, The Three R's, (named for Rice, Rosa and Rockwell), Camp Ritchie, Camp Dew Drop Inn, The Pollywogs, Camp Menlo, Camp Fironell, Camp Happy Hours, Standard Camp, The Rustlers, Glen Camp and Pioneer Camp."

The Cavalli brothers sold the business in February 1920 to R. E. Woodhams, his son, A. Woodhams, and Edgar D. Bartley.

The new owners took over the building in connection with their freight and stage line that operated between La Honda, San Gregorio and Pescadero. The new business was called The La Honda Mercantile Company.

No discussion about the history of La Honda would be complete without inclusion of the Zanoni Family. James and Catherine Zanoni moved into the La Honda area as dairy farmers in the late 1890s. They were well known for their flat cheeses in 25 pound cakes. James and Catherine had sons, Teddy, Armand, Matt and Jimmy. All the males in the family enjoyed hunting and fishing and their ranch, on the western outskirts of the town gave them great opportunity to spend hours and hours of pleasant time in their favorite sports. They were very well known in the town of La Honda and their progeny exists to this day.

Louis Zanoni was apparently a brother of James. The Redwood City Democrat reported on September 29, 1921 that Louis Zanoni of La Honda was in Redwood City on his way back from Los Angeles.

Moving from La Honda to Bellvale, we take a look at the Palmer Family. Jessie Palmer came to California from his native England and found work with the Hanson and Ackerson Lumber Company at its mill on Deer Creek in La Honda. He established his residence in La Honda and went back to England where he met and married Emily Osborn. He returned to La Honda and to his job with Hanson and Ackerson, but this time he was a supervisor at the company's new, large saw mill on Alpine Creek. Jessie Palmer was given the responsibility to move the mill.

According to the Gazette: November 20, 1886: "Hanson's Mill is being removed under the efficient direction of Mr. Jesse Palmer from its recent location on the San Gregorio to a site about two miles away near Alpine where a fine body of timber, chiefly redwood, but in part fir will be worked up into lumber."

Jessie and Emily had four children. Lotti was born in 1871, Rebecca (Becky) was born in 1874 and twin boys, Albert and Jessie Jr., were born

in 1881. In 1879 Jessie was elected to the position of Trustee of the La Honda School District.

The Palmer family was struck by tragedy during the 1886 diphtheria epidemic which wreaked such havoc throughout San Mateo County. Lotti died on December 5, 1886, Albert died on December 11 and Jessie Jr. died on December 16, 1886. Rebecca was taken out of the family by John Sears and protected from the disease. She remained with the Sears family for two weeks. Then Jessie and Emily took Rebecca to San Francisco where they spent a month waiting out the epidemic.

In 1888 Jessie purchased some land in Butte County and planted an orange grove for future use. He returned to La Honda and joined Frank Bell in purchasing the San Gregorio House from George Evans. Frank Bell, Jessie and Emily Palmer and Rebecca moved into the hotel. In 1892 Rebecca Palmer married Frank Bell.

The Bell family originally came to the La Honda area in the late 1850s. On August 20, 1859 James W. Bell purchased 1,200 acres from Joseph and Alfred R. Woodhams on the San Gregorio River about 4 miles west of the town of La Honda. In 1873 James Bell built a school on his property. The school opened in that year with Miss L. Coffin as teacher for less than a month when she departed and Miss Auld took over in the now formal "Bell Elementary School District."

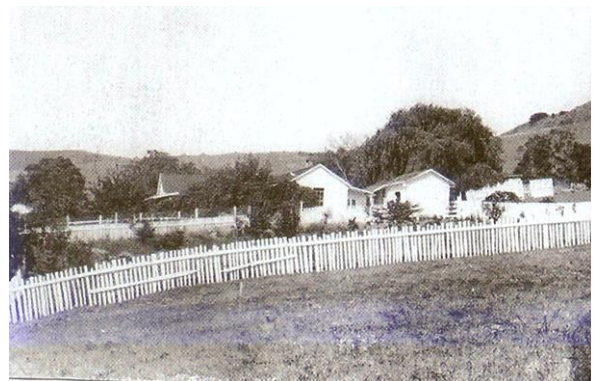


The Bell family who, at one time, was the patriarch family of Bellvale just west of La Honda. Frank Bell. The patriarch is lying in front of the tree while his wife, Rebecca Bell, is sitting in front of his legs.

Then, two years later, things began picking up in the little town of "Bellvale." This article in the San Mateo County Gazette on December 4, 1875: "We have been shown some cinnabar croppings taken from the surface of a quartz ledge located on the ranch of James W. Bell that is rich in red sulfur and mercury. Specimens of the rock have been submitted in San Francisco to scientists who pronounced them the richest in cinnabar of any chippings. The discovery was made two weeks ago by George, son of J.W. Bell and by Frank Leavitt who has been engaged in quicksilver mines for years. Machinery has been purchased and work of driving a tunnel into the ledge will be commenced immediately."

July 15, 1876: "Work on the Bellvue cinnabar mine located on James Bell's ranch on San Gregorio Creek is being vigorously prosecuted. Three men are employed sinking a shaft which is now down 75 feet. The vein is now running perpendicularly downward growing wider and the indications are considered excellent."

Engineers and others came to Bellvale and established residences while working on the mine. Similarly, the Bell School District kept increasing. At the opening of school on September 1, 1877 the number of children between the ages of five and seventeen years is now 36 with 20 of that number being on the teachers list from last year. The teacher now was Miss A.C. Warren who had taught previously in the San Mateo School District. The Board of Trustees for the Bell School District consisted of Captain George Watkins, W. D. Armstrong and James W. Bell.



The Bell Ranch with a view of the picket fence.

Things started getting better in 1895 when the Redwood City Democrat reported, April 25: "The ranch of James W. Bell a few miles southwest of La Honda has for some time shown evidences of petroleum deposits in various parts of it but on Monday last of the boys discovered a rich and copious flow on the Boges Creek which runs through the ranch close to the edge of the water. Mr. Bell naturally feels much elated over his find and he has a right to be for the indications are that his ranch covers one of the richest oil deposits on the coast and perhaps a great asphalt bed besides."

This discovery gathered the attention of capitalists and scientists and many came to investigate the flow. An expert of prominence, Mr E. J. Beane, manager of the California Natural Gas, Oil and Land Company gave this opinion "That there is a lake of oil located beneath the surface between the two springs one of which bubbles to the surface on the west corner of the ranch and runs into Boges Creek. The surface of the creek is covered with oil." Mr. Beane thought so much of the prospects that he offered Mr. Bell \$50,000 to \$100,000 to sink wells and develop the property, giving Mr. Bell one third of the net return."

James Bell eventually leased three sections of his property to oil companies. They all produced oil for several years. One of the companies was the San Mateo Oil Company, which was actually based in Arizona. S. J. Tichenor, who lived closer to La Honda than Bell, actually made this lease.



Another view of Bell Ranch from a distance.

By 1902 the resort syndrome had struck Bellvale and the Bell family joined in. The Redwood City Democrat April 4, 1902 :"(under the heading, Some Popular Summer Resorts) Bellvale – a sunny and homelike farm house situated on the banks of the San Gregorio Creek; pleasant, healthy and easy

of access. The best home cooking. Rates \$5 per week."

If you travel west on the road to San Gregorio from La Honda you will pass an almost invisible driveway (although it was never paved) that left the road on a curve and returned in the same way about 150 feet west. This was the little road that went to the "Peek-a-Boo Inn," a pretty little resort restaurant. The San Francisco Star: August 2, 1916 "The owners of Peek-A-Boo Inn at Bellvale, the pretty little mountain resort west of La Honda, are arranging to hold a big barbecue at their place on Sunday, August 13. An admission of 25 cents will be charged." An advertisement in the Redwood City Tribune May 1, 1923: "Peek-a-Boo Tavern, La Honda. Rooms and tents for rent. First class restaurant; meals at all hours. Barbecues for parties. Fishing, hunting and camping."

Bellvale continued to be looked at as a resort community and many people came to the little city for hunting and fishing. They also came to be taken by wagon to the coast and places like Pebble Beach where collections of the naturally polished stones were put in bottles and placed on mantles in the big city.

Gradually things began to change as residents moved away or passed on in life. The Redwood City Standard on October 10, 1920 wrote: "The Bellvale post office between La Honda and San Gregorio closed its doors October first. This is one of the oldest post offices in the county, its postmistress for many years being Mrs. James Bell. During the past year, owing to the establishment of a rural stage delivery only two persons were getting service at this office and the Government decided to close the place. The patrons of Bellvale will be served hereafter through the La Honda post office and by the Woodhams stage line."

The Times-Gazette announced on Friday June 30, 1933 that "After a period of declining health, James M. Bell, retired farmer and San Mateo County pioneer, passed away Wednesday at the home of his brother-in-law Henry D. McGarvey, 649 El Camino Real. He had resided here for the past ten years. His wife, the late Lila Elizabeth Bell, passed away here in March of 1926. For many years she resided in Bellvale in this county."

THE TOWN OF WEST UNION: LUMBER MILLS, WINERIES AND FARMS

By John Edmonds

If you go on Edgewood Road to the Edgewood Park driveway, you will see a sign that says, "Stage Road" and you probably wondered how this could be true. As you read further the answer to this question will become evident.

Edgewood Road was originally developed by Willard Whipple as a natural transportation route from the upper Whipple Mill on West Union Creek to Redwood Creek and the lumber docks in Redwood City. Edgewood Road was originally named Whipple's Mill Road and it was a primary source of lumber for this busy port.

Willard Whipple came to Redwood City from Navoo, Illinois where he worshiped with the Latter Day Saints (Mormons). He first used his skills at mill construction when he worked with William Littlejohn building a mill for Charles Brown on Alambique Creek.

Following his experience on the Alambique Creek, Whipple went north to the creek that falls from the Skyline area to the canyon east of the mountain. Because of the pending Civil War, Whipple named the creek West Union and built his own saw mill near the point of the creek where it turns and runs south to San Francisquito Creek. The first efforts were very rewarding at the mill and the road we now call Edgewood Road was established and was built by Whipple to haul the lumber to the Hanson – Ackerson Lumber Company in Redwood City. Shingles and fence posts were also included in these shipments.

Willard Whipple was first man to build a saw mill on West Union Creek. His first mill was started in 1852. The second person was Edwin Oakley, who built his mill where Squealer Gulch intersects with West Union Creek.

The Oakley mill was built about 1853. This mill is south of the other mills on the creek. About one year later Whipple built a second mill on West Union Creek but the mills were known as the "upper (1) and lower (2) mills.

The numbers of mill employees increased as the demand for lumber, especially milled lumber, increased. The town grew dramatically and spread out over quite a distance, largely from today's Edgewood Road and on both sides of today's Canada Road. People quickly found that the ground was very fertile and they began planting various vegetables and flowers around their newly built houses. Grapes were successful and soon two wineries were established.

Jacob and Jane Kreiss came to West Union and built the first winery. It stood about 500 yards south of Edgewood Road and about 200 yards west of Canada Road. The Kreiss winery burned down in 1888. There are pieces of broken glass where the winery stood and a very wide wagon road that runs toward Canada Road. The wagon road is lined by stones set on edge marking the sides of the road. The width of the road is wide enough that two wagons could pass going opposite directions without any trouble.

Jacob and Jane Kreiss moved to Redwood City in 1882 and joined Jacob's brother Michael and his wife Josephine. Michael was the owner of the Pioneer Brewery near Five Points in Southern Redwood City. Michael had built the brewery in 1865 and it was one of the earliest breweries. It was very popular even though it was some distance from town.

A school house was built by John Greer and donated to the town. It stood near the gate on the northwest corner of Edgewood and Canada Roads in 1859. There were 72 students registered. The school house burned to the ground on March 30th 1876.

The fire was discovered by Charles Knights when he appeared for morning classes. Charles was the son of the highly popular stage owner and driver Simon Knights who had moved to West Union following the landslide that destroyed the home at Searsville. The school house measured 23 feet by 38 feet and it was capable of housing 100 students. When the school burned down, school was held in the Kreiss home until a second school house was built further south on the east side of Canada Road near where the PG&E substation now

stands. Until fairly recently there was an old cabin which stood about 200 yards further up the hill from the substation on what is now the college property or Edgewood Park. This cabin was the home of a shepherd who lived alone with his herd for quite some time.



West Union School on Picnic Day

Another family that moved into West Union was the Brown family. Robert Brown was a master builder and he and his wife Lydia built a home and barn as well as keeping their home in Redwood City. Robert is credited with building many of the well recognized Victorian type homes which we can still see in various parts of downtown Redwood City.

The photographs of the West Union School that are included in this article were given to the author by the former Fire Chief of Woodside, John Volpiano. John was a student at West Union School on Canada Road.



West Union School, c 1910

One story which began in West Union and ended in Redwood City in the last months of the town's existence is that of Mrs. Westphal, the wife of Dr. O.J. Westphal. It was a thrilling experience as Mrs. Westphal was driving into Redwood City on Whipple's Mill Road and was coming down the hill from Whipple's upper mill property, the horse suddenly was spooked and took off down the hill, out of control. Mrs. Westphal held onto the lines and with presence of mind she guided the maddened horse through Wellesley Park and down the county road to Broadway where she turned into town. The street was crowded with wagons, horses and automobiles but she managed to avoid them and made the turn onto Main Street without overturning. Even though the horse was still running at breakneck speed, at Stambaugh Street Mrs. Westphal again turned the horse wildly down the street. Joseph Britschgi, driving his Occidental Dairy wagon, leaped to the street, ran a block, jumped up beside Mrs. Westphal and was able to bring the horse to a stop with the lines. He was considered a hero and he continued to assist Mrs. Westphal to medical care.

Willard Whipple was not present when this exciting event occurred. In 1855 there was an explosion in the boiler of the lower mill and one man was killed and another badly burned. Willard was so distraught over this tragedy after a few months that he had the upper mill torn down.

Whipple loaded the remains of the upper mill on six wagons. He attached four horses to each wagon and drove them up to the Middle Fork of the Yuba River in Nevada County.



Hotel and Post Office at North Bloomfield

Here he milled lumber for the framing of gold mines. He established his home in North Bloomfield and then got involved with two other men and invested in three gold mines, the Excelsior, the Pittsburg and the Wisconsin. The Pittsburg, which he owned with a Mr. Leonard, went down 30 feet when they hit a vein eight feet wide and drew out gold at \$100 a ton which was a very rich vein. Needless to say Willard Whipple became quite wealthy.

Willard finally travelled back to Illinois, his home state, and lived a financially secure life. He died in Illinois and is buried in Union Cemetery in that state.

The Town of West Union continued to function largely as a farming community well into the 20th century. The end came just before the 1st World War and most of the people tore down their houses or simply moved them to Redwood City just as the people of Searsville had done in 1890.

Credit for the information on the gold country goes to the Nevada County Archives Library on Price Street in Nevada City. The information comes from the "History of Nevada County, 1880 by Thompson and West.

A CANDID CAMERA LOOK AT REDWOOD CITY IN THE 1950s

By James O. Clifford, Sr.

A movie of 1950s Redwood City provides a rare look at a time when nearly everyone in town was white and knew their gender role. Also, they were in pretty good shape.

A viewer of the DVD "Life in Redwood City," originally a 16-milimeter film, could be forgiven if they thought the nearly hour-long movie had something to do with the old Happy Days television show.

The film came into the possession of Gene Firpo in the 1990s when he was an ad executive with the now defunct Independent newspaper.

"A lady wanted to place an ad in the paper and her husband asked me if I would be interested in a color movie he found while cleaning out a warehouse," Firpo said. "I told him yes and he came in with the film later and said 'here it is.'"

Firpo's not sure of the movie's parentage, but theorizes it probably was made to promote the city. A good bet on the sponsor would be the Chamber of Commerce. Among the movie's early scenes is one showing a billboard proclaiming that the new chamber office will be built by July 4, 1950. The chamber did not reply to requests for information about the movie.

The film was silent until Firpo's friend, Reg McGovern, a former news photographer and author of a book on Redwood City, added a sound track of Glenn Miller music that puts the viewer "In the Mood" for a journey to a by-gone era.

Race and gender are what the media conditions us to think about today, so first things first: Almost everyone in the film is white, which should be no surprise. The 1950 census reported that 98 percent of the city's population of 25,544 was white. As for gender, the movie shows men in suits and ties in most of the decision-making positions, including newspaper editors and school officials. Men also seemed to be doing the heavy lifting, such as loading milk crates. The only woman seen at a civic club luncheon was waiting on tables. And, of course, there are smokers and big cars.



Redwood City's Auto Row on El Camino near Whipple. New and used car dealers such as Paul Diebert sold Buicks and Ryan Hayes sold Plymouths and De Sotos.

Yes, times change, but the biggest change might be one we are not expected to notice: There is no way anyone in this movie, particularly the youth, could be, in any shape or form, considered obese, much less morbidly so.

In the footage of Sequoia High School, muscled male students go through physical education classes that resemble a Green Beret conditioning course. Clad only in shorts, the teen-agers swing hand over hand on ropes, like so many Tarzans chasing Janes, except there are no girls. They scale walls, some reportedly 12-feet high, dangle their way across suspended logs and lift their knees high as they run through an obstacle course of tires.



The Wall

The course was the work of Frank Griffin, who became a Sequoia teacher in 1921, a year after the state imposed mandatory PE requirements. It was no coincidence that the course looked military. Griffin, who passed away soon after he retired in 1960, made 67 visits to armed forces training camps in World War II and came away disappointed with the physical condition of recruits. His thoughts are noted in a 1942 state publication dealing with the integration of the war effort in California secondary schools.

“A national diet of hamburger and ‘coke’ has produced a reasonably well-filled, but not well fed, youth with the resultant lack of stamina,” Griffin wrote. He reported that tests at Army camps showed even athletes were “weak in the arms and shoulders.” The answer, he concluded, was a tough program for high school students, which he had fashioned for Sequoia, one “segregated on the basis of ability and achievement in to elementary, intermediate and advanced groups.”

And there was no hiding which group a youngster was in. Each ability level was reflected in the color of the shorts. In a brief paper written at the time of his retirement, Griffin said he established the color system in 1925, making white, red, and blue the basic colors. The student went to a higher rating only after achieving minimum standards in tests such as pull-ups, push-ups, swimming, running, and so forth.

“Later, honorary colors (purple, silver, gold) were added for the more proficient boys,” Griffin recounted.



The Atomic Loop: The Ultimate Challenge, Sequoia High School's Obstacle Course

Those who went though Griffin's course usually mention the shorts as well as the challenging “atomic loop,” in which the youth climbed to a platform in a tree, then went hand over hand on a 44 foot long horizontal rope, then swung arm over arm on a 32 foot log followed by the same task on a steel pipe. Then came a jungle of ropes placed 18 inches apart, which brought the candidate back to the starting point.

A newspaper reported that student Paul Romero finished the grind in 1 minute and 27 seconds in October of 1945.

Griffin, who is shown briefly in the movie talking to students, said he got the idea for the course, which was torn down in 1960 to make way for a gym, from his visits to the military camps. The pipes and log came from seeing Navy recruits in action while the rope idea was borrowed from the Marines.

One newspaper report said that during World War II Griffin received nearly 300 letters from former Sequoians who thanked him for getting them in good physical shape, which gave them a jump on other service recruits. Some students in the film must have fought in the Korean War. Firpo, who served in Vietnam, said his Army basic training was "a piece of cake" next to what he went through at Sequoia.

"We were tested once or twice a year on a whole list of physical things like push-ups, sit ups, swimming, and shuttle run," recalled Al Cerruti, class of 1953. "People came from all over the country to watch our program."

Griffin also invented a device called a "Peg Board" which was designed to strengthen the arms. The boards were made by swim coach Robert Whitmore, who sold the boards to other schools and gyms.

"We should have got a patent on them, because now they are put out by many companies," Griffin told a reporter after his retirement. The Whitmore-made boards had a sticker that declared "The Original Frank Griffin Peg Board."

It turned out that Griffin should have patented his entire program. In 1961 former Sequoia football coach Stan LeProtti drew national attention when he used Griffin's methods at another school. LeProtti hit what was then the big time with a story in *Look Magazine*. Less than a year earlier, articles about LeProtti's program at LaSierra High School appeared in *Scholastic Coach Magazine* and the *California Teachers Association Journal*.

Local media circled the wagons to defend Griffin, claiming he was not getting the credit he deserved.

"The best LeProtti could do for his old tutor was credit him with creating the color system

used to designate the levels of physical achievement," Redwood City Tribune sports editor Ed Jacobowsky wrote in his "Between the Lines" column of Jan. 18, 1962. And that credit was given in only one publication. The rest made no mention of Griffin.

The columnist conceded that LeProtti was doing a "wonderful" job, saying, "no one can condemn him for seeing that, in this day and age of general unfitnes, word of such a program is broadcast far and wide."

"But it is a shame to see the many decades of work put into this program by Frank Griffin passed off in one brief sentence," Jacobowsky concluded.

Griffin let the matter slide, saying he was "proud to see the system gaining praise and being carried on elsewhere."

To be fair, Griffin earlier received a good deal of publicity for his program, including recognition in *Newsweek*.

San Francisco Chronicle sports writer Bill Leiser could barely contain himself in a 1942 column praising Griffin for helping the war effort.

"We salute Sequoia High School," he penned. "A boy who goes through the course will find little to worry about in the Army's toughening up program."

Surprisingly, Griffin, dubbed "Griff" by his friends, was a high school dropout. According to the Sequoia alumni association, he left Sequoia before graduation after a dispute with an English teacher. An old newspaper article said Griffin was kicked out after he told a typing teacher to "go to an area of higher temperature."



Frank Griffin congratulates Swim Coach Clyde Devine in 1954

Griffin, who was born in San Francisco and whose family moved down the Peninsula after the 1906 quake, went on to Stanford where he had a B average. The newspaper story said he was hired by the same principal who suspended him. He received his Sequoia diploma after he joined the staff.



The Physical Education staff of 1928-9. Left to right: Jim Eva, Ray Demick, Frank Griffin, Len Casanova and George Reid. Casanova became a football coaching legend.

Griffin was named to the school Hall of Fame with a citation that said he started a PE program “that brought national acclaim to Sequoia over many decades and spawned hundreds of disciples in secondary schools throughout the U.S.”

Little is known about Griffin’s personal life. Apparently he was a bachelor who was fond of travel. In 1936 the Redwood City Tribune dubbed him and a friend, Ray Bruton, “world itinerants.” The two, the newspaper said, wore their block “S” school sweaters to the arctic circle, the equator, the Great Wall of China and the Great Pyramid. Griffin frequently wrote columns about his travels.

What about the girls’ program? The movie mainly shows a relaxed bunch of young ladies posing for the camera, which is misleading.

“You had to go to PE,” said Jeannie Gibbs Nordness, class of 1953. “We played softball, volleyball, basketball and field hockey. There were always some girls who tried to get out of it.” She described one teacher, a Miss Olds, as “very tough.”

Marge Johnstone, class of 1946, said the girls also played tennis

“We wore dark blue shorts and a white shirt.”

All students, boys and girls, had to learn to swim.

“The guys in the boys’ gym would stand in line to see us running from the shower to the pool” Johnstone recalled.

The author doesn’t want to give the impression that the school’s PE program was the main reason for such a relatively svelte population. There are many other factors, such as a diet that had less processed food. Nutritionists can debate the matter, but the fact is those in the film appeared in good physical condition.

Adrian Dilley, a PE instructor at Sequoia, says, “times have most definitely changed” and “the motivation to be physically fit just isn’t there.”

“It’s a tough battle to fight, but I take baby steps with my students every day,” he added.

It just wasn’t kids who looked fit, at least not in the movie which showed people coming out of churches, stores and factories. Yes, we made things then.

In the movie, scores of factory workers carrying lunch pails walk shoulder to shoulder out of the National Motor Bearing Company. The clerical staff, mainly women, leave the building in another scene. All look as though they have the energy to work another shift.

A photo of the factory is in the book Reg McGovern co-authored with his wife, Janet, and Betty and Nicholas Veronico. Entitled “Images of America REDWOOD CITY,” the book shows several businesses located in Redwood City in the 1950s. The list includes PABCO, which made linoleum, paints, and asbestos-based products, Johns-Manville, which also produced items made from asbestos, the S&W cannery, and some tanneries. In addition, the book gives a glimpse of the high tech future to come by showing a production line at Ampex Corporation, the developer of audio and video tapes.

In the movie, milk bottles – yes, bottles – are loaded in crates at the Occidental Creamery where raw milk was trucked from surrounding dairies and processed into products for home delivery.

Home delivery would soon become part of history – along with the “atomic loop.”

Note: Firpo has a few copies of the movie. For interested buyers his phone is 650-464-1838.

THE TRIAL OF THE CENTURY IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

By John Edmonds

The father of an illegitimate child, by publicly acknowledging it as his own, receiving it as such, with the consent of his wife if he is married, into his family, and otherwise treating it as if it were a legitimate child, thereby adopts it as such; and such child is thereupon deemed for all purposes legitimate from its birth.

California Civil Code section 230

The Perplexing Problem of Constance May Flood

It was a steaming hot day on July 20, 1931 when the paternity trial challenging James L. Flood's will began. Constance May Flood Gavin had filed a lawsuit against the will which omitted her name as the daughter of James and Rose Flood. James Leary Flood, the son of James Clair Flood the Silver King of the Comstock Lode, died on February 15, 1926 after an illness of several months. He passed away in one of the towers in his home on Middlefield Road in Atherton called Linden Towers.

But let us begin this story with James Flood's wife Rose who in 1893 was busy arranging a beautiful layette in the upper story of a large building at the corner of Page and Shrader Streets in San Francisco. Rose's large window in the room provided a great deal of warm sunshine for the new baby. Rose wrote to friends in Kansas City, “You should see me in my dressing gown and the beautiful layette I have for the baby.” Rose was very happy: the room was filled with toys and beautifully furnished.

James Flood had also purchased a beautiful and larger chalet in the Santa Cruse Mountains

The baby was named Constance May Flood and The Floods had her initials CMF imprinted on a number of items such as a couple of trunks, a silver chalice and several other items.

When the baby arrived she was pampered, petted and deeply loved by both Rose and Jim. Both Jim and Rose presented the baby as she grew to many friends and associates as their daughter calling her, “My beloved daughter Constance.”

The Floods took a house on Pacific Street when their lease on the previous property expired. By this time Constance was three years old. This was a big white house and it became their winter quarters as they were spending substantially more time during the warmer periods of the year at Alma Dale. Rose's parents, the Fritz's, along with her sister Maude, expressed themselves, both emotionally and physically, about Constance. “My wonderful little daughter” Jim would say. Maud remained at the house when her parents returned to Kansas and she stayed with the family for a number of years.

During the summer of 1897, Constance was about five years old, they were at Alma Dale when Rose became ill. They moved back to San Francisco where the best doctors they could find were brought to her aid. Maud continued to care for her sister but an operation to remove a tumor became necessary, following Christmas that year, but she died following the operation. Rose's body was taken to Kansas City for burial. She was 36 years old when she died.

Jim was overwhelmed with grief and suffered to the point that he decided to take an ocean voyage to the Orient. Maud and her brother Walter Fritz joined Jim and Constance along with several servants on this long voyage. After several months on the voyage the group returned to San Francisco and then to Alma Dale. One year after Rose's death Jim married Maud in a lavish ceremony in San Francisco and Constance carried the ring on a pillow. That was the last time anybody saw Constance.

Constance was taken to Alhambra, near Los Angeles, and placed in a convent to remain until her eighteenth birthday. During her first year in the convent she learned she was there as Constance May Stearn and had no idea why the name was changed.

After several years at the convent Constance received a letter from Eudora Forde Willette who claimed Constance was her daughter and that she born when her name was Stearn. This Constance refused to believe as she still deeply loved Jim but Jim had never returned a single letter she had written to him. She was torn and started to have doubts about her identity.

Finally Constance wrote to Jim a lengthy letter. The last paragraph illustrates her feelings,

“Well, I will say good-bye for the present, hoping you will write like I asked. I’ve been expecting an answer, but I’ve lost all hopes of getting any, so I wrote again, as you see. I hope you are very well, which I know you must be. I send much love to you from,”

As ever Yours,
Constance May Stearn

Constance reached her 18th birthday and was released from the convent. She had been taught no skills that would prepare her for life on her own and she was all too aware of the true lack of a practical education she had received. Fortunately she had friends with twins named Bulla, whose father was a state senator, the twins were her own age and the parents of the twins invited Constance to come and live with them for a while until she could get her feet on the ground and survive.

One fine Southern California day Constance was out in the garden at the Bulla residence. She received a call from the house saying a Mr. Walsh was here to see her. Her heart immediately filled with anxiety as she walked toward the house. This was the spring of 1917 when Mr. Walsh and Constance sat down, Constance was wringing her hands in anxiety. Mr. Walsh wasted no time to inform Constance that she was not the daughter of James Flood and his first wife, that she was a waif that Mr. and Mrs. Flood took in as a baby. He said she was the daughter of Eudora Stearn. Constance struggled emotionally with this information and asked if she could see this Mrs. Stearn.

The answer was, “We don’t know where she is and it would be better for you not to see her.” By this time, in early 1917, Constance was 24 years old and had met and fallen in love with Jack Gavin. Jack was a banker but he was in the army and was being sent to Camp Fremont in San Mateo County. Jack wrote to Constance telling her that he was being shipped out and he hoped they could marry after the War.

Meanwhile Constance continued living at the Bulla residence and working as a domestic from time to time in order to make a living. She had learned to cook to a minor extent at the convent and she began making meals for the family whenever she could. When she worked it was for an elderly couple in the vicinity and she became very popular with the couple and with many people in the neighborhood. Constance was a very pretty young lady and many people were attracted to her.

In early August Constance received a copy of an affidavit that read, “Duly sworn deposes as follows; August 1898 Constance received an affidavit from Eudora that read, “Eudora Ford E. Stearn being first duly sworn deposes as follows: That she is over 18 years of age, that in 1894 in New York, she married Edward Stearn, who died in the year 1894 in New York. That she had born to her the result of said union a female child on the 11th day of May, 1893, in San Francisco and that said child was named Constance May Stearn.”

Constance was numb for a few days and then she rationalized that the affidavit was probably a forgery and that if Jim and Rose Flood had observed that she was the child of such a woman they would never have agreed to make her their own and that she thus was indeed the daughter of Jim and Rose.

When Jack Gavin returned from the war some 18 months after leaving he came immediately to Constance, the two having written a number of times during that period, and proposed marriage to her. Jack had come back to his job at the bank and was well prepared to get established in wedlock and support a wife. The two Bulla girls were both getting married and Constance was part of each of their services.

Constance remained at the Bulla home, because they didn't want her to leave even though she was working now and in a very happy situation. But it was now time to get married and settle down so Jack and Constance made their wedding plans and went down to get their licenses and the difficulty came when she had to decide which name to use.

Jack Gavin and Constance were married on May 11, 1921. Jack's father and mother as well as several cousins and friends were present but nobody from Constance family. Jack and Constance lived together very happily for several years until Constance became desperately ill and lay in bed for months not recovering and thinking she was going to die. As she did gradually start to recover her doctor suggested that she go to a sanitarium but the small amount of money she and Jack had been able to save was pretty well used up and the cost of a sanitarium was out of the question.

In February 1926 Constance read about her father's death and became very sad. It is during this period she was persuaded to fight for recognition. Mr. Eugene Aureguy then came into Constance's life. Mr. Aureguy was a man who helped people find relatives and other persons when they were interested.

One of the first things he did was to take Constance and reporters to 1890 Page Street in San Francisco, the address that Constance lived in during the first six years of her life. There they found Dr. Salfield, a widower, who had lived on the ground floor when the flood family was living above him. Constance stood still as Dr. Salfield was asked if he recognized her. "Yes! Yes! Though my eye sight is poor now, I would have known Constance no matter where I saw her. Her big brown eyes sparkle just as they did when she was living here as a baby, she has grown but she has hardly changed."

The group went down to the basement where a merry-go-round he had built for Constance lay broken in the corner of the room. He asked her to go over and get it. She did so and recognized it right away.

Throughout this event newspaper reporters and photographers were busy documenting the events.

As the information got out over the press the rather overwhelming response was dramatic. The days of the first depositions were approaching and the citizens of San Francisco were knocking on the doors of the attorneys. Willa Okra Ikerson was one of the newspaper reporters. She started her presence at the very beginning and saw it through to the very end. She wrote, in a subsequent book, "The Flood story had gripped the imaginations and hearts of generous San Franciscans." In a very short period of time more than 50 persons came forward to tell the attorneys that they had known Constance as a little girl and many offered to testify about the way Jim and Rose doted over the beautiful little girl.

Maud Flood was living at Linden Towers in Menlo Park as the trial approached. Her children were living there as well. Jim, the oldest was now 21 years old but Jim will be remembered to sit through every moment of the trial in support of his mother.

The process of depositions took more than two years and was a very long process with transportation problems in getting some witnesses to the offices where the interviews were taking place. Most of the depositions were done in San Francisco and the majority of the persons required to testify were San Franciscans so it was the people out of the area that, in some cases were very necessary, had to be transported to the City. A good example was Eudora Willette and her mother Alfredeta who lived in Oakland who had to be transported by ferry to the City.

I will not go into the depositions except to say that they played a major role in the subsequent trial. The honesty of the two Willettes came into question especially when Eudora changed her story, you see she had for years claimed that James Flood was the father of Constance and she was the mother. The Willettes were very poor and James Flood had been giving them money for a number of years. There was really no question that it was Eudora who brought Constance to Rose and Jim as a very new baby and that she had done so because she honestly thought the child would have a better life.

As I begin to write about the trial that led to Judge Buck's judicial end let me repeat the California Civil Code section 230:

"The father of an illegitimate child, by publicly acknowledging it as his own, receiving it as such, with the consent of his wife if he is married, into the family and otherwise treating it as it were a legitimate child, thereby adopts it as such; and such child is thereby deemed for all purposes legitimate from its birth."

The Trial Begins

July 20, 1931 dawned a very warm day and it seemed especially warm to the hundreds of people that were already swamping almost every space in the courthouse. The doors to courtroom "A" were still closed and the opening hour 9 AM had not yet arrived. The attorneys had a myriad of preliminary motions and questions before anything of true importance would come into play. The number of witnesses to testify was so long that a real effort was being made to decide what was really necessary. As the hour approached the bailiff gradually opened the door. This large impressive man made no pretence from that point forward that there would be no toleration for undisciplined behavior. The attorneys, newspaper reporters and photographers, and other participants were escorted through the roaring, anxious mob that packed the courthouse throughout its interior and beyond. The newspapers had made this a nationwide event and the San Francisco Call Bulletin would become the center of a very curious country.

Once the trial participants were inside the courtroom the public was allowed to enter in a courteous and organized manner. When all the seats were filled, standing room was allowed and the crowd filled every empty space standing along the back and both sides, extra chairs had been placed down the middle aisle to allow for mere seating. People were required by the bailiff to remove hats, remain quiet and be aware that anybody who violates any of the orders would be removed from the courtroom and he turned to the reporters and instructed them that those requirements were for them as well.

The emotional outpour from those who had not been able to enter the courtroom was enormous and that had to be quelled prior the beginning of any proceedings. The day was very hot and courtroom "A" was extremely warm. That atmosphere continued literally into the 1990s.

The Honorable Judge George H. Buck by 1930 had been on the bench as San Mateo County Superior Court Judge for 40 years. He was, and still is, the longest tenured San Mateo County judge in history. He was elected District Attorney of San Mateo County in 1882 and performed that job very well and became very well known, especially in Democratic circles as he was somewhat prominent in political circles as well. He was elected the head judge upon the death of the blind judge, Judge Edward Francis Head in 1890. George Buck lived on Jefferson Avenue the second house west of El Camino Real on the south side of the street. He was easily recognized because he was always on time and could be seen walking to work with his cane, bollard hat and obvious limp. He was so punctual that people said they could set their watches when he crossed El Camino Real.

Judge Buck had come to San Mateo in 1874 with 45 cents in his pocket. He came because of illness and his doctor in his native Michigan thought the improved weather in California would be valuable to his health. George Buck worked as a laborer at a livery stable in Redwood City until he could make enough money to establish a legal practice.

The primary attorney for Constance May Gavin was Maxwell McNutt who was assisted by John Taaffe who would do most, if not all, of the examination of plaintiff witness and cross examination of the defendant's witnesses. Theodore Roche was the head attorney for the defendant and did most of the examination work. He was assisted by Garret McEnerney.

By midmorning the parties and the spectator's faces were already flushed from the heat and things became more difficult when Judge Buck began reading the will of James L. Flood in rather a drab monotonous tone. Those standing had difficulty staying on their feet and they began shuffling. Judge Buck stopped reading and informed the standing that if they continued he would excuse them from the courtroom

During the trial, on several occasions, he did just that and Meeks had a struggle each time and the judge had to leave the bench and a good half hour of the trial was lost each time this occurred.

The process of picking a jury appeared to be difficult at first when the first person called quickly talked about his relationship with James Flood and his regular visits to his Atherton home. He left the courtroom and a second man was called who told the court he had already made up his mind about this case from the intensive coverage in the newspapers. He said, "I have a fixed opinion such that I doubt even this wonderful array of legal talent could change."

Waves of laughter rolled through the courtroom. Judge Buck seemed to be outraged and pounded his gavel fiercely on the bench. His face was red with anger and he quickly told the audience that further such behavior would cause them to be excused. This kind of behavior continued throughout the trial by the judge and there were many that were anxious about his health and his heart.

The newspaper people were surprised when the jury was picked before the closing time the first day. The second day at ten o'clock the trial began. Maxwell McNutt walked across the floor and stood in front of the jury. He said, "Constance May Gavin was born May 11, 1893, in San Francisco. We shall prove to you and the court that James L. Flood was her father and Eudora Helen Forde Willette is her mother and that James Flood and Eudora Willette were not married at, or prior to, the petitioner's birth."

McNutt was very brief in his opening address to the jury and he did it in a quiet and pleasant voice. He was smiling throughout his address and told the jury exactly what the plaintiff intended to prove and suggested that they should not be confused by the bravado of the defense. When Roach, a very large man and like McEnerney, had a large booming voice, went on for close to an hour parading in front of the jury with his hands clasped behind his back: his voice booming so that the onlookers from the hallway would not mistake his sermon.

It is not my purpose to bring you through the blow by blow description of the evidence as it was presented by some 30 to 50 witnesses for both sides.

Most of the witnesses for Constance were clean, well dressed and pleasant to look at and listen to. Their honesty my seem to be without doubt. When the defense witnesses took the stand their honesty was often in doubt as was the case of their prime witness, Eudora Willette. Mrs. Willette had told half the world, including the depositions, that James L. flood was the Father of Constance and that she was the mother.

The problem was that she changed her story in court and stated that a James Cannon, who died several years before, had been father and that she and her mother had given the child to the floods because of what they thought would be a better life. Her mother, Alfredeta Forde, with whom she lived in squalid conditions in a slum apartment in Oakland, came to court in a heavy cotton overcoat, she raised her hand on the witness stand and said, "I swear on a hundred bibles" when asked by the court. She then proceeds to be a good deal less than honest.

Taaffe and Roach had a number of angry disputes during the course of the trial which lasted some three weeks. A number of tricks were used by the defense to block the introduction of certain pieces of evidence and even though Taaffe argued convincingly Judge Buck almost always ruled in favor of the defense.

In the last days of the trial, some three weeks had elapsed since those first trying moments. It never got easier, on a number of occasions Judge Buck told Joe Meeks to clear the standing audience from the room and left the bench not to return for at least 30 minutes.

The newspapers made an attempt to tell both sides of the dispute to the very interested public. The photographs of Constance May Gavin were quite attractive and they showed her large and very visible eyes. Constance was a very pretty woman and the public became quite attracted to her and was very much on her side. The public of which I speak was both local and national as the trial, blow by blow, was broadcast in newsprint and to some degree by radio all over the country.

On the Friday of the third week the trial came to a halt. Judge Buck asked Roach if he had anything further and Roach responded, "That's the case Your Honor." Roach then returned to his table and took some papers out of his brief case and quietly walked up to the bench and gave them to Judge Buck.

"I move that you instruct the jury to bring in a verdict for the respondents in this case." Roach stated. The court room became very still; the judge paused. Judge Buck took the papers and turned to the jury, "The jury will retire, elect a foreman and sign the verdict as I instruct you in favor of the defendants." These words were greeted with angry hisses and loud cursing by the audience and the judge quickly left the bench. The trial was over but the judge did not even allow the attorneys to present their closing arguments. Boos, hisses and angry shouts echoed throughout the courthouse and the Sheriff's was called to protect the litigants and the court staff. The newspaper reporters had to really struggle in order to get to a telephone to call in their stories.

The public went crazy calling for the impeachment of Judge Buck and asking that the Appellate Courts take up the matter immediately. The attorney from both sides gathered their counterparts and discussed what the next steps would be. None could justify the decision made by the judge on the plaintiff's side of the table. The jury publicly told the newspapers that they voted 8 to 4 for the plaintiff Constance May Gavin and that they felt they had wasted their time and would never participate in the court process again if the judge was going to make the decision for them.

The process the judge used was called a "Directed Verdict" and it was a legitimate process albeit very rarely used and never used before the final arguments in a trial. It was simply true that the case would have been reversed and sent back for a retrial very quickly and Judge Buck knew it almost immediately after he left the bench.

The final outcome of the case was that the Flood Estate gave Constance May Gavin one million two hundred thousand dollars to settle which they did as that was what they were asking for.

Of course, half the money went to the attorneys but six hundred thousand dollars was very helpful to the Gavin family and it didn't mean much to the Flood family.

Judge Buck went into hiding for the weekend but returned to work on the following Monday. He was, of course, plagued by reporters but would have nothing to do with them. The effort to impeach him was real however, it caused some anxiety. He was in his 42nd year on the Superior Court bench as the county's senior judge. He finished his year and had to run for election. This time his competition was Maxwell McNutt and Buck's decision haunted him into retirement.

Judge Buck's son Norman had been run over by a railroad train some years earlier and was placed in the International Order of Odd Fellows plot in Union Cemetery. George H. Buck had been in public service for 50 years in 1932 and had presided over some 20,000 cases and 1100 naturalization process for naturalized foreign born soldiers at Camp Fremont. He was 91 years old when he joined his son in Union Cemetery. He lived with the mistake he knew he had made in the Flood case for the rest of his life and he suffered the criticism which continued to plague him.

Bibliography

The primary book that I used for this essay is "The Strange Case of Constance Flood" by Willa Oakerson Iverson. I used several other sources, especially newspapers from the dates in 1931. This gave me a little better color for the article although I intentionally tried to underemphasize the critical error that Judge Buck made. It was, indeed, the biggest decision, but the worst decision, of his career. JE

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Thank you to the Redwood City Civic and Cultural Commission for their monetary and vocal support for this journal.

Hope you enjoyed the new and improved Journal of Local History of the Redwood City Public Library. Please send us a line at gsuarez@redwoodcity.org or call me, Gene Suarez, at 650-780-7098.

We welcome any comments or constructive criticism. Our next issue will appear in the Fall 2010. From all of us at Redwood City Public Library's Archives Committee, we wish you a pleasant Summer.

