

"Fair Oaks Memories"

A presentation by K. Lorane Dupen and Doug Dupen

Fair Oaks Historical Society

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Thank you for the introduction, Steve. My mother and I have been members of this Society for three years now and have enjoyed the programs presented every quarter. I have noticed however that if a presentation goes over thirty minutes Warren McWilliams starts to suffer from some sort of palpitations; therefore Mom and I will try to be succinct.

Let me start with my personal relationship with Fair Oaks. My younger brother Jack and I were born and raised in Sacramento but spent weekends throughout the decade of the 30's at our maternal grandparents' home in Fair Oaks. Their home was a two-story colonial on the north side of a gravel road which later became Villa Court. It was one of only three or four homes on the road and was the furthest east so that it was all open space from their house to the bluff.

Jack and I came to know the area intimately. We often walked down the dirt road which is now Howard Street and back up the hill across Bridge Street to the town square. On this trek we would pass the Hinsey House, the Women's Thursday Club House, and the Community Church. We often walked down the hill behind (north of) my grandparents' house to the verdant swale below which years later was to become the right-of-way for Sunrise Boulevard. We often slid on our behinds down the face of the bluff to the river bank below. We often walked down the dirt road south of my grandparents' house, now paved and called Pennsylvania Avenue, to the dump and to the shack of the rattlesnake-venom-milker, Pegleg Pete. We often swam in the river under the eastern edge of the old bridge (never the "dangerous" western edge).

In 1940, my grandmother suffered some health problems and she and my granddad moved in with us in Sacramento. My grandparents sold their house to the Quackenbush family. This ended my family's relationship with Fair Oaks (my granddad died a year later, in 1941) except for my mother driving my grandmother regularly to her afternoon bridge parties with old friends in Fair Oaks, including some held in the Slocum House. My mother remembers some of the regular bridge players as being May McDonald, Hazel Broadley (nee Slocum), Emma Bramhall, and Harriet Camden. My grandmother died in 1953 and even thoughts of Fair Oaks dimmed.

Forty years later, in 1993, my mother and I began revisiting Fair Oaks. She wanted very much to visit the 19th century house her grandparents had built on a hill on what is now Minnesota Street and in which she had been raised, the house you all know of now as the home of Leigh Landis. So we did. We also visited the house my grandparents had built on Villa Court, the house in which my mother was married. We had lunch in the new restaurant in the Slocum House and had cocktails in the parlor there where my grandmother had played bridge (and where my mother often "made a fourth") a half century ago.

It was in that restaurant that my interest in the history of Fair Oaks was kindled. For on the wall in the foyer of the restaurant was a century-old photograph of a display advertisement offering lots for sale in the area and listing "Samuel Wilson and Son" of New York (my grandfather and great grandfather) as east coast agents for the development. I wanted very much to obtain a copy of that photograph. The proprietor of the restaurant, Mr. Kerry Kassis, was not into history; evidently the decor of his restaurant was designed professionally. So although he couldn't help me himself, he referred me to a Mr. Dick Hill who owned the hardware store over the hill behind the restaurant. Mr. Kassis told me he thought that Mr. Hill was sort of an unofficial mayor of Fair Oaks.

So I traipsed around the block, avoiding chickens, to the hardware store. Fortunately, Mr. Hill was in attendance at the time of my arrival. He was extremely cordial but allowed as how he knew little of the history of Fair Oaks and in reality had little interest in it. But he said he knew someone who did. He advised me to contact Warren McWilliams who worked sometimes in the hardware store and who was a Fair Oaks history buff and in fact was or had been President of the Fair Oaks Historical Society.

I reached Warren by phone later and found out that he is indeed a Fair Oaks history buff. He was very excited to hear from me, in part particularly because his wife Janet, I think, used to live on Villa Court not very much beyond the Quackenbush house my grandparents built. Warren insisted I do all I could to get my mother and myself involved with the Historical Society and I agreed. Mom and I attended the very next meeting and have been religious attendants ever since.

At that first meeting Mom and I attended, July 1994, not only did we meet a whole lot of wonderful people but I was awe-struck by the tableful of local historical literature available for sale. I purchased everything on display and took it all home to study. One document I bought was the booklet "The Heart of California," the January 1897 edition of the Farmers' Reading Circle Library, published by Howard & Wilson Publishing Company, Chicago. On the back of page 34 of that booklet was a reproduction of the display

advertisement which I had seen on the wall of the foyer of the Slocum House: the promotional piece for "Sunset Colonies, Fair Oaks and Olive Park" which listed my greatgrandfather and grandfather "Samuel Wilson & Son, General Eastern Agents, 379 Broadway, New York."

In the same booklet, facing page 41, there is a photograph of my grandfather Clarence with his father, mother, and brother. And then on the very last page of the booklet under "List of Purchasers as of November 1, 1896" is the notation "Sam'l Wilson, Asst. Supt. Pullman Palace Car Co., New York."

(I should note right here that Mom's maiden name was Wilson and her mother's maiden name was Caulfeild, otherwise this and what follows doesn't make full sense.)

Next I rifled through the "Fair Oaks Historical Calendar for 1979" and found the picture, facing the calendar for November, of the "Robinson-Buffum Baseball Team, ca 1910." And right there is a picture of my great uncle Bill Caulfeild (my grandmother's brother) and beside him his brother Jack. My mother had to tell me the brother's first name because the calendar didn't know and had left it blank. Also I noted, as always, the compiler misspelled my grandmother's family's name which should be and is "Caulfeild."

Well, so far I have focussed on my own story. Now I want to talk about how my grandfather Clarence Wilson came to Fair Oaks at the end of the last century and how my grandmother Kathleen Caulfeild Wilson came to Fair Oaks very shortly thereafter.

The Wilsons Invest in Fair Oaks

Samuel Wilson was of New York. In the early 1890's he became Assistant Manager of the Pullman Passenger Car Company. He must have been a dynamic entrepreneur because he also was a self-ordained circuit-riding preacher for the Anti-Saloon League. He lived in Manhattan with his wife and two sons. He must have been of some means because both his sons received their education at private academies and the family spent vacations in the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River.

Some way or another, while taking care of all the above, Samuel Wilson and his younger son Clarence had been engaged as "General Eastern Agents" for the firm, "Farm, Field, and Fireside," out of Chicago which was developing and promoting Sunset Colonies, Fair Oaks and Olive Park. (Clarence' brother died in his youth.) The chief executive officer of the firm was James W. Wilson of Chicago; I have no evidence either way on whether or not there was a family relationship between him and my great grandfather.

Samuel Wilson was on the first excursion train from Chicago to Fair Oaks in November of 1895. On pages 46 and 47 of the booklet "The Heart of California" is a letter Samuel Wilson sent to his manager James Wilson the following month from Texas while returning east from his inspection of Fair Oaks and of similar developments in Southern California. In the letter he waxed eloquent and at great length about the virtues of their Fair Oaks development over all others he had visited, including the virtue of price: "At Fair Oaks, equally good, and insuring earlier crop and better prices, I bought for \$100" per acre.

The fact that this glowing endorsement letter was published widely just one year later coupled with the fact that Samuel Wilson had obtained three widely dispersed lots, one on Illinois Avenue, one on the west side of lower Hazel Avenue, and one on the east side of upper Hazel Avenue makes me wonder how much of these three lots Samuel Wilson really purchased (if any) at \$100 per acre and how much if any he was deeded (as left-overs) in compensation for acting as east coast agent and for being such an effective skill. Twenty of the original purchasers were from the east coast.

There is no evidence Samuel Wilson ever intended to make California his residence. The first thing he did with his three lots was to turn their development as ranches over to his young son Clarence who was sent out west regularly to hire local managers and get things set up. Clarence continued his regular job of conductor and inspector for the Pullman Company, a job his father had arranged. Clarence' regular run for the Pullman Company was between Manhattan and Mexico City. Between runs to Mexico he had time to take the train (on his railroad pass) to Fair Oaks to oversee the three ranches. The ranch on the west side of Illinois Avenue just north of Winding Way was planted with orange trees. The ranch on the west side of lower Hazel Avenue (across from where the Phoenix packing plant would be built) was planted with a variety of deciduous trees -- cherries, pears, peaches, apricots -- as was the ranch on the east side of upper Hazel Avenue, closer to Orangevale.

Clarence continued this coast-to-coast activity for over a half decade until he met, wooed, and won Miss Kathleen Elizabeth Caulfeild of Fair Oaks.

The Caulfeilds Migrate to Fair Oaks

In 1873, the Reverend St. George Caulfeild, Rector and Dean of the Diocese, All Saints Church, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada, officiated at the wedding of his only son Charles to Miss Eliza Hanvey. Charles and Eliza set up residence in St. Thomas where eventually Stuart, Kathleen Elizabeth, and Carolyn were born to them. Then about 1880, the family of four (Carolyn had died in infancy) moved to Chicago where Charles established a pharmacy. Over the

next decade the family was enlarged by the births of sons Harry, William, and Jack.

By the middle of the 1890's, Charles had become ill to a point of disability. For reasons I do not know (health? climate? stress?), the family learned of the development of Fair Oaks and decided to take the plunge of a transcontinental removal to that burdgeoning community. They purchased several acres of land on a hilltop just north of Fair Oaks Boulevard and less than a mile west of the town center. (The house of course still stands facing Minnesota Street and is owned and occupied by our member Leigh Landis.)

The family lived in the house they had built until the onset of World War I. Charles remained ill and often confined. Eliza became a true matriarch and raised the family. The eldest son, Stuart, succumbed to typhoid fever contracted from contaminated well water in 1899, shortly after the house was built and occupied. Ten years later, Charles himself finally gave up the ghost and passed on.

The youngest son, Jack, had started out delivering groceries for the grocer, Mr. Holtz, but later became a deputy to Sheriff William Gormley in Sacramento. He died in the flu epidemic of 1918. Harry started out maintaining and driving Fair Oaks' first Stanley Steamer for its owner, Mr. Robinson, the proprietor of the local telephone company. Harry drove the Steamer daily to and from Sacramento as a commute bus service. Later Harry took a job constructing fruit crates at the first local packing plant, the one across the river past the shanty town near the railroad depot. He became a skilled carpenter and took work up the Feather River before dying in 1923 of diabetes. Kathleen worked for a while as a clerk at that same packing plant across the river.

Bill remained with his mother to take care of her and worked for years in the olive processing plant of the Fair Oaks Fruit Company. He eventually became superintendent of the olive curing process in the plant which was located on the west side of Sunrise just north of the town square.

Aside: The company clerk, who was located in the main office across the street from the plant, for a time was Miss Marguerite (Gretta) Hanvey, the only daughter of Dr. Charles and Jane Hanvey. Dr. Hanvey, who originally practised medicine in the Susanville area and eventually in Berkeley, was a nephew of Eliza.

With her family diminished and disbursed, Eliza at the beginning of World War I sold her house to the Burg family and moved with her son Bill into rental accommodations, still in Fair Oaks. She died not much later.

But let's go back fifteen years to young Clarence Wilson, commuting among Fair Oaks, New York, and Mexico, and to young Kathleen Caulfeild, blossoming into womanhood.

Kathleen and Clarence and their daughter, my Mom

Very shortly after the turn of the century, Kathleen Caulfeild and Clarence Wilson met and in 1903 married in Fair Oaks. The new young couple decided to settle in New York so Clarence could pursue his career with the Pullman Palace Car Company. They moved in with Clarence' parents in Manhattan. Clarence continued his runs to Mexico and Kathleen continued existing with Clarence' parents.

In 1906, my mother, Kathleen Lorane Wilson, was born and became the fifth member of the Wilson household in Manhattan. This situation, awkward at best, lasted about three more years. Finally, Kathleen made the major decision to move back to her family home in Fair Oaks with her young daughter. For a couple of years, Clarence and Kathleen tried to maintain a two-coast residency. She stayed in Fair Oaks. He continued his New-York-to-Mexico train runs but visited Fair Oaks between runs both to see his wife and daughter and to continue to manage his father's three ranches.

But this intolerable situation couldn't last. Eventually Clarence decided he couldn't have it both ways and made the difficult decision to abandon his career with the Pullman Company, to move permanently to Fair Oaks, and to concentrate on running his father's ranches.

Mom's Childhood in Fair Oaks

Shortly after moving back to Fair Oaks, my mother, Lorane, enrolled in and attended Fair Oaks elementary school on the "top" of the town square -- located precisely right here where we are meeting this evening. She remembers walking to school every day from her grandmother's hilltop home. She would walk south on what is now Minnesota Street, then east on Fair Oaks Boulevard past the Beecher House, then back up the steep hill from the Buffum Colonial, and down to the school. This route took her past the Hinsey house on the hilltop east of where the Church and the Women's Club House stood.

Mom remembers her adored first- and second- grade teacher, Louella Holtz, daughter of the town grocer. (Louella had a sister named May and a brother named Alfred.)

Mom remembers being sent happily to Mr. Vaughn's "tonsorial parlor" on the town square for her first "dutch hair cut."

She remembers accompanying her grandmother to meetings of the Women's Thursday Club, held upstairs in the Murphy Building. Her grandmother Eliza was one of the founders of the Women's Thursday Club and, my mother believes, its first President.

My mother tells me about being in awe of the "Hindoos," turbaned migrant workers who her grandmother would often feed and allow to sleep in the family barn in the dale north of The House.

She remembers her parents socializing with other local families: the Hinsey's (Mr. Hinsey was either the owner or manager of the Fair Oaks Fruit Company), the Gores (whose home was on the bluff east of the Hinsey house and which overlooked the river), the Phoenixes (who owned a third packing plant on the east side of Hazel Avenue across from one of my grandfather's orchards), the Bramhalls (Dr. Bramhall was our family physician), and the Cunninghams and the Beeches (who owned large orchards and estates on the other side of the river).

Mom has particularly fond memories of her mother's brothers and their friends. Her mother's brothers and a lot of other young men such as George Hinsey and Art Holtz were quite a wild group of young blades. My mother says she always knew when the fellows had been "into town" for the evening because the next day she found pieces of candy left for her hidden in jars and vases. She never let on to anyone that she knew how the candy got there.

An Interregnum in Sacramento

Things were still not ideal with the young Wilson family, Clarence, Kathleen, and youngster Lorane. Living with Kathleen's family was not the best of all possible worlds and the three ranches were not providing a suitable income.

My grandparents had become good friends with another young family in Fair Oaks, the Sargents. Haven Sargent was with the County Clerk of the Court's office in Sacramento. He commuted daily into Sacramento via the train across the river. During his commute he met and married Adele Buckley who was a telegrapher with the commute railroad. They established a home in Fair Oaks and had one son, Franklin.

Haven Sargent was aware of my grandparents' less-than-satisfactory situation. In 1914 he learned of an opening for Chief County Probation Officer for Judge Peter Shield's juvenile court. He referred my grandfather to the opening. My grandfather applied for, was interviewed for, was offered, and accepted the position. (My mother opines that her father's extensive private school education back in New York gave him the edge for the job.)

So Clarence and his wife and daughter moved out of Clarence' mother-in-law's house in Fair Oaks and into one he purchased in Sacramento. My mother continued her schooling in Sacramento. (Fifty years later, Mom learned that her third grade teacher in Sacramento had eventually married Mr. Vaughn, the Fair Oaks barber who had given Mom her first commercial haircut; how the two ever met one another is a mystery) It was in school in Sacramento that my mother first met the boy who a decade later would become her husband.

Back to Fair Oaks

As soon as World War I was over and commuting became easier, my grandparents decided to move back to Fair Oaks. Their friends the Sargents' home was on Villa Court, on the south side of the street. My grandparents purchased the lot directly across from the Sargent home. They first built a small apartment and attached garage at the back (north) of the lot to live in while they planned and built "the big house." It would take over a half decade for my grandparents to be able to finally realize the home they had dreamt of. (The original old apartment is gone but the attached garage is still there.)

Meanwhile now my mother was ready for high school. She enrolled in San Juan High School in Fair Oaks. She would walk from the Villa Court home to the town square where she would catch the school bus. She remembers four other girls in particular who rode that bus at one time or another over the next three years. Two were the Rice girls, Ethel and Iva. (The Rice family had a small ranch on a hill east of the school.) Ethel was older than my mother and Iva was younger. Iva of course became our own Iva Langness. One more was Bea Burg, whose parents had bought my mother's grandmother's house, and the fourth was Bernice Fulton who later married Al Veglia, a manager with the Department of Motor Vehicles.

During those years, my mother's family was close to several others. There were of course the Sargents across the street. There were the Gores and there were the Slocums. My grandmother's friend Hortense Gore married Don Slocum; the couple eventually moved to Seattle. Hazel Slocum married one of the Broadley brothers, either Harold or Bob. There were the Bramhalls. Dr. Bramhall had ministered to my great-grandfather in his last days. The Bramhalls had a daughter, Eleanor, whom I knew myself. And there were the Hodges; one Hodge daughter was a school teacher, the other an illustrator.

In 1925, after finishing high school and a year of college in San Jose, my mother married my father (in my grandparents brand new "big house") and established their home in Sacramento. A few years later my brother and I came into this world and we are now back to where I started this extended discourse.

I have related dates, names, facts, and events. My Mom would now like to add heart and life to my arid recounting:

(I cannot effectively reconstruct here the presentation my Mom now gave. Suffice it to say that she first described the first years of her life on an upstairs story of a multi-unit building amid the concrete of Manhattan, with no trees or greenery, with people hurriedly scurrying about, and with alertness and care needed when venturing out. She then recounted the contrasting idyllic life of her childhood in Fair Oaks with its sylvan vistas, its awesome flora, its congenial folk, its placid demeanor, and its nourishing character. She concluded with the admission that she deeply appreciated this opportunity to express to Fair Oaks the depth of affection with which it is carried in her heart.)

Let me close by referring to a program presented here to this Society last October. In her talk "The Founding of Citrus Heights," Shirley Van Maren laid out the history of the founding of a community older than Fair Oaks. In the talk she covered the interest of the Citrus Heights denizens when it was learned that developers were first planning the establishment of Fair Oaks nearby for "rich people from back east." It is true that Fair Oaks was peopled with many of the well-off -- the Kings, the Gores, the Straths, the Buffums, the Slocums, et cetera. But there were others not well off in that sense but well off in the sense of having Fair Oaks to hold. Of the latter set were the Caufeilds and the Wilsons.