

The Davis Ranch, 10850 Fair Oaks Blvd – 2014 Update

by Sally Dunbar, Old Homes Editor

One of the longest same-family-occupied homes in Fair Oaks is fading into the sunset. October 2011 Kay Schrudder reported on the Davis Ranch on Fair Oaks Blvd, south of Sunset. This month is an update, as the home is slated to be torn down.

As a refresher, Walter M. Davis and wife Oma Bennett, bought 20 acres in Fair Oaks in 1906, soon adding another 40 acres. They built their home at 10850 Fair Oaks Blvd on 60 acres, which stretched from FOB to Chicago Ave. A surgeon from 1890 through 1910, Walter M. and Oma had three children - Walter J, Elizabeth, and Oma. While the family lived there in the early years, 1920 found them owning and managing the Hotel Madrone in San Francisco. Father Walter died in 1922 of a pulmonary embolism, leaving a sizable estate to Oma, including various SF properties, a roadhouse (saloon) named the Oasis South of the Fair Oaks Bridge, and the 60 acre Fair Oaks Ranch.



At the time of Walter's death, son Walter was managing the ranch under a crop-rent agreement, along with J.C. Lee. A letter from the father's attorney declared the "lamentable condition of the husbandry" (the place was a wreck) they found when they assessed the ranch for Walter's estate handling. Son Walter stayed at and managed the ranch from his early 20s until his death in 1939 at age 40. A letter from him to his mother in 1939 showed his frustration at the difficulty of making a profit, the lack of trusted pickers, his unhappiness at managing so much land, and his frustration at being an orchardist. He died months later. Prior to his death, they remodeled, removing the striking turret and porte-cochere, adding a french door entry and dormer window, replacing the victorian columns with craftsmen columns (and in the '70's adding an addition with a new kitchen).



In 1942, after Walter's death, Mother Oma ordered many fruit and nut trees, including quince, peach, almond, walnut, apple, grapefruit, fig, white and red grape, many of which are still found at the property. They grew 10 acres of manzanilla olives, 14 acres of mission olives, and 7 acres of olive oil. In 1944 Mother Oma and her two girls moved back to the ranch permanently. Mother Oma died in 1950, and the girls, forever remaining unmarried, lived at the ranch until their deaths in 1996 (Elizabeth) and 2006 (Oma).

In the late 1940's the Davis family sold off 10 acres near Post Rd, then in the early 50's sold off land which is now Fair Oaks Estates - today's Pollard, Dietz and Shangrila streets. In 1972, they sold the Eastern 20 acres to Henry and Katherine Kroeger, which is now Hegseth Ct. and 6 homes along Chicago. They reserved the current 7 acres, with the house, barn and caretakers cottage.

At their death, the Davis girls left a sizable estate, including the ranch, to UD Davis School of Medicine for scholarships. After considering various proposals including high density housing, a senior medical facility, a park, and restoration of the home, the Regents sold the property to Watt Communities at Davis Ranch, LLC (assessor's office show \$1,360,000 price), which has plans to create 17 homes sites on 7 acres. During their planning process, Watt Communities hired an Historical Survey and Assessment of the ranch, including its potential for historical significance, consideration of the family contribution to the community and to the olive industry. A copy of the findings has been presented to the Historical Society, which we have at our museum. The old Davis home, which is in very poor shape, will be demolished, thus ending 100 years of Davis ownership. But the Davis family wishes to support the Medical School has been realized.