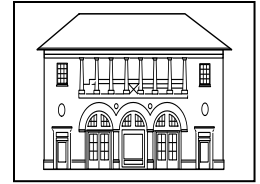


THE JOURNAL OF LOCAL HISTORY

VOLUME 3 NO. 1

WINTER 2011

ST PATRICK'S DAY ISSUE
SEE PAGE 18



Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library
1044 Middlefield Road, Redwood City, CA 94063

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The President's Message

I sincerely wish all our subscribers a very happy and joyful 2011.

The Local History Room in the library has been kept open by some very wonderful friends: Mike Bursak, Shirley Schwoerer, Deanna Liota, Jim Clifford and Marian Wydo. The room is open Monday through Thursday from 1p.m. to 4p.m.

The work is usually quiet but there are times when it can be busy. We need four to six more people so that we have backup help. Is this something that you have thought about in the new year? We will provide training and support to get you started.

We surely appreciate the people who can spend a few hours a week volunteering at the Local History Room. Bring a good book.

John Edmonds
President

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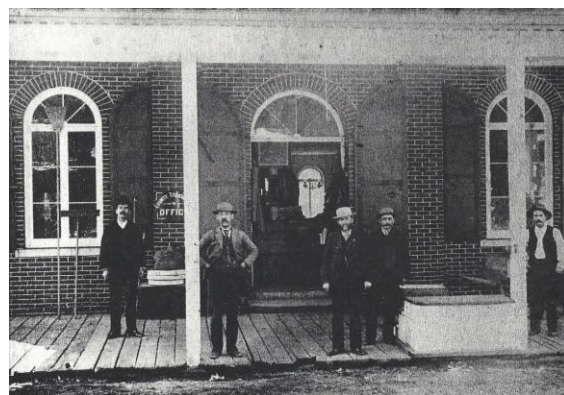
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Jesus and Emily Vasquez

By John Edmonds

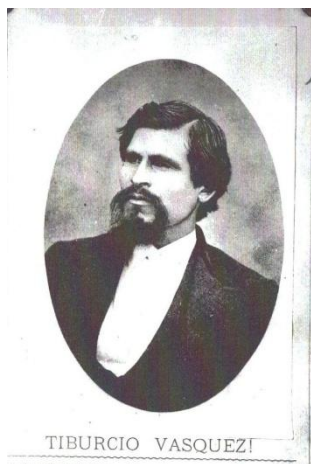
There are some people who are very well liked and highly respected who are not well known because they do their jobs quietly, thoroughly and with sobering dignity. They rarely do things that bring them to public attention and shy away from personal praise. Such a man was Jesus Vasquez.

Jesus is the man standing on the right of the three men standing in front of the store. The photo was taken by James Van Court and is part of the Van Court collection at the Redwood City Public Library.



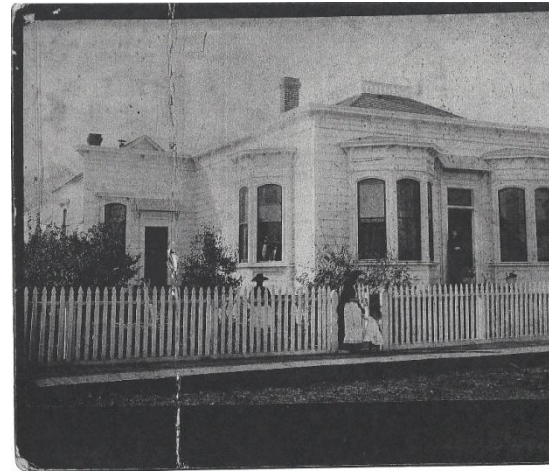
He was independently wealthy but never showed his wealth. He drove a buckboard for John Diller, and the only good picture we have of him shows him standing in front of the Diller store with William Holder and P.P. Chamberlain who purchased the store on Main Street from Diller.

Jesus was a rather small man who was born in Half Moon Bay on September 13, 1860. His father was Jose Maria (Joseph) Vasquez and his mother was Maria De Los Reyes Bernal. Jesus was a cousin of Tiburcio Vasquez the Robin Hoodized bandit who was born in Monterey where he was educated and learned to read and write. After his education he became involved in fights which led him to a life of crime throughout California and a great deal of notoriety. However, while Tiburcio Vasquez was Jesus' cousin, he was not involved in the life of the young man.



Tiburcio Vasquez

The San Mateo County Gazette wrote on Saturday April 18, 1863 that "Tiburcio Vasquez was sitting in a saloon in Half Moon Bay on the Wednesday before. He had been led to the window seat to play cards and was just about to start when a shot crashed through the window and into Tiburcio which ended his life. Deputy Sheriff Keith was in town and made an arrest of the individual who led him to the window to be assassinated. A manhunt began for two more men who were involved in the murder.



Winter House, 702 Stambaugh Street RWC

Jose Tiburcio Vasquez was born in San Jose and was a well known member of the military unit at the San Francisco Presidio. It is for this reason that he was granted the 7750 acres that ran from Pilarcitos Creek in Spanishtown north to Media Creek in El Granada and from the ocean 2.5 miles up a mountain. The ranch was called, "Corral De Tierra" and was confirmed by the state of California on December 13, 1854.

Thus, Jesus Maria Amacus Vasquez was born on the coast side where he spent his early life and where he was educated. He moved to Redwood City early in his adult life and came to work for J.V. Diller and then P.P. Chamberlain in the store on Main Street. He remained in his position for the rest of his life and was 33 years old when he passed on the 29th 1893.

Emily Vasquez, originally Emily Winter, married Jesus in Redwood City just a few years before he died. The family lived at 702 Stambaugh Street. Emily was a native of England and met Jesus at the Methodist Church where she had been worshipping for a number of years. Jesus Vasquez became a Methodist and enjoyed a short but wonderful life in that church.



Pablo Vasquez in Half Moon Bay

Emily Winter came to Redwood City in the mid 1870s with a substantial family. When she passed away on March 25, 1944 she was 81 years of age. She was buried beside her husband in Union Cemetery.

Jesus uncle, Pablo Vasquez, was probably his closest friend on the coast and a person he spent a great deal of time with in his early years. Pablo was the fifth son of Jose Tiburcio Vasquez and one of the few people who bothered to make a record of what life was like in those early days on the coast.

Pablo wrote that the adobe houses were built by a band of Indians, brought up from Tulare County by Francisco Berrlleza. They erected them by contract. The Indians made the sun-dried adobe bricks by digging a wide hole in the ground mixing grass (straw) with water, clay and adobe soil. They then trampled the mixture until it was well combined. Molds were made of wood cut from trees and the bricks were set out in the sun to bake. Often the grass for these molds had to be trampled by horses to make it fine enough bricks.

The doors and windows of the adobes were made by a white man named George White. He was the carpenter for the entire coast region. Wooden porches were built along the entire front of the buildings and wooden verandas were built up so that people could lean on them. These porches were also used to tie up horses and years after, when autos had replaced horses, the grooves in the wood were still deep and visible. Rose bushes were planted against the porch and veranda and were still present years after, even after the house had disappeared.

Pablo said his father used to make jerked beef and sell that along with hides and tallow in San Francisco. He made the tallow by driving four stakes into the ground and then stretching a cowhide between them so that it would sag in the middle. He would then fill it with melted tallow; and when it became hard he would wrap the hide around it and pack it off along with the beef and hides to San Francisco. A close watch had to be kept for grizzly bears. "It wasn't safe to go out after four o'clock in the afternoon" because of the bears.

MARRIAGE LICENSE.

State of California, }
COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, } ss.

These presents are to authorize and license any Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge of the Superior Court, Justice of the Peace, Priest or Minister of the Gospel of any denomination, to solemnize, within said County the marriage of José Vasquez, native of California, aged 27 years, resident of Redwood City, County of San Mateo, State of California; and Miss Emily W. Winter, native of England, aged 24 years, resident of Redwood City, County of San Mateo, State of California. Said parties being of sufficient age to be capable of contracting marriage.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the Superior Court of said County this 24 day of April A. D. 1889

J. J. Johnston
County Clerk and ex-officio Clerk of the Superior Court
in and for said San Mateo County.

By E. E. Bennett
Deputy Clerk.

Marriage Certificate.

State of California, }
COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, } ss.

I hereby certify that I believe the facts stated in the above license to be true, and that, upon due inquiry, there appears to be no legal impediment to the marriage of said José Vasquez and Emily W. Winter and that said parties were joined in marriage by me, on the 24 day of April A. D. 1889 in Redwood City said County and State; that James H. Winter a resident of San Francisco County of San Francisco, State of California and George White a resident of Redwood City County of San Mateo State of California, were present as witnesses of said ceremony.

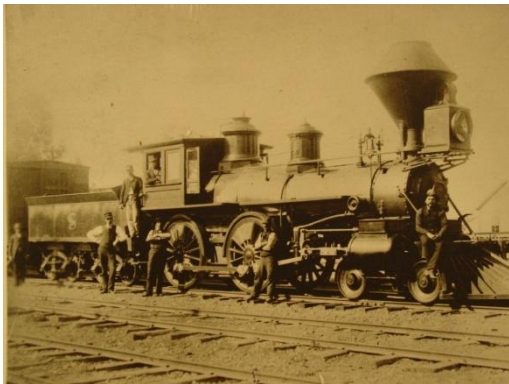
The coastsiders primary source of income was their herds of stock which were carefully nurtured on the perennially grassy meadows of the coast. The people also grew beans, corn, pumpkins and other squashes and some root vegetables. The corn was used to make bread by grinding it in a "metate" bowl and boiling it in lime water then making it into tortillas.

The San Francisco and San Jose Railroad

By John Edmonds

C.B. Polhemus, Peter Donahue and H.M. Newhall met in San Francisco in early 1860 to plan the railroad from San Francisco to San Jose. They began to raise money for their venture and they became the first board of directors of the railroad. The Railroad Company was formally organized on August 18, 1860. The surveyors decided at that time that the route would require 49.5 miles of track.

While railroads were a new and grand idea in California there had been a number of railroads built prior to the Civil War both in the East, North and South. Both the North and the South targeted each other's railroad. The majority of the lines were destroyed during the four years of war.



It took several years of planning to establish the likely costs involved in building a new railroad on the Peninsula. Recognizing the rails would have to be shipped from the East would add to the cost already made difficult by the war. The rails were shipped from Massachusetts from "Bay State Iron Works," a foundry Colis Huntington discovered when he was searching for tracks for the Transcontinental Railroad Project. This took a great deal of time so there was much discussion in the San Mateo County Times-Gazette.

The people of San Mateo County saw the railroad as a valuable resource to the commerce of the business community, the growth of the population and the general wealth of the county. The three counties--San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara--were each required to raise \$100,000 to pay for the railroad. The plan was for the railroad to stop at each city along the line and provide transportation for people and products.

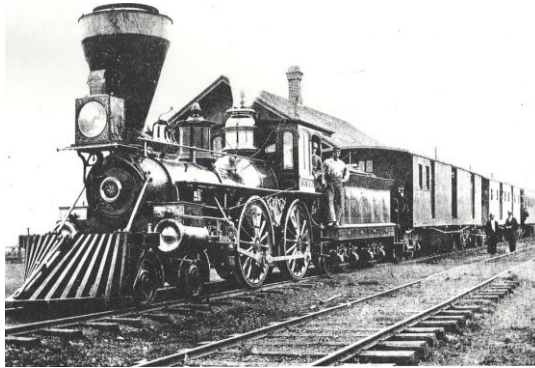
The San Mateo County Times-Gazette newspaper was very supportive of the railroad. It said, "On all questions of moment, there are arguments deductible for and against the railroad. On the one side are presented the immense benefits which must naturally and of necessity occur to our county, in point of improvement and progress. The enhancement of the value of property of every class, the increase of population, extension and enlargement of business and the facilities of trade, the addition of revenue to the county and the consequent general prosperity which nothing else imaginable could, by any way possible more rapidly or surely affect than the building of this railroad."

The paper went on to say: "Those who disagree with the building of the railroad, while good neighbors, were kind people who feared advancement and preferred to, snuff brimstone in every breeze and seem to be distilling bitter from sweet--extracting poison from the rose and prefer to expect misfortune from such ventures." Incidentally, the half-owner and editor of the San Mateo County Times-Gazette during this period was the highly respected attorney and former district attorney of the county Herman Schofield. (See separate article in this journal.)

It was especially important to put the story of the railroad in the Civil War book because it was the great diversion for a number of years during the often depressing news that came from the war. Several columns were devoted to "news from the East" with ongoing reports of the battles being fought. The railroad was very special and the news was far more positive.

While the folks today who argue against the high speed railroad are very accurate in their assessment of the cost of the project and the money that could be used far better for a number of other projects, the majority of the voters seem to want the railroad.

One thing is for certain: the high-speed railroad will bestow on our communities none of the excitement and benefits expected by the paper in 1861.



“The Victory is Ours,” said the newspaper on May 25, 1861. This referred to the results of the vote taken to approve or disapprove the \$100,000 bond issue. The expected work on the railroad could now begin although, in truth, the route had already been surveyed, the grading had already started and the project was already well underway. This does illustrate the obvious position the paper took in its editorials.

The majority margin in the vote was 182 votes. There were 652 votes total: 417 yes, 235 no votes. This was before women had won the right to vote but even at that there were very few people in this area during the Civil War and this will give the reader an idea of the population at the time. Nonetheless the issue passed and the work continued at an even greater pace.

The contract with McLaughlin and Houston was completed in October 1860, so that company was very well prepared to begin laying track on those areas that had been satisfactorily graded. The work continued through 1862, with several winters of problems; the substructures washed out in several locations and were properly dealt with in the subsequent repairs. Much of the work done on the railroad was done by Chinese laborers with Caucasian supervision.

The newspaper was talking about the “superior quality of the masonry and the bridges and how the work was superior to a large majority of the bridges crossing the streams and waterways in the East.” At this point, one-half of the cross ties had been delivered and the other half was expected in the coming months.

The San Francisco and San Jose Railroad became a reality on October 15, 1863, when the railroad was completed to San Francisquito Creek, the dividing line between San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. The first engine, the “California” (as seen in the previous two photos) made its maiden trip from San Francisco to Menlo Park and a grand celebration was held.

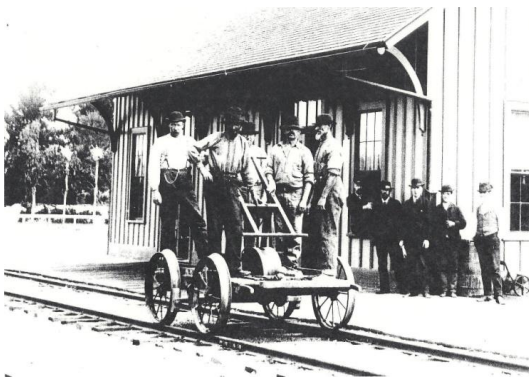
It was a grand day in Menlo Park, however on October 15, 1863, when the champagne was flowing and the politicians, railroad officials and many from the general public really enjoyed the afternoon. One of the special guests invited to the event was the “Jefferson Cavalry,” a military company of 100 of the best citizens who rode down to the party. The horses enjoyed themselves as well as they feasted on the apples and other fruit being sold by a vendor. They trampled his wagon as well. This, of course, provided an unexpected amount of entertainment for the event. The participants took a collection and provided the pleasant Mexican vendor with twice the value of his loss.



The Jefferson Cavalry had become a very well known fighting company that never fired their weapons.

They were quite well qualified, however, as they drilled a great deal. They were certain the Confederates were going to come right straight up the Peninsula in order to get to San Francisco. The company consisted of some of the top citizens of the county. They were very serious having become Company "H" of the 1st California Cavalry. As such, they could have been sent to places like Fort Yuma in the desert. However, they never left Redwood City except for a special event in San Francisco. The truth is that they had a very good time and their antics were quite hilarious to the spectators. George Fox and Andrew Teague were both attorneys and district attorneys at different times. John Poole drove stagecoaches for Simon Knights and Joseph S. Keith who later became the county sheriff. They were all members of the Jefferson Cavalry.

The officials of the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad Company contracted with the Union Iron Works, a company of growing recognition, in San Francisco for this "American 4-4-0 full sized steam engine. The California made its first full run from San Francisco to San Jose on August 30, 1865, and it set a speed record on that run of 67 miles per hour.



A railroad station was built on Arguello Street on the east side of the tracks. It was in the vicinity of the present tracks but it had to be built on solid ground. The great number of creeks in the area made that somewhat challenging. It was a fairly substantial building containing several desks and tables with a ticket counter and a window.

The side of the building that faced the tracks had a series of five large double paned windows that gave the room's occupants a very good view of the trains as they arrived and departed. There was always something happening around the station as work crews, those who kept the tracks in good working condition, pumped their wagon which held five men up and down the tracks from city to city. There were a number of these little carts that worked from different areas of the tracks from San Francisco to San Jose and points in between.

A great deal of business took place at this little station. It was not just the passengers who needed passage. Freight also became a major financial investment for the railroad company.

The Hanson and Ackerson Lumber Company found that shipping milled lumber to San Jose especially but San Francisco as well was faster and, in many respects, easier than loading it on the many small ships that traversed the waterways.

In 1868, a railroad wharf was built on Redwood Creek by the Hanson / Ackerson Lumber Company. The Transcontinental Railroad had been completed at Promontory Point, Utah just a few months before. Now it became possible for businesses in San Jose and Santa Clara to box their products, put them on the train, transport them to Redwood City then take them by buckboard to the docks on Redwood Creek and ship them to Sacramento, Napa and other more distant ports. A special dock was built on Redwood Creek just for the purpose of the added materials that would be transported.

Redwood City Business Notices.

RAILROAD WHARF!

LUMBER!
POSTS!
SHINGLES!
WOOD!
Dressed Lumber of all Kinds!
Doors, Windows,
Etc.....Etc.....Etc.

CHEAP FOR CASH,
 WHARF ROOM FOR ALL KINDS OF STUFF.
Freight taken for all the Interior
Ports.

LIBERAL CASH ADVANCES MADE.

☞ Warehouse room in plenty for all kinds of grain, freight, &c., Also—Sales made on Commission, at low rates.

☞ The undersigned is also Agent for the Schooner Harp.

☞ Office at the store of J. V. Diller, Redwood City.
J. W. ACKERSON.

oct-1-1868.

Timothy Guy Phelps joined the board of directors of the S.F.&S.J. Railroad. He was in the primary leadership position in 1863. He was instrumental in getting a number of wealthy investors to buy property along the railroad right of way. Such people as Darius Ogden Mills, C.B. Polhemus, John Parrott, Ansel S. Easton and Thomas H. Selby all bought a minimum of 500 acres along the railway and built their dramatic mansions.

By the middle of 1870, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company had been established. Their purpose was to build a railroad all the way to Los Angeles and San Diego. They went so far as to hire surveyors to establish the most cost effective routes to the various destinations from San Francisco south. Their first step was to purchase the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad. This was not terribly difficult as Timothy Guy Phelps was on the board of directors of both railroads. As we all know the Southern Pacific became part of the Octopus and the owners, like the owners of the Transcontinental Railroad, became extremely wealthy. The Southern Pacific was a great success.

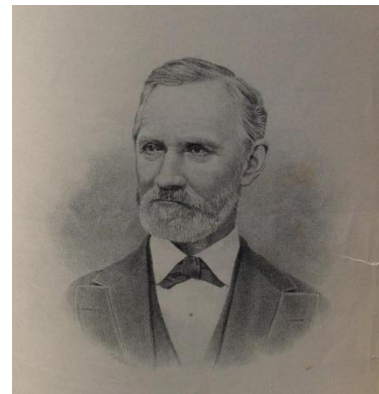
This was, however, the end of a storied railroad. The San Francisco and San Jose Railroad was the first such railroad built in California and its great success can only be measured by the anxiety of the great men of wealth to purchase the railroad.

“When looking at matters from a railroad point of view, scarcely six years had elapsed since the completion of the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad through San Mateo County yet we found there a remarkable advance in the property values, not merely immediately along the line of the railroad, but in every portion of the county. Plus this, there has been added to our population a large number of wealthy residents who lavish their money in improving and beautifying the county and giving employment to a large number of persons. In fact, they are continually contributing directly and indirectly in various ways in building up a large and prosperous community.”

The last thing to mention is what everybody, I'm sure, expects. The “Railroad Saloon” was established at the northwest corner of Arguello and Broadway, “A” Street in those days. It was established specifically for the purpose of assisting the wealthy citizens in their relaxation.

A major person in the High Speed Railroad is the Honorable Quentin Kopp, retired judge from the San Mateo County Court System and a man well known, highly respected and recognized for a number of excellent jobs preceding the court position. He would be the Timothy Guy Phelps personage in that project.

The fact is that the overhead tracks will go far to separate the eastern part of the community from the western part, that it will create a substantial increase in stress in our lives, and that it will be of minimal financial value to our communities, yet will cost us all substantial amounts of money. It is likely that a rather high percentage of our citizens will never be able to afford to ride on this behemoth yet will be paying for it nonetheless, makes this a rather undesirable project.



It must not go without notice that one man in the San Mateo County government was the primary motivator and it was he, when difficulties arose between San Francisco County and San Mateo County regarding a question of fraud, who did the necessary investigation and found the problem to be more a misunderstanding. There was no criminal problem, so he was able to get representatives from both governments to sit down together and work out the difficulty. That man is Benjamin Lathrop. He was the county recorder and auditor. He took the necessary records in the courtroom. Since all the court records were handwritten, the records are easy to read due to his beautiful handwriting.

The primary complaints on the railroad, after it had been established and was in use for a few months, were the very high rates it was charging the passengers. Lathrop looked into this problem and was able to work out an equitable agreement to get the prices lowered without causing the railroad to lose money.

I often wonder what this county would have been like without Benjamin Lathrop.

The San Francisco and San Jose Railroad was sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company after about eight years of dedicated service. During that period the railroad brought substantial benefit to the County of San Mateo with a dramatic increase in population and an equally dramatic spread of new construction along the railroad system and toward the foothills.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was mostly a dream at this point. The original plan was to go down through Gilroy. They were surveying a route to Monterey as well as the southern route. The federal government assisted the railroad by donating when they substantial amounts of land in San Joaquin Valley. Investors were then certain that the primary route would be through Fresno and Tulare counties. The Gazette was not happy about Southern Pacific's plans. What they were most unhappy about was the lack of information the railroad was presenting to the public.

I will end this essay with a quote from the last paragraph of a long editorial from the Gazette on April 17, 1869: "Then again, there is the Southern Pacific Railroad which, as a matter of course will necessarily pass through Redwood City and San Mateo County in reaching San Francisco. There is no longer any doubt but that the Southern Pacific will be built within a very few years as it has recently passed into hands of men of capital and energy. Taking it for granted then, that the two great railroad lines connecting California with the Eastern states are to pass through our county it requires no prophetic eye to see that San Mateo County is bound to advance step-by-step until it becomes the most favored and lovely spot this side of the Garden of Eden."

I'll bet you never hear anything like that from the High Speed Rail System.

The Metamora Tribe of Redmen

By John Edmonds

There is a very large plot in Union Cemetery for members of the Metamora Tribe of Redmen. These were not Indians, although they certainly dressed as such on special occasions. The fourth of July parade is a good example. The women's associated organization was called "The Pocahantas Tribe."



A few members of Metamora Tribe. The gentleman standing in civilian clothes is Owen McGarvey.

The "Redmen" organization was a national organization that was social as well as somewhat political. The Redmen were first organized at Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, in 1813. The Redwood City Chapter was established on August 28, 1869. The founding members were D.M. Knowlton, Charles A. Kirkpatrick, J.W. Bartlett, G.R. Warren and A.T. Warren.

Members in San Mateo County included some of the highest ranking men and women of Redwood City and San Mateo County who joined the tribe.

The Redwood City Democrat published an extensive article on August 8th 1895 entitled “A Gathering of the Big Chiefs and The Little Ones.” A second headline, “A Week of Business Combined with Pleasure of All Sorts and Degrees,” preceded the article.

“During the past week the various committees of the Metamora Tribe were actively engaged in making arrangements for the reception of the Great Chiefs and visitors during the session of the Great Council. The ability and success with which the work was performed may be judged by those high in authority to be the most nearly typical encampment ever held on the coast.”

“The wigwams and trading posts of the city have been so profusely decorated in honor of the visiting tribesmen that Redwood has witnessed nothing to equal it since the date of her discovery. So abundant and generally tasteful are the decorations that the committee of award of the prize for best decorated place will have a hard task to perform in making the selection.”



A gathering of the Metamora Tribe probably before an event of some kind such as a parade.

The tribesmen set up their wigwams behind the courthouse. There they conducted their business and sold wares of all sorts. The 39 tribes consisting of 2900 individuals took up every hotel room and then some in the city. They ate their meals at every restaurant in walking distance. This “pow-wow” lasted a full week and it was a wonderful opportunity for the businesses. The city, well aware that it would be busy, was well prepared.

The various tribes from all over the state smoked peace pipes together and told stories. “So in our village the pipe of peace is passed around and smoked by the chiefs, once palefaces. The council fire also burns constantly in front of the Long House and will continue to do so throughout the week. Visitors are hospitably received and served with ice cream and liquid refreshments, including strong waters and “Killeknick” for the visiting bucks. The camp is resplendent in the colors of the Orders and viewed by night under the light of the campfires and many colored lanterns is a spectacle to be long remembered.”

It took many hours for visitors to arrive by train. The Metamora Tribe met each arriving tribe and escorted them the few blocks to the gathering place behind the courthouse. There was a dramatic opening event as hundreds of Caucasian Indians dressed in buckskins and feathers marched down “A” Street to Mound Street then back to the courthouse.

“The Metamora Tribe put on entertainment at the gym on Main Street in which 1,000 people attended taking up every seat with some people standing.” (In 1895 the only building on Main, or Mound Street, was owned by the Grand Army of the Republic, which was always ready to have it used for such purposes. It had basketball hoops.)

“J.J. Bullock in his address of welcome on behalf of his tribe, was at his best. He said that “welcome could be read in the countenance of our citizens, in the cordial greeting and wealth of decorations and that while we could not boast of a large city and fine halls, we could not be outdone in lofty mountain and rich valley scenery.”

The Improved Order of Redmen was a national organization that still exists in some areas although somewhat politically improper. I did notice, as a matter of information, that the Improved Order of Redmen was a recognized social order in Panama during the construction of the Panama Canal. When the canal was finished most of those organizations disbanded and the members came back to the United States and often joined tribes in their own areas.

But the Improved Order of Redmen still exists, even today, in the East and the Mid West. It's a little mystical to me that these guys, even today or especially today, can run around in feathered headdresses and play Indian, but Stanford University and Sequoia High School can't be the Indians and the Cherokees. I guess the East Coast Indians are more permissive.

The list of gentlemen who belonged to the Improved Order of Redmen, Tribe #24 represent a list of rather important figures in the Redwood City area. The list I present here is how the organization looked at about the turn of the 19th century. Please remember that there was also a "Pocahantas" Chapter attached to the Metamora Tribe. These were the women's organization and often they were the wives of the men who were involved.

George W. Lovie
 Frederick Brandt
 Benjamin F. Josselyn
 Henry A. Chase
 William Rotrosky
 George H. Buck
 W. M. Betts
 J. J. Bullock
 F. Ludeman
 R. R. Livingston
 E. M. Hanson
 E. E. Walters
 John Domingos
 A. G. Richards
 J. R. Terrill
 Joseph DeBenedetti
 Alex William Westran
 Owen McGarvey

Herman Ambrose Scofield

By John Edmonds

Herman Scofield was born on September 1, 1819, in Vermont. He was educated in that state and came to California when the Gold Rush started. He tried his luck at digging for gold but was unsuccessful and soon returned to his profession, attorney at law. Scofield moved to the Town of Folsom and opened an office and business. In 1860, he moved again, this time to Redwood City. His license allowed him to practice law anywhere in the state of California.

Scofield spent a brief period of time in San Francisco and Oakland but he soon returned to his home in Redwood City. In 1863, he ran, in the election, for district attorney and won the position. When he finished his first term he ran again but he was defeated by Harvey Kincaid.



Times Gazette Building

In 1866, Scofield joined with A.T. Warren and purchased the Times – Gazette newspaper, and moved into the offices on the second floor of the building on Main Street just south of Bridge Street. Mr. Warren handled the business end of the paper and Schofield handled the typesetting and editing of each edition, which always came out on Saturday and was always four pages.

The two operated the paper for five years. The partnership ended when Mr. Warren sold his half to Scofield. Scofield operated the newspaper for six more months when he sold it to the McPherson brothers.

Scofield held no office until 1879, when he was elected Justice of the Peace for the 3rd Township, a position to which he was reelected in 1880, and he held it at the time of his death. Herman Ambrose Scofield died on January 15, 1881, and was buried in plot #53 in Union Cemetery.

Redwood City 1910: Everything Up To Date

By James O. Clifford, Sr.

Last year San Mateo County celebrated the 100th anniversary of the dedication of its historic courthouse, a Victorian structure that now houses the county museum and serves as the focal point of downtown Redwood City. There was a lot of looking back to 1910, but what did the people of 1910 look forward to?

Newspapers of July 4, 1910 that honored the courthouse's birth overflowed with the optimism and confidence of a young nation that suddenly possessed an empire wrested from Spain.

"Wireless telegraphy and telephone and quick contact with the outside world are man's parallel to God's great gift of the climate and bay," boasted one column in the Redwood City Democrat. "Surely Redwood City is among the best." After all, the city of 2,442 had two weekly newspapers and five churches.

The writer, Frona Colburn, claimed "nothing seems wanting but a flying machine."

Colburn must have been pleased when 1910 recorded huge leaps in aviation, although the skies were still a new frontier, one pioneered by the Wright Brothers as recently as 1903. Contests were held around the world to find out who could complete flights that then seemed very distant. In September of 1910 the Daily Mail awarded a prize of 50 pounds to a pilot who flew from Paris to London. It also was the first year a radio message was sent from a plane, according to "Century of Flight," which, on a more deadly note, listed 1910 as the year the machine gun debuted as an aerial weapon.

The feat of flying drew thousands to Tanforan in San Bruno in 1910 to see famed pilot Louis Paulhan of France reach an altitude of 1,300 feet, according to the New York Times of Jan. 26 of that year. The interest is understandable. Paulhan was fresh from his performance at the first major American airshow, which was held at Dominguez Field, just south of Los Angeles, from Jan 10-20. There he set a new flight endurance record by carrying a passenger almost 110 miles in his Farman biplane in an hour and 49 minutes. Then he reached a new altitude mark of 4,164 feet, according to the U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission. In a few years Redwood City would have a flying school, albeit one with a short life. The founder-aviator, Silas Christofferson, died in 1916 when his biplane plunged to earth near what is today the city corporation yard.



Dumbarton Bridge was big news in 1910.

To showcase advances, the Democrat ran several pictures of the recently opened Dumbarton Rail Bridge, the first bridge across the bay. The bridge, which cut 26 miles off the train ride from Oakland to San Francisco, featured a rotating section that shifted aside to make way for boats. The newspaper also noted that the courthouse was "class A fireproof," adding that "not a piece of wood was "used in the building for structural or finish purposes."

There was a hint of some problems ahead, however. A very short story at the bottom of the paper reported that the "waters of the Bay are being polluted" but in the main there were few naysayers.

The county's population stood at 26,585 and would grow to 36,781 in ten years. Much of the growth was recorded in the northern parts of the county where refugees fled from San Francisco's 1906 earthquake and fire. South San Francisco incorporated in 1908, the same year Burlingame did. Daly City would incorporate in 1911 and San Bruno in 1914. Despite the increasing population, some areas would soon be cut off from growth. In 1913 the Raker Act, which led to the Hetch Hetchy Water System, assured that parts of San Mateo County would be kept from development.

Everything was up to date on the Peninsula, which even had telephones. A "long distance" three-minute call from Redwood City to San Francisco cost 25 cents. The prices in the newspaper's ads look laughable today until one realizes that the average worker in America earned \$15 a week for 54-60 hours of toil. Southern Pacific charged \$108. 50 for a round trip ticket to New York that included "liberal stop-over privileges." The ad for grocer E. P. Heise showed a pound of seedless raisins going for 10 cents while a pound of mince meat was tagged at 15 cents, the same price as a can of lobster. At Einstein's, boys suits were going for \$7.50. Realtors were selling "brand new bungalows" for \$4,000 while the Pioneer Auto was offering a car for \$1,500. The paper also had an ad for a blacksmith, who must have wondered about his future. Henry Ford alone sold 10,000 cars in 1910.

Women Take the Lead

The July 4th edition of the Democrat was important for reasons other than reporting every aspect of the new courthouse. It was the first time women produced the newspaper.

"When it is issued it will go far to convince the public that the ladies know what news is and how to write it," the Democrat's June 16 issue predicted about the Independence Day edition that would be put out by members of the Woman's Club, which was less than a year old. Incorporated on Sept. 16, 1909, the first meeting drew 33 members who planned to promote "good fellowship and cooperation" among women in the area.

Mrs. George A. Merrill fulfilled the promise of "knowing what news is" when she wrote about what the future would hold. She saw increasing relations between America and Asia as the key.

"The contact between America and the Orient goes on with little notice, appearing to us as a series of common place incidents of our daily lives and seemingly a matter of small consequence," she wrote. "Historians of a century hence will see it otherwise."

Right on target. A century hence is now.

Merrill also wrote that the Panama Canal, which would open in five years, "will add still further to our increasing radius of world connections."

She forecast that the population on the Peninsula "will continue at a rate that will soon reconcile the oldest inhabitant to the passing of the farm and the advent of the suburban home-builder."

The aforementioned Colburn made a similar forecast, predicting the Bay's deep water ports would lure trade that will result in "great factories, mills, plants and warehouses which will have direct contact with Pacific Ocean traffic."

Another contributor, Frances Fairchild, gave her opinion about the future of women, noting that they were better educated than their mothers and were raised to be "practical, executive and forceful."

"They have worked harmoniously and demonstrated the power of associated womanhood," she wrote about what today might be called "networking."

"The doors of greater opportunities have opened to them and under these circumstances they will accomplish more in the future."

Fairchild pondered what was in store for the family. Insisting that "true womanliness is not in danger," she wrote that "the sacred duties of wife and mother will be all the more honorably performed," concluding that women will need "better men," ones who "uphold the sanctity of the home."

Not All News Is from Ivory Towers

Don't get the impression that people of 1910 were consumed by matters of such great importance.

The papers were filled with what today seems mundane. Whole columns of print reported on “What Your Neighbors Have Been Doing During the Past Week.” For instance, The Colma Record of Oct. 7, 1910 let the town know that “Mrs. Madison Rae of Colma has been on the sick list for a couple of weeks” and that “M. Wiggurick of Stickles Avenue has returned from a month’s vacation at Santa Cruz.”

It’s a good bet that most of those comings and goings were by whites, who formed the vast majority of the population. There’s a hint of racism in the Democrat. In her piece, Merrill claimed that the “principal point of contact between the white and yellow civilizations will be on California soil.” Try getting that line in print today!!!

The white world was dealt a body blow on July 4, 1910, the same day the courthouse was dedicated, when black heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson devastated former champion James Jeffries before 20,000 people in Reno. Jeffries, the “great white hope,” had come out of retirement, saying, “I feel obligated to the sporting public at least to make an effort to reclaim the heavyweight championship for the white race.”

San Mateo County had a good look at Johnson almost a year earlier in Colma when he fought middleweight champ Stanley Ketchel. The 202-pound Johnson knocked out the 170 pound Ketchel in the 12th round after the smaller fighter had decked him. Ketchel was tough. He kept getting knocked down and coming back.



Courthouse Then: c 1910



Courthouse Now

“That man isn’t human,” Johnson reportedly told his corner during the Oct 16 fight. After he was knocked down by Ketchel, Johnson unleashed a blow so powerful it ripped five of Ketchel’s teeth off at the roots. Colma was a fitting place for such a battle. The northern part of the county was home to much of what was illegal in San Francisco – including boxing and gambling.

About Those Courthouse Swastikas

A sure sign of the racism of the times are the swastika-like tiles sprinkled throughout the courthouse floor. NOT so fast. Let’s not rush to judgment. Before World War II, the swastika, a word of Sanskrit origin, was used by many cultures for thousands of years to represent life, sun, power, strength and good luck. Some American Indians who wove swastikas into blankets for sale to tourists stopped the practice when the emblem became associated with Hitler and hate. The word “race” was tossed around freely in 1910. The 1911 edition of the U.S. Immigration Commission’s Dictionary of Races of People recognized 45 “races” among immigrants to the United States.

The San Mateo County History Museum has printed a flier that explains the floor mosaic, calling the symbol the “sauvastika, the mirror image of the swastika.” The flier adds that “in the early 1900s, before the Nazis adopted the symbol, it was a common decoration on cigarette cases, postcards, coins and buildings.”

The courthouse swastikas could be regarded as ironic because today the museum features an Immigrant Gallery that honors all early immigrant groups that contributed to the growth of San Mateo County. That's not all. The museum holds an Immigrants Festival each year where visitors can get a literal taste of different cultures by sampling foods ranging from Chinese to Italian or joining the crowd in the courthouse square applauding Mexican, Portuguese or Irish dancers.

The rotunda floor of the courthouse gets little attention compared to the stained glass dome that caps the building 70 feet up. The dome, which consists of a 36-foot diameter inner dome and a 40-foot high double outer dome, contains 38,240 pieces of antique colored glass in 144 panels, 27,000 feet of lead and 50,000 solder joints. When lighted, the dome is indeed a "landmark." Getting it lighted was no easy task. Several organizations joined forces to light the structure in 1988. They included the Electrical Industry Trust, which donated 70 fixtures that were installed by volunteers from the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The chandelier and stained glass ceiling of the restored Courtroom A, which is used for such special events as reenactments of famous trials of the past, are well worth a visit.

Dennis Hansen of Redwood City worked on the lighting job.

"It was hard work," he recalled. "Lots of tight spaces. But it was worth it when the lights came on. Very spectacular."

The dome was about all that was left of the structure after the 1906 earthquake. Surprisingly, little, if anything, was made of the earthquake when the courthouse was rebuilt and dedicated in 1910. One would think that the courthouse would have been regarded as a symbol of the county's bouncing back from the disaster. Much could have been made of that aspect, in the same way San Francisco would in 1915 with its exposition in the Marina District, which took place on the rubble from the earthquake and fire.

The possibility of San Mateo County hosting the 1915 exposition was pitched to the crowd at the 1910 courthouse gathering by the main speaker, W. J. Martin, who suggested Tanforan as the location.

Martin, like the women in the earlier edition of the newspaper, focused on a future pushed by access to Pacific markets. He saw a time when railroads and "rapid transit, electric and other services of the cheapest and best" along with "splendid roads and highways" will bring prosperity to the Peninsula. "Accessibility is the secret," he said. "Nothing else."

And just who was W. J. Martin? He was William James Martin, a real estate agent regarded as the "father of South San Francisco." Martin, who was born in Illinois in 1856, was the subject of a paper written in 1939 by San Mateo Junior College student Lorenzo Lorenzo, who wrote that Martin brought "factory after factory" to San Mateo County.

"Building up the Peninsula was his consuming ambition," the college student said of Martin.

Newspapers would later proudly boast that thousands of people came to Redwood City for the 1910 dedication, but "good order prevailed."

A "flying machine" did show up for the 1910 dedication. It was one of the floats in the event's parade. A reporter wrote that the "aeroplane float was so daintily trimmed in the national colors that the idea of lightness was accentuated to the point that it looked quite ready to fly."

The Woman's Club saw a dream come true when the courthouse's 100th birthday was marked in 2010. In 1910, the organization hoped a fountain would be included in the square in front of the courthouse, but it didn't get its wish when those in charge opted for a basic plaza design. Today there are several fountains in front of the courthouse, as can be attested to by the thousands of people who have attended the summer activities in the square that range from dances to movies.

The refurbished courthouse was described by the New York Times as "a European-style piazza sprinkled with Italianesque stone fountains." The feature story published a few weeks before the 2010 ceremonies depicted the courthouse as the power in a "Silicon Valley Relaunch."

A "flying machine" did show up for the 1910 dedication. It was one of the floats in the event's parade. A reporter wrote that the "aeroplane float was so daintily trimmed in the national colors that the idea of lightness was accentuated to the point that it looked quite ready to fly."

Always a Local Angle

By James O. Clifford, Sr.

This is a story behind the story: about how the search for a local angle - any local angle - to a major story can spread like a mushroom cloud, resulting in a fallout of sheer serendipity that gives the hunt a life of its own.

It's also a bit of a coup for The Journal of Local History as well as more evidence for keeping open the Redwood City Library History Room, which, now that city funding has been sliced, is operated by volunteers who need all the help they can get.

And what history writer wouldn't regard as a major story the recent hoopla over the 75th anniversary of the first trans-Pacific crossing by the fabled China Clipper? Television shows, newspaper stories and blogs recounted the exploits of the four-engine Pan American flying boat that took off from Alameda in 1935 and hopped its way to Asia, using islands with strange names as stepping stones. In a few years the islands of Midway, Wake and Guam would be familiar to most Americans as World War II battlegrounds.

The three-day China Clipper 75th Anniversary Celebration last November drew scores of people to the museum at San Francisco International Airport. The museum, a replica of the waiting room of the 1937 San Francisco airport, was a perfect setting. Upon entering, the visitor is overshadowed by a giant globe of the world that once graced Pan Am's office. There are large models of the Clipper planes, including one with the side open to allow a peek at the plane's seating and dining areas, which were luxurious enough to make today's cramped airplane passengers jealous.

Three movies about the Pan Am Clippers were shown during the celebration and memorabilia was sold. The items for purchase included a set of three DVDs that recorded a gathering of Clipper enthusiasts held at the same airport just five years earlier. The set contained eleven hours of lectures and panel discussions by historians, authors and aviation professionals. Talk about a dedicated fan club!!!

A quick search of the merchandise failed to find any with a strong link to San Mateo County. The Clipper, after all, was first based in Alameda and then moved to Treasure Island where it thrilled crowds at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition, better known as the San Francisco World's Fair. The flying boat was so popular that tickets were sold to watch maintenance work from a balcony in the hangar.



Pan American Clipper over San Francisco Bay — Photo by Clyde Sunderland.

A glimpse of San Mateo County is shown in the Trans-Pacific 75th Anniversary Special Edition of FAM 14, a publication of the San Francisco Aeronautical Society. The name FAM 14 stems from the abbreviation for the world's first transoceanic Foreign Air Mail route, which was forged by the Clipper, a Martin M-130. The masthead of FAM14 shows the plane flying over the San Francisco waterfront on Nov. 22, 1935, departing on the first trans-Pacific commercial flight to Manila. What made the flight "commercial" was the mail contract with the government. There were no passengers yet.

The San Mateo link is a photo inside of the seaplane harbor at SFO. The aerial shot taken around 1946 shows what appeared to be two moored Boeing 314s, which were later models of the Clipper. A sad picture because it marked the end of the line for the pioneering planes that landed and took off on water because, prior to World War II, there were no airstrips large enough to accommodate them. After the war there were plenty such runways and new long-range, land-based planes took over.

According to FAM14, in 1944 Pan American moved from Treasure Island to San Francisco Airport where the last flying boat arrived from Hawaii on April 9, 1946. A few days later, the War Assets Administration placed ads to sell the fleet. All the flying boats were eventually scrapped.

Redwood City Man was Publicity Chief

A search of yellowing newspapers in the Redwood City Library history room revealed that a local slant to the Clipper saga was difficult in 1935. The Redwood City Tribune used almost exclusively United Press stories. The paper did manage to report that George North of Redwood City was aboard the Clipper, which it described as a “flying ship” when it arrived in Alameda for what would be its historic flight.

North, who was publicity director of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, was “statewide publicity aide for the first flight of the China Clipper across the Pacific,” the Tribune story said. North and the M-130 arrived from San Diego on the last leg of a flight that started at the Martin airplane plant in Maryland where the plane was handed over to Pan American. The Tribune was so starved for a local angle that it went as far as to report that the plane had “12 letters or so” for Redwood City residents when it returned on Dec. 6, 1935.

San Mateo County just missed becoming the center for Pan American flying boat operations, thanks largely to a near miss on that first flight in 1935 when the takeoff was witnessed by 10,000 people. The 26-ton flying boat pulled from its wake and strained to reach for the sky, failing to get enough altitude to fly over the under-construction San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Veteran pilot Ed Musik steered the craft under the cables and guy wires of the span in a sensational feat captured by news photographers.

Rep. John McGrath, who told reporters the Clipper “nearly crashed into the bay,” insisted that bridges and planes did not make good neighbors.

“In the face of this one incident, our Navy Department would hardly be able to face the nation were it to select a site for its Navy base which would subject every naval plane to that same hazard,” said McGrath, who pushed to have Coyote Point made the Navy’s seaplane base. He lost out to Alameda, which became home to a naval air station.

Pan American signed a contract in 1940 to establish its Pacific Coast headquarters at what is today SFO, but Pearl Harbor intervened and the airline’s entire Pacific fleet was contracted to the Defense Department.

At Last a REAL Local Slant

The movies shown to the SFO gathering yielded a solid local slant apparently missed by much of the news media. The opening movie was a short documentary. The night’s feature was the 1936 film “China Clipper,” which starred Humphrey Bogart and Pat O’Brien. The third film, which was more of a travelogue, was made by a passenger on one of the early Clipper flights. That’s where the local tie comes in, and it’s a good one.

The passenger turned out to be Carlton E. Morse of Woodside, one of the great radio drama writers of the days when radio was king. The master of ceremonies asked how many in the audience had heard of Morse. A few hands went up. When he identified Morse as the creator of “One Man’s Family,” many more hands shot up.

“One Man’s Family,” set in San Francisco’s elegant Sea Cliff area, was born in 1932 and became the longest running radio drama in history when it ended in 1959. Don’t call the NBC show a “soap opera.” Legend has it that Morse, who was 91 when he died in 1993, punched a reporter in the nose for using the term to describe the lives of “Father and Mother Barbour,” the main characters in the show the announcer proclaimed was “... dedicated to the mothers and fathers of the younger generation ... and to their bewildering offspring.” Morse also wrote the popular “I Love a Mystery” series.

Little was known about the Morse movie, which was silent except for some music, according to editors at FAM-14.

“This was a film that was lent to one of our board members and we are not in a position to make a copy of it,” said Liz Gindraux of the society. “It was titled 1937 Hawaiian Clipper Trip and Carlton E. Morse was involved in the shooting in some way, but that is really the only data we have on it.”

(Eds note: The flying boats had separate names, such as “Hawaiian Clipper” and “Samoa Clipper,” but “China Clipper” became a generic term.)

The airport museum staff could not shed further light, but *The Journal* did not give up. In researching Morse, the author stumbled upon one line on the Internet that said the Library of Congress possessed a 10-minute recording in which Morse reported on his roundtrip Clipper flight from San Francisco to Hong Kong.

According to Library of Congress policy, the only way to hear the recording was to visit the library in Washington, D.C. *The Journal* contacted Felix Lim, a Catholic seminarian once assigned to Mount Carmel Parish in Redwood City, who is now studying in the nation’s capital. Lim put the author in touch with Vivian Awumey, a Library of Congress contact who listened to the recording and took notes, which she sent to the *Journal*.

Morse, who called the experience “a dream come true,” reported 18 passengers on the six-day trip to “the Orient,” a 7,000 mile flight at an altitude of 12,000 feet, 125 miles per hour for 120 flying hours. The other passengers included a Chinese businessman, a doctor and a Swedish newspaper reporter who wanted to be the first person to travel around the world on a commercial flight.

Seven stewards, all male, served meals or refreshments every two hours. Passengers read, played cards, talked or watched “the panorama” of clouds and sea, Morse continued.

It’s not known how much Morse’s flight cost, but the price of a round trip from San Francisco to Manila was \$1,438. 20. The trip was made in grace and style, certainly when compared to today. The Clipper’s central lounge was wider than a Pullman club car and was fitted with broad armchairs. China and silverware accompanied the meals. Some planes had sleeping berths.



Honolulu Stop

Despite the luxury, the trip wasn’t for the weak. The plane stopped in Honolulu, Guam, Midway and Wake Islands, Macao and Manila to refuel and load mail. The passengers, who stayed at hotels while the tasks were done, were awakened between 2:30 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. and ordered back on the plane, a grueling schedule that forced some to drop out and resume travel by ship, Morse reported in the broadcasts in two NBC Blue network programs in May of 1937.

Morse’s pioneering trip came four years after he bought 50 acres off Skyline Boulevard above Woodside at \$900 an acre on which he built a house he called Seven Stones.

According to a 1987 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Morse said he sold the final 13 acres in 1986 with the stipulation he could stay in the home for the rest of his life.

Morse used Seven Stones as the model for “Sky Ranch,” the summer retreat of the Barbour’s of “One Man’s Family.” The Barbour’s often talked about driving to Woodside or Redwood City. It was on the road from Highway 35 to Woodside that Clifford Barbour’s wife, Irene, was killed in a head-on crash, proving that even in fiction there is always a local angle.

John Westergren

By John Edmonds



It was a sad day on June 12, 1888, when John Westergren departed this earth. He had suffered for more than a year with “consumption” or tuberculosis, as we know it today. This was stated in the San Mateo County Times & Gazette in the June 14, 1888, issue. He passed away on the Thursday prior. The death was expected, but still painful. He was only 44 years old. The newspaper lamented the fact that he left a widow and five children.

John Westergren was a native of Sweden who arrived in San Mateo County and took up residence in Redwood City in the early days of this settlement. He went to work for the lumber industry in the mountains. He was one of very few men who would drive the very heavy lumber wagons from the mills to Redwood City—usually double that--meaning wagon and trailer, and pulled by four or six horses, depending on conditions.

John Westergren was the daring sort of man. He would stand 10 to 12 feet high on top of the milled lumber and drive it down the crooked roads from Skyline or farther, with nothing to brace his back, and only a board or two to place his feet upon. The fact that he was willing to earn a living this way tells me that he was a tough and stellar individual.

The funeral services and the burial services were under the auspices of the Metamora Tribe of Redmen. (See accompanying article.) John was a member of this organization, which was very prominent in Redwood City. It is still an ongoing concern in other parts of the country.

Family Letters: A Window to California's Past

By Jim O. Clifford, Sr.

(Editor's note: As far as is known, the subject of this article is not related to Dennis Martin, the pioneer who established St. Denis Church, the first church in San Mateo County, in 1856.)

A Peninsula woman's family tree yielded a fruit historians spend careers searching for: a primary source, a document written during the time under study. The find is a series of letters penned during the latter half of the 19th century by an immigrant to California who wanted the folks back home in Ireland to know what life was like in the Golden State.

Julie Mooney of Burlingame, a project director at Canada College, is the great-granddaughter of John Charles Martin, who started his letters in 1871 and continued the correspondence for 10 years, by which time his younger brother Joe had joined him in California. There are some joint letters from the two, and Joe kept writing to his family until he returned home to Ireland in the 1920s.

Mooney said she started a preliminary exploration of her family history in early 2004, with much of her interest spurred by her daughter Meghan, who was completing college at San Jose State.

“She began to ask a bit about family stories, relationships, how many generations we were in California,” said Mooney, who began “poking around” to gain information about her ancestors. She met with a relative in California, who brought along some old papers her mother had kept, things such as genealogical charts, newspaper articles, obituaries and other items about the family in Ireland. The information also included contact information for a Caroline Mullan in Dalkey, Ireland. BINGO!!!

Mullan, the great granddaughter of a Martin brother who remained in Ireland, turned out to be an indefatigable researcher. In her early search of the past, Mullan corralled what she described as “mountains of utterly fascinating correspondence,” that, unfortunately, did not include the long-lost “letters from America.”

“Sometimes I used to dream that I found them,” she said. Then sheer serendipity surfaced in 1995, when she went to London to visit an uncle who told her she could rummage through his attic in search of family artifacts.

“There, right in front of me, was a packet of letters which I instantly recognized as the ‘letters from America,’” Mullan said.

John Martin had lived in San Jose when he wrote his first letter home to his mother on May 27, 1871, telling her he had been promised work at an assaying office in San Francisco, an offer that is not mentioned again.

“Am straining every point to be able to embrace the opportunity,” Martin penned. “This is a fast country, and men must go by circumstances.”



John Martin

One Among Many

Martin was among a steady stream of immigrants to the United States. Between 1870 and 1890 nearly 12 million immigrants arrived. That’s more than had come in the preceding 70 years. During the 1870s and 1880s, the majority came from Germany, Ireland and England, according to the American Memory website.

During Martin’s first decade in America, cable cars came to San Francisco and barbed wire to ranges. Polygamy was outlawed, and gold was discovered in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. Custer made his last stand at the Little Big Horn in 1876, the same year the nation was 100 years old, Tom Sawyer was published, and Alexander Graham Bell said, “Mr. Watson, come here.”

In 1872, while in Santa Cruz County, Martin wrote his sister that “labor in America today holds as honorable a place as capital.” He marveled at the telegraph and railroad and the “flash that travels quick over the Atlantic Cable.” In a later letter, he said that the world “nowadays is only a neighborhood. Think of a train going from New York to San Francisco in 3 ½ days.”

“I tell you without a doubt that there is no country in the old or new worlds whose government, religion and social habits come so near perfection as the United States, now that slavery is abolished,” he told his sister Fanny. Nevertheless, things weren’t going well for Martin.

“There is very little work here during the five rainy months,” he wrote two years later from Soquel. “And then the work during summer is for the most part what you called horse work. Adversity often makes me feel as if I would give up the contest. I have to hunt for work in the season and wait for it when there is none.”

Martin noted that unlike his homeland, America did not have “casts or classes.”

Yet, he said, “Everything is run on a high scale society, dress, luxuries, etc.,” all things that he insisted should be ignored by an ambitious young man, “unless his ambition is merely to keep his head above water or live from hand to mouth.”

In an 1875 letter from Sunol Glen in Alameda County, he noted that many Irish immigrants did just that with drinking, gambling and other vices, “considered accomplishments.”

The same year, and in Boulder Creek, he wrote that wages were low because immigrants were coming “from the East at a rate of 10,000 per month” and “overstocking the labor market.” He would have a great deal to say in another letter, and in an angrier tone, about competition by newcomers from China.

“I’m at present working on a road that crosses the Coast Range from Santa Clara to Santa Cruz counties,” he wrote in a letter to his brother James. “My health is very good, although I have camped out” and “sometimes mix in rough crowds.”

On a lighter note, Martin reported that “spelling mania” was sweeping the nation with spelling clubs formed “in every town and hamlet from Maine to Texas.”

Many of his letters bounced from hope to downright depression, all on the same page. One letter said he was sick for three months in San Francisco, which he claimed “was a bad place to get sick.”

“Expenses of all kinds are so high, and the people are selfish, but now I am accustomed to that kind of thing,” he said in a message that sounds as if it could have been written today.

Becoming Bilingual

In the same letter, which was written in February 1876, he told his brother that California had “a good crop prospect” because “it had rained a great deal since November.”

By this time, which was around 30 years after Mexican rule ended in California, Martin was learning Spanish, describing it as “a very easily learned language and almost as pure as Latin. In fact, it is a sort of bastard Latin—corrupted a little.”

From such remarks, it is obvious that Martin was no “paddy,” whose only talent was wielding the “Irish banjo,” an ethnic slur of the time that meant a “shovel.” Clearly, he was a literate fellow of some education. The family history notes that Martin spent two years at the Albert Institution in Dublin, now part of the present University College of Dublin.

Agriculture, geology, surveying and veterinary science were among his studies, but “the main emphasis was, however, on literature,” read the history, which added that Martin’s references from the college tabbed him as “a man of good natural ability. His attention to his studies has been most satisfactory, and his conduct has been most exemplary.”

This education probably paid off in the long run, but in 1876 Martin was working by the sweat of his brow in a saw mill in Alameda County, where the “wages were good,” but the work was “very heavy.”

Martin’s spirits were buoyed by the approaching Centennial in Philadelphia, which he predicted would be “a great affair.” He also noted the appearance of Japanese Navy ships in San Francisco Bay, as well as Japanese students “in all the colleges.” The Japanese sailors and marines “are quite at home in the streets of San Francisco.”

The Chinese were a different matter to Martin.

“California is overrun with Chinese, who take the places of both men and women,” he wrote. “Labor has to compete with the Chinese Empire.” He also reminded his family in Ireland to “remember that California is not the El Dorado it was represented to be in ’49.”

According to the “Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900,” after the Gold Rush, the Chinese immigrants who had worked the gold fields became farm laborers, railroad workers, or took low-paying jobs. When hard economic times hit in the 1870s, non-Chinese competed with the Chinese, leading to anti-Chinese riots and the Chinese Exclusion Act passed by Congress in 1882.

Martin was critical of his own people, as seen in the aforementioned comment on Irish drinking and gambling. In addition, Martin was a fervent anti-cleric who had a great deal to say about the Catholic Church and Irish immigrants.

“No wonder that Americans and other foreigners pity the blind zeal of the Irish,” he said, contending that the church leadership’s “doctrine seems to demand obedience that turned Christianity into a threat of excommunication here and damnation beyond...”

Such vehement letters dropped off when Martin's situation changed dramatically in 1878.

"I made a purchase of a piece of land in May," he told his brother Joe in an 1878 message from Livermore. "Put in a crop of wheat and barley at considerable expense this fall. If things turn out as I anticipate, you will have a chance to show your skill in harvesting 100 acres of California grain."

He then gives Joe advice on making the trip to America.

Joe Comes to America

"Only 10 days across the Atlantic and about the same across the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, and you are in California," he wrote, telling Joe, "The less luggage you have, the easier to make your way. A serviceable suit of clothes and a couple of shirts and underwear will suffice."

Joe joined John in Livermore in 1880 or '81. "He worked nearly all the time with me since he came here," John wrote home in February of 1881. "I was reaping wheat the day he came here, and he went stacking the next day."

The 1880 census showed John living in Murray, Alameda County. At that time, it was a township that included Livermore, Pleasanton, Dublin and Sunol. The census recorded 4,370 names. John was listed as single and a farmer. Despite John's earlier comments about the Chinese, a Chinese cook from Hong Kong named Ling was listed in his household.

Joe learned quickly that the streets of America were not paved with gold.

"This is the roughest state in the Union on working men," he informed his sister Mary in September of 1881. He has been part of a crew that took a thresher from Livermore to the San Joaquin Valley, camping in fields where he saw "the thermometer as high as 115."

"The worst feature of working on a thresher is that the hotter the day is, the harder you've got to work," he complained. The next letter, one sent in April 1882, is to their 24-year-old sister, Liz.

"This letter comes from Joe and me," say the brothers, who conceded, "Both of us were silent too long."

Liz is told that if she decides to come to America, she could join the two siblings.

"Remember that working for wages here is not considered menial and degrading as in Ireland. 'Tis looked upon as a stepping stone to something better."

A month after the letter was written, John married Annie Helegis, according to the family history. It also notes that Joe took over the correspondence in January 1884

In a Livermore letter in which he never mentions John, Joe wrote, "Mrs. John Martin and family are all well. I haven't been to their place in quite a while."

The family notes, "They don't seem to have been on good terms."

The history also shows that John and Annie had 11 children. They sent their eldest daughters, Fanny and Annie, to board across the bay at San Francisco Normal School, now San Francisco State, to become teachers. Fanny taught in Altamont, Inman and other local schools. Annie taught in one-room school houses in Hayward, Dublin and Livermore.

Joe's letter from Livermore reports that there are "thousands of idle men in San Francisco. There was a very large collection taken up in San Francisco a week ago to feed the unemployed." But he added, "This didn't keep the newspapers from giving glowing accounts and all kinds of inducements for immigration to the golden gate of California."

Three years later Joe had rented 257 acres and made plans to put wheat and barley on 200 of them.

"I have to be up at 5 o'clock to clean and harness four horses, go to work at daylight and quit at dark," he said, explaining he had little time to write sooner.

By 1890 Joe had a farm of 377 acres, 300 of it cultivated, as well as 17 horses.

"This is nice-looking country," Joe tells Liz. "This valley will soon be transformed into one vast vineyard and orchard. It is so now for miles around, grapes and fruit of all kinds are plentiful."

Right Month, Wrong Year.

"The papers are full of the predictions of some fanatics in Oakland and San Francisco that these places and adjoining towns will be swallowed up



Baling Hay On The Martin Farm

on the 14th of April by an earthquake,” he reported in the 1890 missive.

“The inhabitants are exhorted to flee to the mountains for safety,” Joe said, adding, “I suppose this is all bosh.”

The earthquake struck on April 18, but in 1906. Almost a year after the earthquake and fire, daughter Annie wrote from Hayward that “everything seems to be out of gear since that awful earthquake, even the weather.”

About the same time, Fanny may have shed some light on the apparent estrangement of her father and Joe.

“I haven’t seen Uncle Joe for some time,” she wrote relatives in Ireland. “He didn’t spend Christmas with us this year.” She also said she intended to take part in an upcoming mission at her church in Livermore.

“I’d like very much to see our whole family make it, but it grieves me to say that Papa never thinks of going to church, and in fact, thinks it useless for any of us.”

As noted earlier, John Martin had made it clear that he had little regard for religion. Not so Joe. Throughout his letters are several “thank Gods.” But whatever his feelings in life, John, who died in 1912, was buried in a Catholic cemetery after services at St. Michael’s Church in Livermore. He was 65.

Mooney reported that there were 16 Martin grandchildren and “many descendants.” She said the Livermore ranch is still there, and the present owners were very gracious when the family held a reunion picnic.



Livermore Ranch

Joe, who remained a bachelor, died in 1932 in Ireland at the age of 81. He brought cuttings from an apple tree on the Martin ranch in Livermore with him to Ireland, where they were planted in Raheen, Galway. Relatives say the resulting trees still bear fruit.

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Editor's Note

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 Spring 2011. From all of us at Redwood City Public Library's Archives Committee, we wish you a pleasant Winter.

