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CALIFORNIAN

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A Foundation Supporting the Study and Preservation of State and Regional History



**Sarah Winchester's
California Dream**

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Rebirth of the Cottage and Community History for All —except *RODENTS!*



Photo: CHCF Library

Tom Izu

Once upon a time (1894 or thereabouts—we don't know the exact date), two modest, almost identical structures appeared in what was to become the City of Cupertino, in a valley that would eventually be renamed "Silicon Valley." The two "cottages" housed guests and workers for Charles and Ella Baldwin's lavish country estate, which featured a winery, vineyards, orchards, and an elegant, French-style pavilion. The two, arched dependent buildings

contrasted sharply with the bright white, neo-classically-columned "party-house" the Baldwins used whenever in residence at their estate. The cottages' earthy and thick stucco arcades were covered with rampant *Parthenocissus tricuspidata*, Boston ivy, that dressed them in bold and vibrant colors each fall. A bright and lively flower and vegetable garden adorned the approach to their north porches.

Over one hundred years passed with the cottages serving several different purposes, for several different owners (De Anza College is the latest)—guest and workers' quarters, rental units, offices, and finally storage space as the buildings began to fall into serious disrepair.

By 1996, the buildings no longer sheltered many humans, but began to play host to moisture, mold, fungi, insects, and a variety of rodents and possibly a marsupial or two. Signs of

these new "guests" were abundant; in fact, in one cottage, an unlucky squirrel became trapped in an attic vent with its torso and head sticking out, and died, becoming a grotesque ornament, startling passers-by who happened to look up at the stiff critter beyond rigor mortis staring down at them. In the other, a skunk or rat died within its walls, causing much nasal discomfort to workers and others who chanced to wander by. Bees made nests in decaying rafters and feral cats left scat around crumbling brickwork causing difficult passage for those who dared negotiate the walkways of the forlorn-looking buildings. Strange collages of various green, gray, and brown tones of molds and mildew mottled the walls and ceilings inside where water damage was evident from the worn-down roofs, greeting the few who were authorized to venture inside.

The Board of the California History Center Foundation (CHCF), dedicated to preserving our valley's history, became distressed over the deterioration of the cottages and wanted to save them both. The two cottages represented some of the oldest remaining structures in the city and were among the most architecturally significant. The CHCF and the college lacked the funds to proceed with rehabilitation and eventually one of the cottages was torn down by the college to allow for roadway improvement, leaving its mate behind. CHCF paid for a new roof to protect the remaining cottage from the elements. A positive turn of events occurred June 6, 2006, when the college's plans to rehabilitate and preserve the remaining cottage were funded by voters through the passage of Measure C, promising a new life for the structure.

Outhouses adorning its patio and surrounded with fencing,



caption for historic cottage photos?

the cottage today rings with the sound of hammers, saws and other construction-related machinery. It is no longer abandoned, left to fend off various threats.

Simply and sublimely beautiful, the cottage is indeed a distinguished building with a special future. Don't let the crumbling stucco, the twin port-a-potties, and surrounding cyclone fence fool you—one hundred years ago it was a prime example of the "Mission Revival Style" made famous by its architect, Willis Polk. In 2010, it is destined to become, once again, a unique and admired structure. It will undergo a transformation into a very special space.

By fall 2010, the cottage will become home to the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement (ICCE) a three-year-old venture of the college that creates service learning and civic engagement opportunities linking our students and faculty with the surrounding community. In addition, it will house a community research facility—with special "lab" or work areas, an oral history interview room and a dedicated classroom—what we are currently calling the Social Sciences and Humanities Division Research and Resource Lab.

Even though this is indeed one of the most precarious of times to embark on a new educational venture—the word "unprecedented" continues to pop up to describe the economic crisis here at De Anza College and elsewhere—a special opportunity is opening up to create a one-of-a-kind facility, one that will make "hands-on-history" and social problem-solving into a

truly living and active part of the educational experience for our students and community participants. Visitors to our future facility will develop multi-media oral history interviews and community history projects by conducting research on local neighborhoods, ethnic, and campus groups.

We hope you will join us in making this possible by your continued support of the CHC and our new partner, the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement.

The cutbacks De Anza College is facing are most severe, and as of this writing, it is unclear what will happen to CHC. However, there is little question in my mind as to the potential this new venture has for CHC, the college, our students and the community as a whole. I believe rehabilitating and repurposing our cottage to support the ICCE program will make the next one hundred years the most interesting and productive of CHCF's history and for all who share its vision. I am not sure if the rodents, insects, molds and other creatures would share my enthusiasm, however. Perhaps they will bide their time and hope for another opportunity in a couple of hundred years or so? Time will tell.

Cover photo: Heart Mountain residents are bidding goodbye to friends and neighbors as they return to their homes or depart for new homes and work throughout the nation, 1945. Photographer: Yone Kubo. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

CALENDAR

Jan. 4	First day of Winter Quarter instruction.
Jan. 15	Sunnyvale's History class, 9:45 a.m., CHC
Jan. 18	Martin Luther King holiday observed, campus closed
Jan. 28	Grand Hotels of San Francisco class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Jan. 29	Sunnyvale's History field trip
Jan. 30	Grand Hotels of San Francisco field trip
Feb. 4	Saving Marin class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Feb. 5	Sunnyvale's History class, 9:45 a.m., CHC
Feb. 11	Grand Hotels class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Feb. 12–15	President's Birthday holiday observed, campus closed
Feb. 13	Saving Marin field trip

Feb. 18	Saving Marin class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Feb. 20	Grand Hotels field trip
Feb. 25	Arts in the Bay Area class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Feb. 27	Saving Marin field trip
Mar. 4	California Missions class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Mar. 7	Arts in the Bay Area field trip
Mar. 11	Arts in the Bay Area class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Mar. 13	California Missions field trip
Mar. 18	California Missions class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Mar. 21	Arts in the Bay Area field trip
Mar. 22–26	Finals week
Mar. 26	Last day of Winter Quarter

EDUCATION

California History Center State and Regional History Academic Program

The following courses will be offered Winter Quarter 2010 through the California History Center. Please see the History class listings section of this Schedule of Classes <<http://www.deanza.fhda.edu/schedule/>> for additional information or call the center at (408) 864-8986.

SUNNYVALE'S HISTORY

Mary Jo Ignoffo HIST 107X-55 ■ 2 UNITS
Sunnyvale, California is best known as a key community in the world-renowned Silicon Valley. This class traces the history of Sunnyvale, from its pre-history, through the colonial Spanish era to the hundred years it was one of the world's biggest producers of prunes, apricots, cherries, pears, and plums. Post-World War II defense and technology companies were the precursors to today's Silicon Valley. This class will demonstrate ways to explore local history for use on websites, documentaries, and in college-level research papers. Primary source documents and photographs will be used to illustrate the city's history.

Lectures: Fridays, January 15, 22, February 5,
9:45 a.m.-12 noon, CHC

Field Trip: Friday January 29 TBA

Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins. There will be tours of these and other hotels.

Lectures: Thursdays, January 28 and February 11
6:20 p.m.-10:00 p.m., CHC

Field trips: Saturdays, January 30, February 20, TBA

SAVING MARIN: PRESERVATION AND POLITICS

Chatham Forbes HIST 107X-96 ■ 2 UNITS
Although less than a mile across the Golden Gate from San Francisco, Marin County is significantly different from its metropolitan neighbor. Outstanding has been the successful environmental protectionism of Marin's private establishment, which has preserved one third of the county's wilderness lands.

Lectures: Thursdays, February 4 and 18
6:20 p.m.-10 p.m., CHC

Field trips: Saturdays, February 13 and 27 TBA



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GRAND HOTELS OF SAN FRANCISCO

Betty Hirsch HIST 53X-95 ■ 2 UNITS
San Francisco, "city at the end of the rainbow," early on became a city of hotels to house its dreamers, gamblers, and other visitors. Most cities are lucky if they can boast of one grand hotel - San Francisco has four: The Palace, Mark Hopkins, Fairmont, and St. Francis, plus others of more recent vintage. This course will discuss the dramatic history of the building and rebuilding of San Francisco's major hotels, the men whose fortunes helped to create them, some of their famous visitors, and the role the hotels played in the panorama of San Francisco's history. Foremost among these men were William Ralston, James Fair,

THE ARTS IN THE BAY AREA

Betty Hirsch HIST 53X96 ■ 2 UNITS
This course will look at the Bay Area arts scene from the Gold Rush on and include attendance at two live performances: Beach Blanket Babylon, the hilarious topical play that's celebrating its 35th year, and Lyric Theatre of San Jose's production of *Kismet*, the musical with its lovely score by Alexander Borodin. *Kismet* set in the times of the Arabian Nights. Also included will be tours of Theaterworks' scene shop and a look behind the scenes at the San Jose Repertory Theater. There will be a small cost for both plays.

Lectures: Thursdays, February 25 and March 11
6:20 p.m.-10 p.m.

Field trips: Sundays, March 7 and March 21, TBA

EMPIRE AND EVANGELISM: THE STORY OF THE CALIFORNIA MISSIONS

Chatham Forbes HIST 53X-97 ■ 2 UNITS
Spain claimed California in the 16th century but left it unsettled for 250 years until Russian advances made it prudent for Spain to build a chain of missions and presidios along 600 miles of coast. Priests, soldiers, and civil officials profoundly changed the lives of California's first people and their land.

Lectures: Thursdays, March 4 and 18
6:20 p.m.-10:00 p.m.

Field trips: Saturdays, March 13 and 20 TBA

Sarah Winchester's California Dream

By Mary Jo Ignoffo

Sarah L. [Pardee] Winchester in San Francisco, circa 1872. Photograph by Isaiah Taber. Courtesy History San José.



William Wirt Winchester, 1837-1881, Sarah Winchester's husband.



Winchester home on Prospect Avenue, New Haven, circa 1870. It was built between 1866 and 1868, and occupied by Sarah and William Winchester, his parents Oliver and Jane Winchester, their younger daughter, Hannah Jane "Jennie" Winchester, and five household servants. It was razed in the 1930s, and today, Yale University's Divinity School occupies the site.

The following article is an excerpt from a book-length manuscript biography of Sarah Winchester (1839-1922), the heiress to the Winchester rifle fortune. It tells the hows and whys of Mrs. Winchester's choice to settle in California. The widow's wish to find a warm climate and distance from painful memories is only part of the story. That her sister's husband was named president of Mills College was also an important deciding factor.

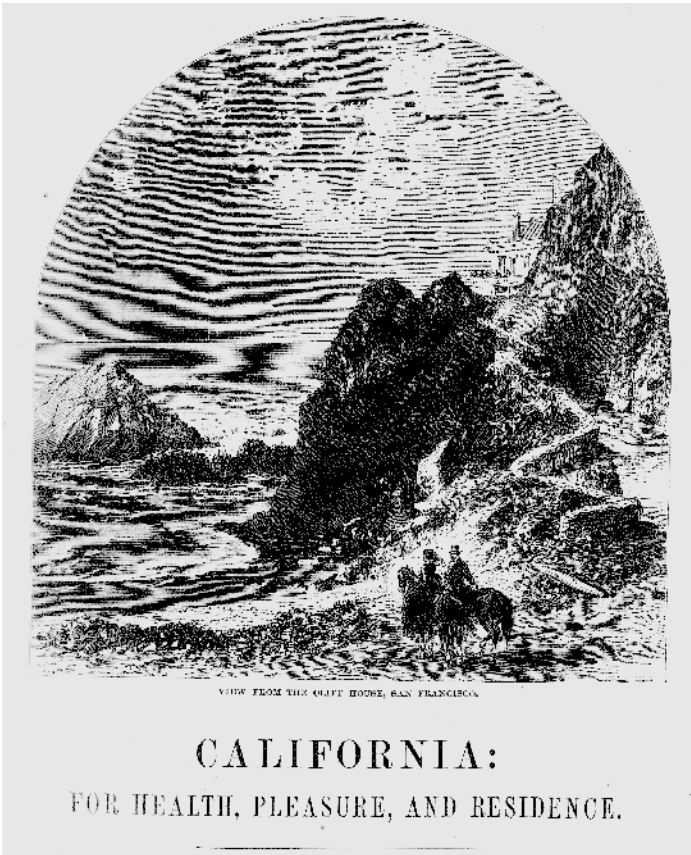
The author's research on Sarah Winchester began after locating heretofore unknown collections of Winchester correspondence, ephemera, and court records. Mary Jo Ignoffo spent four years in the research and writing of *Enigma, Sarah L. Winchester, the Mystifying Heiress to the Winchester Rifle Fortune*. It is currently under consideration for publication.

After the death of William W. Winchester in 1881, Sarah Winchester grieved for her husband at the seashore, and then traveled to Europe.¹ The New Haven city directory noted that she "removed to Europe," suggesting that she intended to be away indefinitely. The terminal illness and death of her older sister in 1884 brought her back to New Haven, and by 1885 the idea of going to the West apparently captured her imagination. She had been to California during the 1870s with her husband on one of many sales junkets for the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. As she contemplated widowhood, her inheritance allowed her to occupy the finest house in New York or an isolated villa in Italy. Why did she forgo a life in Europe and leave her native New England to move to the mostly unknown California?

Europe provided distance from New Haven and all its burdensome memories, but Winchester's well-established American roots would not be easily displaced. Neither did she harbor a desire to cut ties with family. But every turn in New Haven must have summoned phantoms from a tragic past. Even New York was too close with its inevitable social demands and business commitments. California, on the other hand, was as far as she could venture without leaving the country. It offered what historian Kevin Starr codified in his *California Dream* series, a new way to interpret life and a new vantage point from which to review the past. The Spanish heritage, Gold Rush legends, and agreeable climates made it a place where a life could be remade and health improved. The soil was so amenable to growing that even one of limited experience

About the Author

Mary Jo Ignoffo has authored books, curated historical exhibits, and written articles for newspapers and magazines. She is currently editing a book for the City of San José's Environmental Services Department and teaching at De Anza College in the history department.



Engraving in Charles Nordhoff's *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence, A Book for Travelers and Settlers* (1872).

could cajole it into bountiful production. She could invest her most personal hopes in the golden state.

California's vast geography of valley and mountain, seaside and desert, stretching from the 42nd parallel south to Mexico, had been claimed by Spain in the eighteenth century just as serious foment for the American Revolution was beginning in New England. With a string of twenty-one missions hugging the coastline from south to north, Franciscan missionaries introduced European culture, language, domestic and farming arts, plants and animals (along with disease and discrimination), forever changing the landscape and the people. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spain lost influence in its distant colonies and they fell away like seeds scattering from a flower in decline. Mexico declared independence from Spain in 1821, and California was part of Mexico until the Mexican War of 1846, barely more than one generation. As that war ended in 1848 with the U.S. gaining California and a huge portion of the Southwest, nuggets of gold were found at John Sutter's mill in Coloma, setting off the largest gold rush the world had ever seen. The following year in 1850, California was admitted to the Union as the thirty-first state—a free state—breaking the exceedingly volatile deadlock between slave and free states and pushing the nation toward Civil War.

Thirty years later, during the 1880s when Sarah Winchester considered moving, California was undergoing a vast consolidation in virtually all aspects. Enormous cattle-grazing ranchos dating from the Mexican era were whittled down, divided and subdivided into vineyards and fruit orchards. Railroads were constructed, new

banks found investors, and the state's politicians realigned themselves to reflect changing demographics. Chambers of commerce and business interests initiated marketing campaigns to lure citizens from the East. Prospective settlers, people like Sarah Winchester, saw promotional pamphlets and read testimonials about an idyllic California.

The most widely read was Charles Nordhoff's *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence, A Book for Travelers and Settlers* (1872). It was a railroad promotional piece designed, among other things, to dispel lingering fears about the lawlessness of Gold Rush

THE
NORTHERN DIVISION

Broad Gauge.

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

RESPECTFULLY INVITES THE ATTENTION OF
TOURISTS AND PLEASURE SEEKERS

— TO THE —
SUPERIOR FACILITIES
afforded by the "Northern Division" for reaching many of the principal

Summer and Winter Resorts

OF CALIFORNIA,

— WITH —
SPEED, SAFETY AND COMFORT.

This Road runs through one of
The Richest and Most Fruitful Sections of California,
And is the only line traversing the entire length of the

Famous Santa Clara Valley,

Celebrated for its productiveness and the picturesque and park-like character
of its scenery; as also the beautiful

SAN BENITO, PAJARO AND SALINAS VALLEYS,
The most flourishing Agricultural Section of the Pacific Coast.

Along the entire route of the "NORTHERN DIVISION" the tourist meets with
a succession of *Extensive Farms, Delightful Suburban Homes, Beautiful Gardens, Innumerable Orchards and Vineyards, and Luxuriant Fields of Grain;* indeed, a continuous panorama of enchanting

MOUNTAIN, VALLEY AND COAST SCENERY
IS PRESENTED TO THE VIEW.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS LINE:

Good Road-Bed,	Steel Rails,	Elegant Cars,
Low Rates,	Fast Time,	Fine Scenery.

6-3-87. 20 M.

Southern Pacific advertisement highlighting the Santa Clara Valley, in Edward S. Harrison, Central California, Santa Clara Valley. Its Resources, Advantages and Prospects. Homes for a Million (San José, CA: E.S. Harrison and C. Oberdeener), 1887.

California. He suggested, as any good railway promoter would, that Americans should relocate within their own country instead of venturing to Europe or Asia. New rails allowed settlers to return to the East within a couple of days if obligations arose. One could more easily maintain family ties by staying in the United States.

Nordhoff was among the first to formulate the perception of California as a tourist destination. He resolutely proclaimed, "certainly in no part of the continent is pleasure-traveling so exquisite and unalloyed a pleasure as in California. Not only are the sights grand, wonderful, and surprising in the highest degree, but the climate is exhilarating and favorable to an active life."² He made other persuasive claims too, emphasizing California's most ubiquitous selling point, its mild weather. "There is not a better, more salubrious, tonic and health-giving climate on the Pacific Coast than in Santa Clara Valley. The mean temperature is about 70 degrees in the Summer and 55 degrees in the Winter."³ For anyone who ever suffered a nor'easter, this was profoundly tempting. At just past forty years of age, Sarah Winchester was beginning to feel the effects of rheumatoid arthritis, a malady that dogged her remaining forty years. Warmer temperatures could go some way toward alleviating painful discomfort. Her doctor suggested that her health would improve if she lived in a drier and warmer environment.⁴

Winchester plotted her escape, imagining a self-contained enclave where she had only to rely upon her intellect and bank book to retreat from the outside world. The availability of land in California played very well into her quasi-utopian dream, and it appeared there was no end to hundred-acre parcels available for purchase, and by her standards, for relatively little money. She would buy land ripe for whatever hard work, good weather, and rich soil could generate. The whole concept offered an unexpectedly positive outlook as she entered middle age.

Adding up all these benefits, however, Sarah needed more than sunshine and a change of scenery. Ultimately, Sarah Winchester went to California, just as thousands of others did and continue to today, to escape a troubled past and to find health and happiness in the Golden State. She would no longer be hemmed in by social demands and the expectations of New Haven society, nor haunted by grief and loss at every turn. She hoped that California still held the magic of the Gold Rush where treasure was to be found just below the surface. She was seeking her own gold, staking her new homestead, knowing very well her inheritance would go a long way to purchasing the life she wanted. California it would be.

Sarah shared her idea with her sisters and invited them to join her. Belle Merriman and Estelle Gerard needed little coaxing. Buried in the fallout of a broken marriage and possibly an alcohol addiction, Estelle wished to start a new life. She hoped California would provide prosperity and happiness for her teen-aged children.



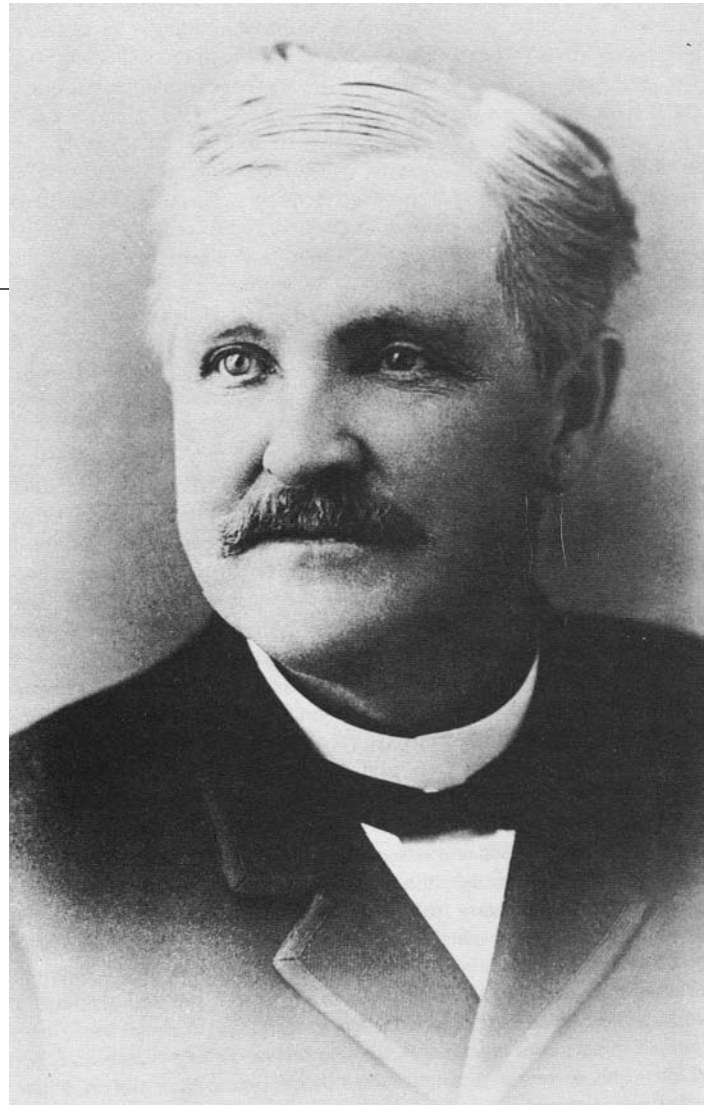
Isabelle Merriman, Sarah Winchester's sister, circa 1915, from Eugene Sawyers's History of Santa Clara County, 1922.

Belle may have had to convince her husband, Louis, who was just over age fifty. Starting over for him would be more problematic. But the Merriman children, who were almost grown, offered no resistance. Sarah willingly paid for everything, and offered a monthly stipend to each sister.

The three Pardee sisters found an additional and irresistible motivation. Their older sister, Nettie Sprague, was also moving there. Nettie's husband, Homer Sprague, had accepted the presidency of a small academy for young ladies near San Francisco. All the remaining sisters would be together, leaving behind an only brother. When Sarah Winchester tallied the reasons to go to the West, the fact that all her sisters could be together was the most tantalizing. Beginning in the summer of 1885, one by one, family by family, the Spragues, the Gerards, the Merrimans, and Sarah Winchester boarded trains bound for California, each stepping toward his or her own as yet unrealized California dream.

Mills College was the unwitting lynchpin in Sarah Winchester's decision to move to California. When officials at the tiny college in Oakland hired Professor Homer Sprague, they hoped he would bring excellence, distinction, and fundraising skills to the young woman's institution. They were in for a big disappointment.

Like Sarah, the Spragues' desire to leave New England was precipitated by a death in the family. When Mary Converse, Sarah and Nettie's eldest sister, died of cancer after a brief few months' illness in October 1884, Nettie was devastated. Mary's death had been sad for Sarah, but for Nettie, it was a life-altering moment. Nettie had been Mary's constant companion and the two were very much like twins. On and off over the years since their combined wedding day, the two sisters had shared a household. When Homer



William W. Converse, circa 1885. Converse was married to Sarah Winchester's sister, Mary, and in an unusual turn of events, was invited on to the board of directors of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company by its founder, Oliver Winchester. Converse was promoted by Mr. Winchester over his son and over his son-in-law. Converse was president of the arms company from 1881 until his death from throat cancer in 1889. He and Sarah Winchester had a close business relationship. Photograph courtesy of History San José.



Mills College, an engraving from William Halley, The Centennial Yearbook Alameda County California (Oakland, CA: William Halley, 1877), 461.

went off to war, Nettie and the children were taken into Mary's home. When the Converses returned to New Haven after a few years in New York, they stayed with the Spragues.

Homer Sprague knew Mary's death took a terrible toll on Nettie. As he cast about for a way to assuage her grief, he secured an invitation to serve as president of Mills College, a small school for young women in California. Perhaps a move to a new land with a good climate would be just the thing for Nettie. And it appeared that the younger Pardee sisters would also be nearby. So, in the summer of 1885, less than a year after Mary Converse's death, the Spragues sold their Boston home and its contents. Two of their sons, one a lawyer and one a merchant, remained in Boston. A daughter had married a New York clergyman and resided there. Only one child, William, who was studying medicine, joined them

in California. The Spragues established themselves near Mills in the Oakland hills overlooking San Francisco Bay. Homer's new position, the stunning landscape, and California life appeared the perfect curative for Nettie's grief at the loss of Mary Converse.

When Homer was hired, Mills was undergoing a restorative of its own. The widowed Mrs. Susan Mills owned the seminary for young women outright, but had initiated a process to turn the institution over to a board of trustees so that it would survive her death. The school had been the lifelong work of both her and her late husband, and she took every precaution to ensure its viability into the future. In her zealous optimism she recruited Sprague sight unseen, based on his reputation and his several publications, from Boston.

When the Spragues arrived on September 30, 1885, they were greeted with exuberant fanfare and escorted to their new quarters at the school. An official presidential inauguration was held in October, and the school put on a real California welcome. Mills College could not have been more enthusiastic and laudatory to Professor and Mrs. Sprague. Everyone associated with Mills, from the students to Mrs. Mills, believed Sprague would bring a brand of legitimacy that the school had yet to enjoy.⁵

The hooplah had the opposite effect on Homer. He was appalled and embarrassed by the public spectacle, and he complained about the "Barnum-like show business," and the "the pomp and parade and 'booming' with which my arrival here was heralded." Although his first impression of California and of Mills was not positive, he set to work at once getting to know the students, faculty, the curriculum and Mrs. Mills. He hoped to make a name for himself by modeling Mills on Wellesley, the highly acclaimed women's academy in Massachusetts. To that end, he taught classes in Greek, Latin, and English from two to five hours per day, and each week he delivered school-wide lectures. Sprague's assertion that "show business" was a mainstay of California life proved quite prophetic, but he was never able to appreciate the casual atmosphere of everyday life in the West.⁶

The chemistry between Homer Sprague and Mrs. Mills was explosive from the very first. Sprague wanted exclusive authority over behavior and curriculum. Mrs. Mills was reluctant to give up her influence. Sprague vociferously objected to the expensive fashionable dress of some of the young ladies, believing it distracted from more serious academic and moral endeavors. He wished to instill "the virtues that ennoble womanhood."⁷ When he declared that for an upcoming school event the students were required to dress conservatively forgoing the more stylish fashions, the young ladies appealed to Mrs. Mills. The aging matriarch sided with the girls, acquiescing to the requests. The girls wore expensive social attire, entirely inappropriate in Professor Sprague's mind. He was shocked and humiliated that Mrs. Mills

publicly overruled him. Sprague was also irritated by what he perceived as exceedingly slow academic progress. Students were assigned essays to be read at a public event, but he thought the results were so poor that it would be an academic embarrassment to have them read publicly. He ordered the papers corrected, but was horrified to learn that some of the faculty were themselves incapable of making corrections.

Sarah Winchester arrived in California in time to spend the winter of 1885-86 with the Spragues. It was immediately apparent that Mills College was not a good fit, and Nettie missed her three adult children and increasing number of grandchildren in the East. Not only had Nettie lost a sister, but she also left behind three of her children. Nettie was not as well-traveled as Sarah, and both the Spragues appeared uncomfortable away from their native New England. Despite Nettie's unhappiness, Sarah clung to hopes for California. She, for one, was relieved to be away from New Haven, especially during winter.

By the spring of 1886 it was clear that Sprague's tenure at Mills College was an unmitigated disaster. In April, Homer came down with an illness serious enough to keep him in bed for a few weeks. And although some students gave him an engraved gold-handled walking stick at the end of the term, the fact remained that he was not very well-liked. The board of trustees asked for his resignation. Sprague refused, reminding the board that he had been hired by Mrs. Mills, and was obviously working for her, not a board of trustees. He was indignant because he felt he had uprooted his wife and sold his New England home under false pretenses. He accused Mills and the board of not disclosing pertinent facts about the school. In his most caustic accusation he stated "calling an inferior school a college does not make it such."⁸ The board declared his



Need caption

Apr 30/88

Dear Sallie,

Enclosed please find
copy of my telegram to Mr
Rambo, also copy of my letter
to him confirming same and
giving him a little fuller advice
and instructions than I could
cover in the telegram, all of
which I trust will meet your
approval.

I have put the Union St lot,
into Merwin's hands, and he will
use his utmost endeavors to get a
respectable offer for it at earliest
favorable moment. I have also
written Peck & Bishop about it again
today. Sincerely yours
Wm. W. Converse
New Haven.

Letter from William Converse, the president of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and Sarah Winchester's brother-in-law, to Sarah L. Winchester regarding E.B. Rambo acting as agent for Sarah Winchester to purchase land near Mountain View in the Santa Clara Valley. Courtesy History San José.

position vacant without his resignation, and by the end of 1886 he was without a job.⁹

Despite the upset in the Sprague household and the likelihood that Nettie would not remain in California, Sarah was determined to stay. She had known Homer for thirty years and had repeatedly seen him refuse to compromise rigid morals or controversial progressive ideals. His claims about Mills may have been true and academic standards low, but the underlying problem was that neither he nor Nettie could acclimate to casual California. Sprague found a new position in an outpost even more remote than the California coast. He became the president of the four-year-old University of North Dakota. His tenure there lasted only a couple of years, and "the severity of the winter climate and the health of his family caused Mr. Sprague to remove again to California in 1891."¹⁰ By 1900, Nettie got her wish and the Spragues returned to New York to live near their married daughter.

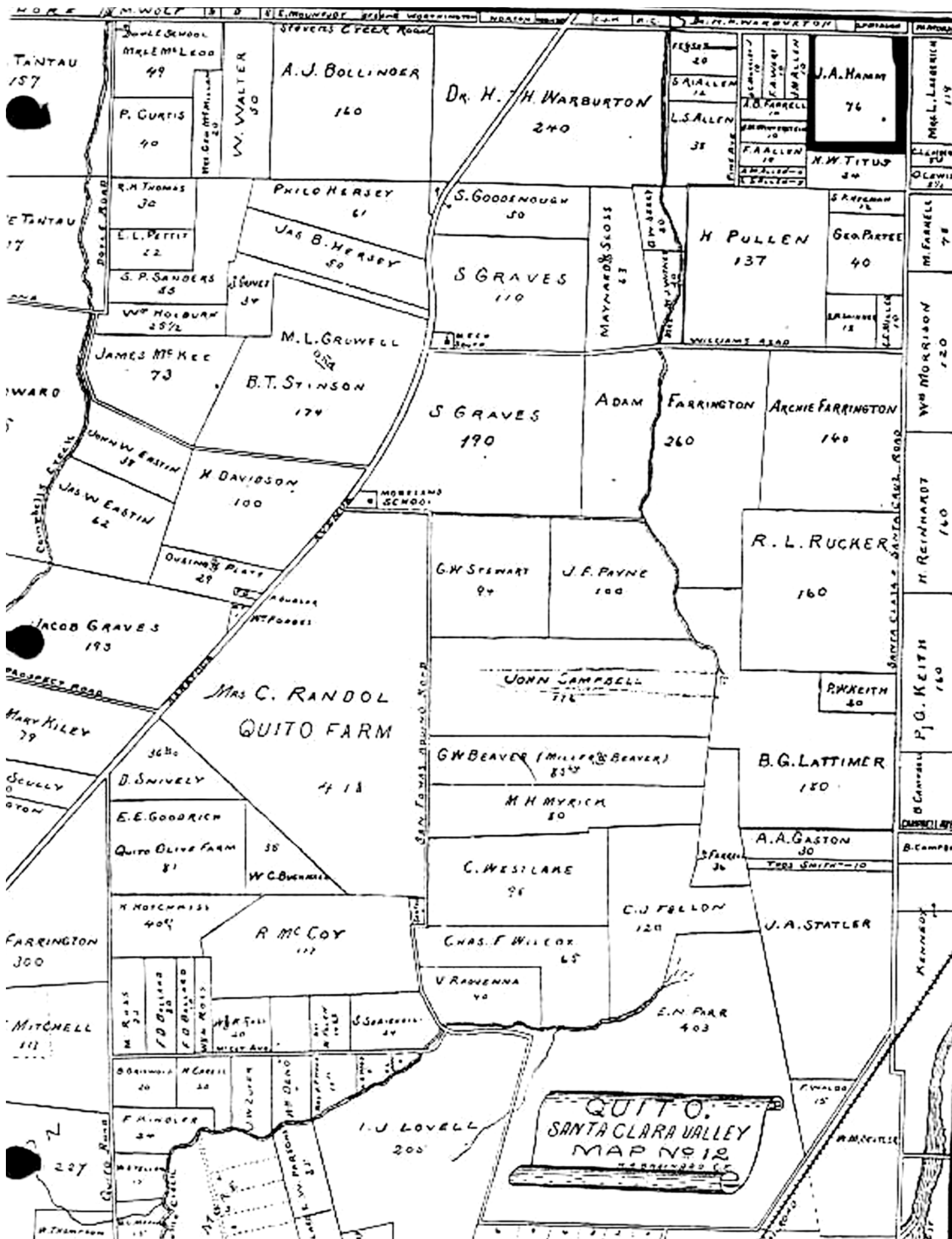
Sarah Winchester scouted for a place to call her own. She sought the advice of Edward "Ned" Rambo, the San Francisco manager for the Winchester Repeating Arms Company.¹¹ He had been hired out of Chicago to operate San Francisco's sales office, the major Winchester outlet in the West. Without hesitation Rambo insisted that Sarah go to see the Santa Clara Valley, thirty miles south of San Francisco. Rambo told Winchester that the charming valley had become his "new haven," and he believed she would like it as well. Her aching joints insisted that she should not live in foggy and damp San Francisco, and she agreed to accompany him on a tour. Ned Rambo proved a valuable guide as she said good-bye to the Spragues and boldly embraced California.

When Sarah Winchester first laid eyes on what today is the Silicon Valley she was enthralled. The pastoral scene, so simple and quiet, lay far from industry's hum and crowded streets. It reminded her of the Llanada Alavesa, an open plain at the base of the Pyrenees in the Basque country that she and her husband had seen ten years before on a trip to Switzerland. She remembered a wide-open valley dotted with cultivated land, decorated by large, old estates and rural villages. The Santa Clara Valley of the 1880s bore a striking resemblance to that European valley and at once she felt a strong desire to stay there.

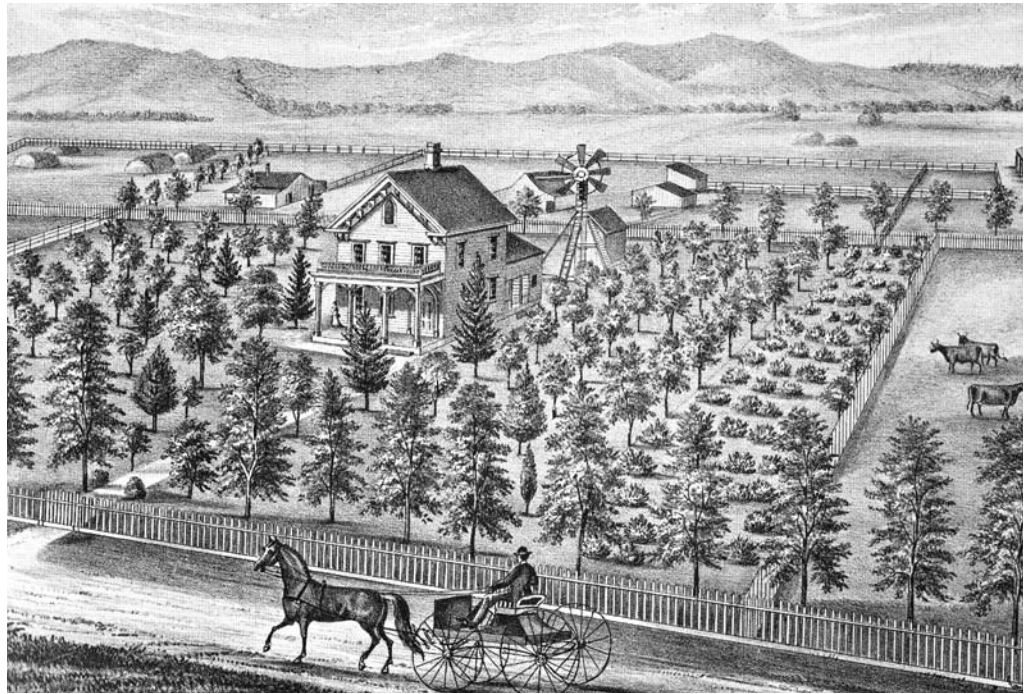
With Ned Rambo as her escort, she toured the Santa Clara Valley by carriage in the spring of 1886. Lying at the southwest edge of San Francisco Bay, thirty miles south of San Francisco and twenty miles east of the Pacific, the Santa Clara Valley in the middle 1880s was an expanse of cattle grazing land. About forty miles long and averaging thirty miles wide, it is surrounded by undulating foothills framing the valley in bright grass, green in winter or soft golden brown in summer. Although not very far from San Francisco, the valley's climate is dramatically different. When the San Francisco peninsula is blanketed in coastal fog and temperatures reach a high of about 60 degrees in summer, the valley is fog-free and can be as much as thirty degrees warmer. This fact alone was enough to entice the arthritic Mrs. Winchester.

Rambo, his wife Mary, and baby son had been in San Francisco since 1883. Under Rambo's direction, the Winchester sales office took a decided turn upscale. He abandoned the deteriorating Battery Street location and opened a new office on Market Street, the city's main commercial thoroughfare. Situ-

Letter from William Converse, the president of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and Sarah Winchester's brother-in-law, to Sarah L. Winchester regarding E.B. Rambo acting as agent for Sarah Winchester to purchase land near Mountain View in the Santa Clara Valley. Courtesy History San José.



Sarah Winchester's San José house has old bones, even older than its current owners claim. This image from the Thompson & West 1876 Santa Clara County atlas shows the Winchester property ten years before she purchased it. A two-story wood frame farm house sat tucked in a small grove fronting the Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road and belonging to W.F. Hargis. Although it is not possible to prove beyond a doubt that the early structure was still standing and therefore the one she bought in 1886, it is certain that it occupied the same site. Moreover, accounts of her moving into the neighborhood assert that she added to an existing house, lending credence to the assumption that portions of today's mystery house date from at least the 1870s and became the one she modified, rebuilt, and re-configured until 1906. By some estimates the house was enlarged to twenty-six rooms within the first six months.



ated just a block from the exclusive Palace Hotel, gun and ammunition sales stood out as a significant entry on the arms company's account ledgers. He rented a flat for his family, but neither he nor his wife was particularly fond of city life. It was not long before he discovered the Santa Clara Valley, and was so enamored of it that he purchased a thirty-acre fruit farm where his family spent the summer months. The Rambo orchard produced a respectable crop of prunes and apricots within a few years.

Rambo understood and perhaps explained to Winchester that the valley was on the verge of a major transformation the likes of which had not been seen since the Spaniards first arrived in 1769 and introduced domesticated animals to the oak-studded, grassy valley. By the time Rambo and Winchester toured the valley, grazing and grain growing had depleted the soil. But temperate weather and alluvial soil deposited over thousands of years by flooding creeks and rivulets made ideal conditions for successful fruit farming. Rambo planted his modest thirty acres, and encouraged Winchester to do likewise. Far surpassing his optimistic



Llanada Villa, Sarah Winchester's San José house, circa 1920. Post card, Stockmeir Library and Archives, California History Center.

predictions, the following year in 1887, a quarter million fruit trees were planted on what had been wheat fields in the Santa Clara Valley.¹² Millions more were planted in the following decade. Sarah Winchester was among the earliest settlers coming to the valley to grow fruit. Natural outgrowth to the orchards, fledgling fruit canneries showed signs of promise if a wary public could be convinced to consume preserved fruits.

Rambo was not the only one endorsing the quality of life in the Santa Clara Valley. Winchester had also read accounts, and one particularly intriguing essay was written by the controversial reverend Mr. Henry Ward Beecher (who happened to find an ardent supporter in Homer Sprague) and a fellow Connecticut native:

The fame of your valley has come over the plains and mountains and assailed our ears until, with the description of the scenery, of mountains, of mines, of trees, of shrubs, of farms, gardens and harvests, of people and prospects, I will not say that we were wearied, but will say that we were somewhat stunned, and it gave the belief that if nothing else excelled in California, the art of exaggeration was rife, and yet, having come as an arrow through the air, and without time to fill in my mind what I saw upon the surface, teaches me a lesson of the estimation of the truth, and I will say with her of old, 'The half has not been told me.' This goodly land which, farthest from the East, seems to have been the last work that God had in hand, and he furnished it to suit the home of man the best.¹³

Beecher acknowledged the exaggerated stories that had been circulating since the Gold Rush, yet even he proclaimed "the half has not been told." His comments underscored the impression that westward expansion and manifest destiny were the work of divine will, and those who complied would be duly favored. The last work that God had in hand, indeed. This line of thought placed Winchester safely under the guiding star of a predestined national identity.

It so happened that when Rambo showed Winchester his

orchard, he also took her to see a ranch for sale a short distance away. A forty-five-acre place owned by one John Hamm on the Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road was quiet, warm, and isolated. The property formed a reverse “L”, stretching south down the Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road from Stevens Creek Road, with the lower portion containing the bulk of the acreage. At one time, the Hamm property had been part of the 270-acre Hargis wheat ranch, but portions had been sold for smaller fruit farms. This particular property had an eight-room farm house that appeared to be smack-dab in the middle of the sprawling valley, hills rising in the distance in every direction. The springtime view presented at this site was irresistible.

By New Haven’s standards the Hamm house was very small. Winchester knew the modest house could be enlarged, but she worried that the farm did not have enough land. Seeing the vast landscape assuaged her doubts, and she calculated that in the future she could buy adjoining properties. She went ahead with the purchase and paid Mr. Hamm \$12,570 for the house and forty-five acres. Sarah christened her new home “Llanada Villa” reminiscent of the Llanada Alavesa, the valley she and William had visited in the Basque country.

Within months of occupying the home and embarking on major room additions, it became clear to Sarah Winchester and to her sisters that sharing one home was not the most desirable situation. Winchester purchased homes for the two sisters who remained in the California, and bid good-bye to Nettie Sprague. From 1886 until 1906, Sarah Winchester added and deleted wings, turrets, porches, sleeping apartments, servants’ quarters, and a seven-story tower. She added acreage at about the same rate, and by 1906, owned almost 160 acres surrounding the San José house.

Family problems, legal battles over land ownership, ridicule

from the press, failing health, and finally the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 made Winchester reconsider the wisdom of her California dream. She could have returned to New Haven at any time, but like her ancestors who transplanted themselves from England to New Haven, Sarah Winchester lived out Connecticut’s state motto, *Qui Transtulit Sustinet* (he who transplanted still sustains). She remained in California for the rest of her life, purchasing more property, operating a small commercial orchard, supporting more relatives, and many employees. Sarah Winchester’s most well-known California legacy is the Winchester Mystery House. The legacy that was most important to her and the guiding purpose of her years as a widow was her endowment of the William Wirt Winchester Hospital, a tuberculosis hospital in New Haven. Today it is Winchester Chest Clinic, a pulmonary care facility within Yale University Medical Center. It is not difficult to imagine which of these legacies would have made her most proud.

- ¹Thomas G. Bennett to Hannah Jane “Jennie” Bennett, June 8, 1881, Connecticut Historical Society, Bennett Family papers; and New Haven City Directories to the middle 1890s.
²Charles Nordhoff, *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence, a Book for Travelers and Settlers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872 and 1874), 18-19.
³San Jose Board of Trade, *Homes for a Million*, 1887.
⁴Reported by Mary Carroll. *Trailblazer*, Vol.24, No. 3, August 1983.
⁵Susan Tolman Mills, “Rebuttal of Homer Sprague’s ‘To My Friends,’” pamphlet, 1886.
⁶Homer B. Sprague, “To My Friends,” pamphlet, 1886, 1.
⁷Yale University Library, Archives and Manuscripts, Homer B. Sprague, newspaper clipping, 1885.
⁸Sprague, “Friends,” 13.
⁹Sprague, “To My Friends,” pamphlet, 1886.
¹⁰*Boston Transcript*, March 23, 1918.
¹¹Eugene Sawyer, *History of Santa Clara County*, 1922, 1372; Rambo was known to family members as “Ned,” and eventually his brother would work for Mrs. Winchester. In 1967, Ned’s nephew, Ralph Rambo, authored a small booklet about Mrs. Winchester entitled *Lady of Mystery*. It remains the most accurate depiction of the woman to date.
¹²*Homes for a Million*, 19.
¹³Henry Ward Beecher, quoted in *Santa Clara County Board of Trade*, Vol.1, No.1, September 1887, CHC.



The William Wirt Winchester Hospital, circa 1918. It was funded and endowed by Sarah L. Winchester in honor of her late husband. It was a tubercular clinic that was absorbed by the Yale University Medical Center. Today the property is used by the Veterans Administration in conjunction with Yale, and the tubercular clinic has evolved into the William Wirt Winchester Chest Clinic at Yale.

The Impact of “Film” at the California History Center: Historical Time Traveling

By Carol Cini

Their eyes glued to the screen, the students watched as the history came alive before them—the speeches, the political campaigns, the assassinations, the candlelit march, the protests, the fires, the calls for action. With my students, I watched the images as they evoked the emotions of earlier times, in November 1978, when Dan White murdered San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and gay Supervisor Harvey Milk. For most of my students, this was “new” historical information, but there were also older adults enrolled in the course who recalled the grief and activism of the city which led to the rise of a new civil rights movement. What we were witnessing in the California History Center (CHC) was not based on the film footage of movies, but a different kind of “film”—microfilm, believe it or not, with its headlines, photographs, and articles from a local newspaper. For my students, microfilm opened up a world of historical exploration in the course *History 2: Introduction to California Studies*. This is a 4-unit course that I have taught several times at De Anza College which allows students to focus on specific topics in California history.

With the help of the CHC librarian-archivist Lisa Christiansen, I have observed how introducing students to aspects of California history through microfilm creates new horizons in their understanding of historical events. Students who see the local impact of the history of gay rights in San Francisco go on to discover its national impact in the U.S., and even its global influence as revealed through their research. To be sure, Hollywood’s recent Academy Award-winning film “Milk,” starring Sean Penn, made this topic more accessible, and the 1960s/70s not seem so distant for many of my younger students. With the advent of web-based research databases, searching for newspaper articles based on this subject has become more accessible; students can merely type in a subject with dates to obtain

a listing of several articles. However, in many of these databases, the articles are merely reformulated print versions, not the actual newspaper pages, and thus, some would argue, students are not looking at the actual historical source. Furthermore, the web databases often do not include photographs, and many do not include articles before 1980, with the Historical New York Times being a notable exception.

The CHC’s microfilm holdings of the *Peninsula Times Tribune* (earlier called the *Palo Alto Times*), from 1908 to 1991, can become a window on the world. There is something about journeying through the images and headlines of newspapers on historical microfilm that even today’s online technology can not duplicate. Scrolling through the microfilm reels, history seems to unfold before your eyes, providing a visual timeline of events which affected people’s lives, a “reel” history, if you will. In addition, microfilm includes the advertisements and specialized sections that lent a flavor to the newspapers of past times, illustrating not only products, services, and clothing styles, but technological change (from radios to televisions to computers), as well as changing attitudes about gender, race, and culture.

Because it is a local newspaper, the *Peninsula Times Tribune* reveals the impact of main historical events in students’ own hometowns, and yet it is close enough to San Francisco to capture the news headlines of national and global proportions. For example, articles regarding the Japanese American internment on the west coast during World War II illustrate the impact of internment on local families as well as the political context in which it was carried out. Such articles provide a sense of the struggles of Asian Americans during those civil rights violations of the 1940s, and students can then compare this to the period of reparations by the 1980s. The CHC microfilm has allowed my students to explore a wide range of local or state events with broader signifi-



Caption for this photo?

cance, and to see the influence of these events on their own local area, bringing home the meaning of history in a more personal way. For example, my students have explored the impact of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (and its echoes on campuses closer to home), the rise of Silicon Valley (and the changes it brought to the original valley), the activism of Cesar Chavez (whose efforts began in the San Jose area), the reasons behind the Los Angeles riots (and other instances of civil unrest in San Francisco and nearby communities), as well as the movements to save the redwoods (not only along the north coast, but in the Bay area as well).

Learning to use microfilm for access to primary source documents helps to ensure that students can “go to the source” for their historical evidence. They also enjoy the ways they are “time traveling,” as several students commented to me. All of this is made possible by the CHC’s microfilm collection, as our regular college library does not have the funding for newspaper microfilm that goes back as far in time for the purposes of historical research. The CHC’s collection is a treasure that contributes to my students’ education, their enjoyment of history, and, not least, their civic engagement, by illustrating to them the impact of the past on the present.

Carol Cini, Ph.D., is a history instructor at De Anza College. She teaches courses in American history, women’s history, and California history.

FOUNDATION NOTES

CHCF Scholarship Winners

The Board of Trustees of the California History Center Foundation awarded two scholarships in June—the California History Center Directors’ Scholarship and the Marion Grimm Memorial Scholarship—each with a prize of \$500 to De Anza College students, Jacob Parent and Fredy Martinez respectively. Both were selected due to their outstanding academic work and demonstrated commitment to service.

Parent will be attending UC Santa Cruz during the 2009-2010 academic year where he will major in Politics. Parent eventually plans to go to law school with a focus on Civil and Human Rights Law and also earn a Ph. D. in Social Policy. His goal is to teach and establish a non-profit that will organize the underrepresented and underserved members of our society.

Martinez will complete his work at De Anza and attend UCLA during the 2009-2010 year where he will major in History and International Development Studies.



Board President Vicki Atherton pictured with CHCF Directors’ Scholarship winner Jacob Parent.

Membership March 2009 – November 2009

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Foothill-De Anza Community College District Employee Payroll Deduction

The following employees of the college district have generously given through the college’s payroll deduction plan:

Diana E. Argabrite, Gregory Anderson, Mary Browning, Susan Bruch, Karen Chow, Tracy Chung-Tabangcura, Judy C. Coleman, Marc Coronado, Joyce Feldman, Denis Gates, Richard Hansen, David Howard-Pitney, Judith Mowrey, Hieu Nguyen, Diane Pierce, George Robles, Kristin Skager, John Swensson, Rowena Tomaneng, Renato Tuazon, Rhoda Wang, Pauline Yeckley.

While attending UCLA, Martinez plans to add the Chinese language to his bilingual skills in English and Spanish. He wants to become an immigration attorney in order to help those that he feels are not receiving adequate legal representation due to race, gender, and sexual preference.

The Directors’ Scholarship, instituted in 2000, is given to De Anza students who show great potential for further study and service to our state. The Marion Grimm Memorial Scholarship was established in 2008 in memory of CHCF Board of Trustees member and long time educator and supporter of local history organization, Marion Grimm.

CHC Director Tom Izu stated about the two: “We are proud to provide support for these fine scholars as they continue their education. We know they will find a way to help make our state a better place for all who live here and call it home.”

California History Center Foundation's current exhibit through June 2010

Roots & Wings

Saratoga Community Garden 1972–1987

*A harmony
of the human spirit
& natural forces*

The Saratoga Community Garden flourished as an educational demonstration garden for children and the community, providing an opportunity for all to connect with the ways of the garden and sustainable farming, and to glean insights from nature. The 10-acre living classroom—with nature as instructor—inspired thousands of children and adults over its fifteen-year life. The exhibit features an oral history interview of Betty Peck and Jackie Welch and many photos of the garden.

For more information, contact Tom Izu at
(408) 864-8986 or by email at
izutom@deanza.edu



California History Center & Foundation

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Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The value of goods received as a benefit of membership must be deducted from the amount of all contributions claimed as a deduction. CHCF members receive issues of *The Californian* magazine and members who contribute at the \$50 level and above also receive a yearly Local History Studies publication.

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