

Old Homes of Fair Oaks

Sally Dunbar

The Dewey Home

4720 Dewey Orchard Court

While this column highlights the old homes of Fair Oaks, it is rare we find one that is still occupied by the original family. Almost beyond odds, the Dewey home at 4720 Dewey Orchard Court is not only still occupied by the Dewey family, but has continually been occupied by a “Harry Dewey,” nearly since it was built. After three generations of Harry Deweys living in the home, Harry H. Dewey’s daughter, Eileen Dewey Thomas, now lives there with her husband, historian John Thomas.



The family history is fascinating, as Eileen's great and great-great grandfathers are both foundations of the Dewey legacy. Great-great grandfather, Jacob Heintz, came to California with his wife Julia from Louisiana in 1870. Living in the south during the Civil War, Jacob, a Yankee by birth, had feared conscription into the Confederate Army, so he paid a fellow \$48 to take his place. Landing in Sacramento, Jacob eventually purchased 200 acres in Fair Oaks—roughly bounded by what is now Dewey Drive, Palm Avenue, Winding Way and Zelinda Drive. Eileen is not sure if a poker game was involved in the purchase, but it is possible, she says. Jacob built their farmhouse their saltbox-style home in 1874.

Meanwhile, great grandfather Harry Dewey was born in Grass Valley in 1864. He and his three brothers were left at an orphanage when their mother died, and their musician father was unable to care for them. Harry was taken in by a pioneer rancher who expected very hard labor from young Harry. His was not a carefree and happy childhood. However, young Harry learned to work hard. By age 25 Harry was married to Bertha Heinz and worked on Bertha's family farm in Fair Oaks. There, in partnership with Jacob, they cultivated up to 4,000 acres of land, planted in wheat, barley, hay, and later cherries, peaches, walnuts, olives and, most notably, almonds. After Jacob's death in 1896, Harry worked the farm in partnership with Julia. By 1901, Harry took over completely.



In 1901 a family room was added, and in 1910 the home was significantly altered with the addition of the grand wrap-around porch, which added a huge outdoor living space and transformed the character of the home. Built by Fair Oaks pioneer, Joseph Broadley, the porch was twenty feet at its widest, and spanned sixty feet along one side of the home. The Broadley family, too, becomes a part of this Dewey story, as Eileen's grandmother is a Broadley.



When Eileen inherited the home from her grandparents in the early 1980s, the original 200 acres already had been whittled down to 3.5 acres, providing the land for acres of Citrus Heights homes and the Harry Dewey Elementary School. Since then, Eileen and John have worked tirelessly to upgrade and renovate the home while preserving its historical charm. As they began their renovation, there was sketchy electricity, no foundation and no heat or air conditioning. Moreover, the home had sunk 11-inches in one corner.

So they built a new foundation, installed electricity throughout, installed central heat and air, reinforced the porch, and remodeled the bathroom. They added crown moldings, made doorways wider, and were able to keep and use the original doors and windows

throughout— as well as preserving the original floors. They removed the tacky kitchen remodel from the 1960's, creating a new kitchen with period feel and modern amenities.

The high kitchen cabinets are topped with historical artifacts from a century of family living— including their old butter churn, an egg measurer, grandmother's pottery, and the little blue egg-collecting basket Eileen used as a child. They even preserved the charming set of steps into the house from the old tank house, which has since been converted to a laundry room and guest room. The steps are worn down by the feet of many generations of Deweys, exposing layers of paint colors added through the years— a nostalgic reminder of those who walked before them.

In 2004, Eileen and John sold an additional 2.5 acres which have been split into ten lots. The grand Dewey home, now on just one acre, looks very much like it did in 1910, surrounded by majestic oaks and beautiful black walnut trees that have witnessed the lives of five generations of Deweys and Heintzes.

