

Old Homes of Fair Oaks

Sally Dunbar

The Levering Home, 7881 Orange Avenue



Frequently you hear the saying “If these walls could talk”. We heard the saying last week as the owner of the Levering House at 7881 Orange Ave talked about his home during his 31 years of ownership. A man with a huge heart, Doug Porter has tried to help those in need by renting out rooms in his 2-story home to those struggling to make ends meet. The cast of characters who have come and gone could populate a movie, he says. Over the years, Doug has tried to maintain the historic feel to the home through many remodeling projects, although a fire in the living room a few years back forced some modernization he had not counted on. The firefighters smashed through the coved plaster ceiling to chase the burning embers, and windows and flooring needed to be replaced. He has also added bathrooms, but the original 2nd story “Juliette Balcony” is still the focal piece of the grand home, and the best place to enjoy the pastoral view and the nightly delta breezes of Fair Oaks, according to his wife, Marsha.

The Levering Home has an interesting story of its own to tell. As the Fair Oaks Colony gained the attention of Eastern investors, ten acres (lots 1 and 6— each five acres— stretching from Orange to Olive Streets, (west of Pennsylvania) came into the hands of T.O. and Maria Berg of the Village of Lee, Illinois, in early 1900, and soon transferred to Mary Miller, also of Village of Lee. The 1901 deed from Mary to Phillip and Emma Schoenholtz states the transfer is “a gift for kindness board and care given during the last sickness” and in exchange for her funeral expenses. Presumably the Shoeholtz never even saw the land.

In May of 1902 our Charles D. “Charley” Levering becomes the owner of the ten acres. Charley grew up in Polk County, Iowa, where his parents farmed. He worked in the lumber business for a few years, and by age 28 bought 160 acres in Omega OK, raising purebred Poland China hogs and other livestock. His marriage at age 32 brought him a bride with health challenges, encouraging Charley to move west, purchasing the ten acres in healthful Fair Oaks to build his new home, in addition to another 25-acre parcel.

Charley chose a beautiful spot to build what would be called “one of the finest homes in the district, a two-story frame building fitted with every modern convenience, arranged so as to reflect the refined tastes of its owners. The attractive appearance of the house is heightened through its excellent location on a well chosen natural building site, which affords a fine view of the entire settlement.” He moved his family to the home in 1905, and developed his acreage with orange and almonds. Charley invested in the first Fair Oaks Bank, and sat on its Board of Directors, as well as that of the Fair Oaks Fruit Company. In 1921, at 60 years of age, Charley sold his home and other holdings in the area, and moved to the Los Angeles area, where his occupation was listed as “Keeper of Bees”.

Charley’s sale was to Charles F. Walsh, a teacher, who retained ownership for 19 years, from 1921 to 1940. Walsh had 2 children— son Houston and daughter Doreene. One of our Society’s members was in Houston’s high school graduating class in 1940, and remembers swimming in the Walsh swimming pool, believed to be the first pool in Fair Oaks. The pool is still visible on the property, although a “tad dated”, and not very swimmable.

In 1940 the Levering home became owned by the OJ Porter family. OJ, along with his sister and brother, had a civil engineering firm, with a testing lab near Sac State. Over the ensuing years, the family subdivided and sold off acreage, eventually giving Doug’s Aunt Verl Lovell the current home on .61 acres in exchange for her contribution to the company. In 1987, Aunt Verle sold the home to Doug, who has owned it ever since.

