

Carlmont History

Vol. 5

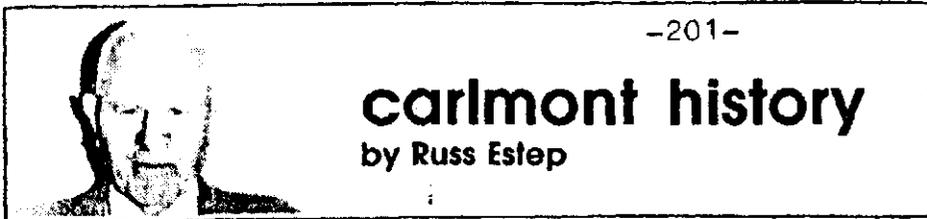
HISTORY OF BELMONT  
By  
Russel Estep

1986

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# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

*Editor's note: Russ Estep informs us that last week's column (3-5) was his 200th column for the Enquirer-Bulletin.*

*Congratulations Russ; we look forward to 200 more.*

....

When pioneers found a suitable place in which to settle they usually tried to build their house and barn near a stream. Unless they could do this, they had to dig there water wells by hand. There are many water wells still in Belmont.

Travellers stopping at the Angelo Hotel at Old County Road, and what became Ralston Avenue, watered their horses at

the little creeks which still flow down to the bay through Belmont. It is presently known as the runoff from Water Dog Lake.

The stream is small, but it never dries up. It is fed by springs that are under Water Dog Lake in Belmont's western hills.

The dam holding water in the lake was

built by William Ralston's hired Chinese laborers to hold water for irrigation. The water is no longer used, but it does look good to the customers at Pine Brook Inn when some of the water is pumped so it runs over a small waterfall beside the restaurant.

The population of Belmont has grown from several persons up to 26,500. Tests have shown that some wells have become polluted, and the water is only being used for irrigation. As the population increased something had to be done.

An agreement was reached to purchase the cold, clear, and pure water from the Crystal Springs Water Co. that comes down from Yosemite. The San Francisco water pipes are tapped west of Redwood City and our drinking water flows northward up Old County Road to Belmont. It is of such high quality that it can be used for battery water.

An old clipping from the *Redwood City Democrat* dated March 29, 1906 stated, "The citizens of Belmont who are taking steps toward the formation of an improvement club held a second meeting last night at which a permanent organization was effected. The aim is to provide the town with a water supply."

Another item dated April 5, 1906 stated that officers for the new improvement club would be Chairman J.J. O'Brien, 1st V.P.W.A. Emmett, 2nd V.P. Mrs. G.C. Ross; Secty. A.S. Neal, Treas. Chas. E. Dugan."

The settlement continued to grow and a later article from the *Redwood City Democrat* stated that "Articles of incorporation of the Belle Monte Mutual Water Co. were filed in the office of the County Clerk today., The company will supply water only to stockholders." This

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# Carlmont history

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date was February 24, 1925.

After the Belmont County Water District 6 was formed, their first president

was W.E. Curtiss who started that year.

He was followed by Arne Hersom July 27, 1950, and at that time, the hookups

had increased up to 732. Hersom was followed by Warren McClure April 3, 1963, then Harold Heidrick Dec. 1, 1975.

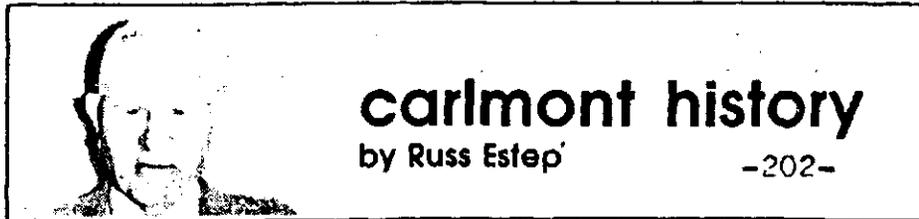
Warren Mitchell became manager in June 1979 and is our present manager of the Belmont Water District. There are five Board members at present. They are Ed Morey president, Bob Cross vice president, Ed Rodericks director, Milton Surrigs director, and Don Vecreveld director.

The hookups have increased to 27,800. With these good citizens handling our water source, we need never to worry about having to dig a well again. It was

hard work, and the mirror reflecting the light down while people were digging, didn't always provide enough light.

But on cloudy days the well diggers could rest and wish that sometime Belmont would have water pipes with running water into the houses. Of course the early settlers had running water, but they had to run to get it.

Russ Estep, a long-time Belmont and San Carlos resident, is the official historian for the City of Belmont. His column is published each week in the *Enquirer-Bulletin*



When today's developers plan their layout, they often provide a lake adjacent, or in, the development. Redwood Shores and Foster City are two close-by examples.

The condominiums and houses sell faster when people can have their own pier at the rear of their homes. Some have small boats. Others just like to feed the many ducks that have come to parts of the habitat.

Prices for homes with an adjoining lake or waterway are usually higher than for other houses. This "something extra" has been a "come on" for many years.

An old clipping of Sept. 9, 1924 tells about development of the Belle Monte Country Club Property in Belmont. A golf course and club house were built to attract the clients. The golf course was

laid out under the supervision of William Dunn.

The course was planned to be 18 holes, but before the work had been long underway, the plans were reduced down to only nine holes. The rest of the property was sold as homesites.

Of course, if you put just a small amount of bait in a fly trap, you catch as many flies as if you used a lot of the bait. People were bussed from San Francisco to Belmont, given a box lunch, then driven around the hills. Then the bus stopped at the little round real estate office opposite the Club House (Congregational Church).

An early advertisement states that tennis, swimming, handball courts, and a children's wading pool were provided. After the Belle Monte Country Club fil-

ed for bankruptcy the swimming pool was there for many years. Finally it was filled with coarse gravel. It was in the back of the building where the Congregational Church is now.

The developers laid out narrow, forty-foot wide, streets. The Union Paving Co. improved these roads, then recorded liens against the unsold lots. When the first people bought lots, they usually found the liens and paid them to clear their title.

The developers claimed they put in five miles of streets, but the paved streets were considerably less. Single track roads with primitive dirt surfaces remained for many years. Some still exist.

The old newspaper clipping states that the club house and road work would cost the developers \$375,000. With our inflation this would be many times the original costs if done now.

The clipping also tells us that 1,000 acres of rolling land was to be developed. Maybe the developers stayed on their roads and never chanced sliding down any of their "slightly rolling hillsides."

It was passed down to me that the sell-

ing plan included showing upslope lots by driving around the block so the customer was on the opposite side, and had to climb out of the vehicle.

If a lot was to be shown that was on a downslope the salesman always drove around the block so the customer was on the side where the lot was located. By doing this the upslope lots appeared much less sloping when the customer looked at them over the top of the salesman's automobile.

If the lot was a downslope, the customer, being on that side, didn't notice the steepness so readily as if he had been on the opposite side of the automobile and tried to see that was offered by looking out the car's window.

Probably there are tricks to all trades, so please don't ever tell anybody what I have told you. Realtors wouldn't do this now-a-days.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Often we hear about ghosts over in England. Some people believe in them. After all, who can prove them wrong?

Recently a "high up" man in our South County Fire Department told me about ghosts at the Belmont fire station on the corner of Cipriani Boulevard and Ralston Avenue. He said his men had reported sounds of a person walking at night within the building and of doors opening and closing. --

He said he had been doubting the occurrence, but that he had heard the ghostly sounds himself. He wondered if there had been a bad car accident at the location, where someone had died, or if an old Indian campground had been there.

I told him that I hadn't heard of any serious car accident at that spot, and also that, as far as I had researched, there had not been any Indian campground there, although it is known the Indians camped where Twin Pines Park is located. He thought I should investigate.

I neglected to tell him about the ghosts at a house I once owned at 25 Manor Court, Redwood City. At night sounds of a person walking could be plainly heard, and the sound appeared to originate up in the attic.

After losing some sleep for a few nights I took some animal poison chunks up there and spread them around. Who knows? Maybe the ghost might be hungry.

A few nights later I again heard the ghost walking in the attic, then chewing on something. While in my night clothes I went into the attic with a flashlight and discovered a large rat chewing on a ceiling joist. Apparently the animal had eaten the poison and was having a stomach problem.

The only light in the attic came from my flashlight and when I tried to hit the rat, the flashlight went out. But I grabbed the rat by the tail and began trying to swing him against a rafter or a ceiling joist. He twisted and squirmed as he tried to bite me.

Finally, I succeeded in subduing his energy by bouncing him off a ceiling joist. Taking him down the ladder, I dropped him into the garbage can and placed the lid on it.

The following morning I went to inspect the "ghost" and found the fattest rat I had ever seen. Apparently he was only stunned the night before, and had spent the night eating what was in the garbage can. I laughed as I dispatched him and was never bothered with "ghosts" again.

There are opossums in Belmont and rats may be found occasionally. Although the Belmont firemen who live at the firehouse have turned on the electric lights when they have heard the sounds, they have seen no animals. Of course, their eyesight would be at a level above the floor at the first instant, so perhaps an animal escaped.

On the other hand, maybe they do have a ghost. Who can say? People in England seem convinced that they exist. Maybe an immigrant ghost came to America and decided this Peninsula was a good place to spend some time. Maybe he was a ghost from an English fire house. I suggested this to one fireman, and he commented, "Oh rats!"

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep



Many people have been bitten by the "golf bug," so they play anywhere they can find a course. If you notice the luggage at the airport check-ins you will see several golf bags.

After the Belle Monte Golf and Country Club folded, and their golf course deteriorated, people looked for another nearby golf course.

Soon, another promoter built a rather primitive golf course farther out, west of Belmont. It was in the area of Hillcrest. Ralph Smith of Belmont, an 83-year-old Belmont citizen tells about it. Smith says he played on it once; probably before he moved to Belmont.

He says it was a nine-hole course and was called the "Goat Course," for parts of it were steep.

Smith told of hogs staying around a waterhole near one cup. He said the people who built the very rough course had

heard that rattlesnakes don't appreciate hogs, since the hogs have been known to eat them.

Yes, there were many rattlesnakes. They weren't generally the three-foot kind like most of us have encountered in Shasta County, where there is so much lava rock. These were just as poisonous, however, although they were usually only two feet in length.

Smith came to this area about 50 years ago. Snakes were in the area up until most lots had been built upon. When Ralston School first opened a student brought a live rattler into the classroom by holding it between two sticks.

When the teacher saw it she screamed, grabbed the sticks, shoved the little boy aside, and ran out the door where she dispatched the poisonous snake. Other rattlers were killed in the school area for several years afterward. Now they seem

to have become scarce.

Smith said he had played golf in the forenoon. He had heard about the snakes and thought that it was the best time for safety. He thought the snakes would still be sleepy.

He told about reaching the third hold and finding a coiled rattler guarding the cup. He apparently skipped that cup and went on to play the fourth hole. To reach the next hole required him to walk through a primitive area. Snakes were everywhere. He beat the grass to scare

them so he could make headway.

Smith never said whether he had reached the ninth hole. Perhaps he was worn out from beating the grass to frighten the snakes.

Others heard about the danger of playing there in the rough areas, so the Belmont "second" golf course folded up.

Persons who played there may have been bitten by the golf bug, but they didn't want to be bitten by one of the many snakes. But the snakes aren't there anymore.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Because both San Carlos and Belmont are situated adjacent to San Francisco Bay, both are vitally interested in the bay waters. Many citizens do not know of the model of San Francisco Bay that is over in Sausalito.

It has been there since 1957. It is operated by the Army Corps of Engineers. They use it for tests of bay waters. For instance, would a Peripheral Canal cause the Bay to become more, or less, salty? Would the delta dry up? What is the best way to handle an oil spill?

Suppose we have a drought, what would happen in the bay? How about earth fills along the bay shore? Can more be allowed? There are many questions that are being answered by the bay model. Recently I went to see the model.

There were three of us who happened to enter the model area after parking our cars nearby. One appeared to be a minister, the other told me later he was a truck driver, and then there was me.

We entered the gate together and proceeded to see the working model, but at that moment nothing seemed to be going on. Maybe preparations were being made for a different study. The water seemed completely calm in the model. The minister smiled and commented: "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

We studied the large bay model with considerable interest, although everything was very silent at the time. We learned that the model was housed in a warehouse near where Bechtel Engineering Co. had built liberty ships during World War II.

We learned that Congress appropriated funds in 1953 for having the hydraulic model built to study San Francisco Bay. In 1955, the Army Corps of Engineers modified the old warehouse to shelter the bay model. Actual construction started in 1956. In 1957, the model was finished to the head of Suisun Bay.

In the 1960s, a study was made to see what would happen if the Bay was dammed up according to the Reber Plan. In 1966, velocity measurements were checked along the center line of the Bart tunnel under the Bay.

In 1976, the dispersion of chemical spills was studied for the area of Dow Chemical's dock at Pittsburg.

In 1982, Delta flooding was studied. In 1983, a computer sampling system was added to the project. In 1984, a tide generator interfaced with the new computer system.

The model is one foot by 1,000 feet. One minute equals one hour and 40 minutes.

One gallon per minute in the tests equals 1,000,000 gallons per minute. Overall length of the model is 450 feet, and it is 320 feet in width. The Golden Gate Bridge model is six feet long.

As we came out to our cars after viewing the model, the minister suddenly uttered a bad swear word. Someone had dented the side of his car. The truck driver smiled and commented to the preacher, "Apparently He didn't restoreth your soul."



## carl mont history

by Russ Estep

In 1863 when trains started running between San Francisco and San Jose, they didn't travel fast. William Chapman Ralston liked to race the trains while driving his own vehicle. Sometimes his horses won.

Of course, he changed teams at Colma and San Mateo. Otherwise his fast driving would have killed his teams. But changing teams only took a couple of minutes because his arrangement required that the waiting horses be harnessed and out in front of their stables. Probably his ego was helped by winning against the steam trains.

Ralston came from a background of ancestors who also did out of the ordinary things now and then. One of my great aunts on my mother's side lived in the same small town where the Ralston family lived. She married a Chapman, and it was told in the family that John Chapman went around the countryside planting apple seeds. Some called him Johnny Applesseed.

One of the Chapman boys grew up and induced many persons to help finance an automobile manufacturing plant. They made cars called the "Dort." The cars were never much good, and finally the company folded up. They couldn't compete with the larger manufacturers.

William Chapman Ralston was no fool. He helped start many companies here in California, and he financed businesses that might never have come into existence had it not been for his

money. Of course, when the auditors found his accounts in the Bank of California overdrawn \$4,300,000, they demanded he replace it.

Mr. Sharon laid his money on the table and took everything Mr. Ralston owned. Ralston could have raised the money in 24 hours, but the Directors demanded it "now." Ralston couldn't stand adversity.

In addition to starting the Bank of California, Ralston financed the construction of the first dry-dock at Hunter's Point. He took over and operated the Mission Woolen Mills. He owned a large ranch in the Central Valley of California, and when the trains began operating on the newly laid tracks a station was needed.

People suggested the station be named for Ralston, but he objected. So they named the station, and the town that grew up around it, Modesto, saying Ralston was "too modest."

Ralston had financed many other large projects, including having the Palace Hotel built. He was well-known throughout the financial world. It was quietly publicized that if you wanted money for "any" project, you only needed to see Ralston. But you had to agree to give him a share in whatever the project was that you proposed.

Ralston's mother had been a Chapman. This is why his middle name was Chapman. This is why his middle name was Chapman. Possibly he inherited the tendency to make money, and to take chances in losing all he owned.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Within San Carlos and Belmont, there are many newcomers who do not know that during the Centennial Celebrations of America to celebrate being in a Democracy where there was no King, Belmont had a King. He was Bert Johnson, born in Belmont in 1904.

Johnson still lives in Belmont. When young, he lived with his parents at the south end of Fifth Avenue. The parents' home was later sold to the Chartier family, who started their restaurant there.

Later, the Chartiers moved to their present location in San Mateo, and the Hernons took over the Belmont house. They operated a restaurant in it for awhile.

Johnson emphasizes just how rural Belmont was. He tells that their family had a horse and cow. The horse to draw a buggy, and the cow for milk.

He tells of their two-seater outhouse in their back yard partially hidden with a gunny sack screen. He also tells that he had to lock their chickens inside the chicken house at night so coyotes wouldn't get them.

To supplement the family diet, Bert used to gather mushrooms from Belmont's hillsides. He said he only gathered small mushrooms and didn't ever pick those growing near trees. He reported that he

never did hear of anyone in Belmont getting poisoned.

He said that the little valley where Molitor Road runs through to San Carlos could always be depended upon for a fine meal of fresh mushrooms after a rain.

Changes in most towns occur so much that people might not recognize what had been there 50 years earlier. For instance, the Hull ranch at the extreme North end of San Carlos is now gone.

Even those two tall palm trees were removed. There is no indication that the large pile of bricks were ever there. Only the name on a street reminds us of the old-time Hull family. When old-timers die, people soon forget.

During the 1920s several houses were built in the Sunnyslope area of Belmont. They can be identified by the red tile roofs. Each of them has a minimum of 1,200 square feet of floor space.

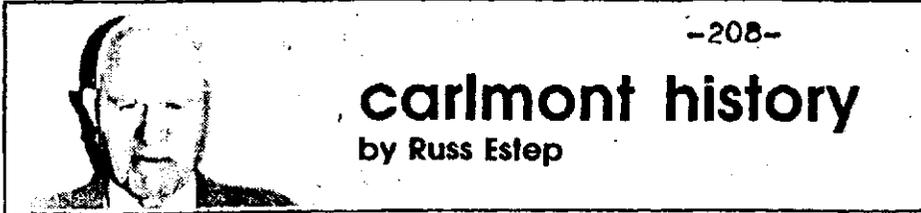
Although San Carlos was mostly a large hay field, Belmont had some houses and a store at the intersection of Old County Road and Ralston Avenue. No one could ever believe that San Carlos and Belmont would have growth such as we see now.

The present San Carlos population is 28,500, and Belmont is listed as being

26,500. Both are growing, yet they haven't reached the stage of a metropolis.

People coming here are sometimes heard to comment, "What a quiet little place." Probably these same people

would have commented 60 years or more ago, "What a noisy place," after hearing coyotes howl after finding Johnson's chickens locked inside his chicken house.



When our country was first settled, some of the people ordered this or that from Britain and had to wait for their orders to arrive. Some owed money to others and presumably the expression "Wait until my ship comes in" originated from this. Many had to wait and wait. But in Belmont, ships did arrive. They

only had to come from San Francisco. They were all of shallow draft, and sails took them along. The old expression continued to be used. If someone owed a bill, he often told his creditor, "Wait until my ship comes in."

When Count Leonetto Cipriani came here from Italy in 1850, he didn't know

there were 15 sawmills at Woodside cutting the large redwood trees. Count Cipriani had his pre-fab house shipped around Cape Horn to San Francisco, then in a smaller ship down the Bay to Belmont.

If you look closely at the Ralston mansion you may recognize that the south portion is different from the rest. William Ralston bought the property in 1864, and added to what Cipriani had until there were 50 rooms in the house.

An old clipping from the Redwood City newspaper tells that Captain O'Neill had operated a ship from San Francisco to Belmont during the 1850s. Before the

railroad came in 1863, ships were a much easier way to transport merchandise from San Francisco than by using freight teams and their large, heavy freight wagons.

Ralston owned a ship at one time, used mainly to transport things he needed at his own property in Belmont. A man named Castor owned a wharf at Belmont for awhile and his wharf was known then as Castor's Landing, according to old records at the court house.

One old newspaper clipping dated November 2, 1893 tells of 51 tons of coal being unloaded at the Belmont Wharf for Mr. Emmett's store.

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## carlmont history

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Another item tells of heavy timbers coming by ship to Belmont from San Francisco to be used in construction of several new buildings, including the school on Old County Road.

Count Leonetto Cipriani arrived on

March 23, 1867 on the "steamer" Moses Taylor, after being absent from this area for several years. Steamers weren't very common in those days.

Charles Hosmer ran an advertisement in August 31, 1867 saying that he could handle the shipping of freight from Belmont by water. He was to act as Agent.

During the depression some promoters had an old navy vessel moored at Bel-

mont. The promoters tried to get the name of Belmont changed to "Port of San Francisco," but they never succeeded. The old navy ship was there to attract attention to their plans.

Presently the only ship at Belmont is the Sea Scout ship. It is moored in the channel near where Marine World used to be.

In August 1875, the Belmont financier,

William C. Ralston, had been caught short in his Bank of California accounts to the tune of \$4.2 million, and he quickly died. We could say that instead of his ship "coming in," it had "gone out." People were sorry for Ralston and his widow.

Russ Estep, a long-time Belmont and San Carlos resident, is the official historian for the City of Belmont.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

William C. Ralston, who had lived in Belmont until his death in 1875, was wealthy, yet a frugal man. Old reports state that he seldom paid workmen above the going scale. Perhaps he didn't want to be a contributor to inflation. Yet inflation was, even then, proceeding upward, and some of it caught him.

A ship Captain named Captain Hinkley purchased a wide lot in San Francisco for only \$45 in 1845, and old records indicate that he thought he was paying too much.

He did alright though. He leased his lot to Ralston in 1868 for \$1,000 per month on a ground lease. The lot had a frontage of 137½ feet, and it was the lot where Ralston had his California Theatre built.

Ralston had two partners when building the theatre. They were H.P. Wakelee a druggist, and Charles Peters. Possibly some others were also silent partners in the construction.

Probably no large project such as the theatre has ever been built in so short a time. Actually the building was started in August 1868 and opened for the first crowds in January 1869. It was an immediate success. Apparently, Ralston's crystal ball had produced another winner.

Two well-known actors of the time were hired to perform in theatre plays. One was John McCullough and the other was Lawrence Barrett. Each had a large following in San Francisco and from the Peninsula, and reports are that there was standing room only at many of their performances.

Ralston's theatre had competition, but with his two good actors he didn't worry. The other theatres were the Metropolitan on Montgomery Street, and Maguire's Opera House on Washington Street.

When building his California Theatre, many workmen were hired. In researching many old records, I find nothing to indicate the wages they received.

Since the year was 1868, old records show that carpenters were getting \$2 per day for 10 hours work. Presumably, this was what Ralston paid. His laborers would have received a smaller sum—probably \$1 per day for 10 hours.

This was what was paid when Ralston had his "Water Dog" lake built west of Belmont.

An old clipping tells that he had over 100 workmen at the project, plus 50 Chinese. Maybe the Chinese were paid less.

Only a few years before this, the Big Four—Huntington, Crocker, Stanford and Hopkins—built the first railroad up through the Sierras to connect with the Union Pacific at Promontory, Utah. Crocker hired hundreds of Chinese labors whom he had transported from China. Old clippings indicate their pay was under \$1 per day, although each received rice for meals. Chinese workmen were available.

Nothing appears to be in old records indicating that Ralston had provided rice for anyone. If he had provided rice, he might have thought it would be contributing to inflation.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In 1795, there was only the Arguello house in all of San Carlos and Belmont. They were raising cattle, and there were no fences. Later, as more people came to this area, the Mezes and other property owners also began raising cattle.

Soon, the herds were mixing with different breeds of cattle and many wandered away. Fences had to be built. It was then that cattle often stood looking over a fence, apparently wishing they were on the other side.

Sometimes people acquire similar tendencies. They like to go to a different location to relax. Some from other places come to Belmont hotels.

The first hotel in this area was built by Charles Angelo. It was located at Old County Road and Ralston Avenue. Soon a second hotel was built nearby. One was called the Belmont Hotel and the other, The American House.

Belmont people often went elsewhere. Old newspaper clippings in my file tell of some spending a week at that large old hotel which used to be beside the highway in Paso Robles. There was a hot spring there where people liked to sit and soak.

Then other clippings tell of people from this area spending 10 days at Shasta Springs. The mineral water in that round, rock-ed-up fountain at the bottom of the tramway seemed good to all who drank from it. The air was clear and cool at the 3,000 foot elevation.

Other people spent a week or two at

Sonoma in the old hotel. Transportation was slow and you became tired long before you arrived. Add this to the tiredness you felt before starting, and you found yourself "all worn out" and ready to rest a few days.

There were other large resort hotels such as the Vendome Hotel on North First Street in San Jose. It was surrounded by a large acreage and sat far back from the street. While a few persons spent just one night or two, the majority came for a week or two.

Over in Oakland was the Claremont Hotel on the sidehill east of much of the old town that was there 70 years ago. People from Belmont and San Carlos went to the Claremont and spent several days when they didn't have money to travel farther.

The change to the east side of the bay was exciting. It took quite a bit of traveling to get there. They had to ride a train to San Francisco, go by streetcar to the Ferry Building, and ride across the bay on a ferry. Once across, people took a Key System car to the Oakland stop; then a taxi (horse drawn at first) up to the hotel.

Other hotel resorts usually required as much changing of types of transportation.

Old records tell of outsiders coming to early Belmont to spend a summer vaca-

tion at one of the Belmont hotels. Possibly they needed to charge their batteries.

Presently the available transportation is faster than it used to be. Local people go to Hawaii, Mexico, Alaska, and even Europe for their vacations. People from

other places come here to the various hotels on the Peninsula.

Doesn't it seem that people have demonstrated that, like cattle, they think the grass is greener on the other side of the street? People from San Carlos and Belmont have always enjoyed getting away.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep



Many people in Belmont think the Ralston house, that was built in 1850 by Count Cipriani, is the oldest house in this neck-of-the-woods. They are wrong if they believe this.

Don Jose Dario Arguello received a land grant from King Carlos of Spain in 1795 and established his home of his land. The first Arguello house was at the corner of what is now Cordilleras Avenue and San Carlos Avenue.

In 1821 his widow and son moved into a new house they had built on Cedar Street, a block north of San Carlos Avenue. A part of that house is still there. Its address is 425 Cedar Street, and Mrs. Ruth Markley has lived in it for the past forty years.

She bought it from Paul Murphy. He bought it from Frank Hamman, and Hamman bought it from Mr. Mann. I cannot find who owned it earlier. There may have been some other owners between Mr. Mann's ownership, and when

the Arguello family owned it.

The old house has been added onto, but at least four of the original rooms remain. Although the Arguello family moved to Cedar Street in 1821, it is likely that they lived in a log house at first. The sawmills at Woodside didn't begin making boards until the late 1840s.

The ceiling of each room in the old house is made of redwood. The boards are 1x4 tongue and groove. The boards are fitted tightly together and carpenter work on the older portion of the old house is excellent. Joints may hardly be seen.

The ceilings are cathedral-type, with a high part in the center of the rooms. It would be impossible to speculate why the ceilings were built to a point, but they do look good. Maybe it was for appearance, for the high ceilings do give a feeling of space.

The old house is comfortable, and Mrs. Markley says she enjoys living there. Her

yard is thick with foliage, and it includes some very large trees and healthy large plants. We might think they could have been planted by the Arguello family, yet Mrs. Markley said she had planted some them herself. Apparently the soil is rich, and they grew very fast.

The floors are not all on the same level. There is a slight difference, and like our modern buildings, this makes some houses more interesting.

Many people do not know that at least one descendant of the Arguello family is still living in this area. He is descended from Mrs. Arguello's side, and he lives

on Harbor Boulevard in Belmont. Both he, and his father, whom I knew, are decidedly gentlemen and very well mannered.

Presumably, they inherited this good mannerism. The Arguello family has been a great asset to this part of California. We are indeed fortunate that they were the first settlers.

**Russ Estep, a long-time Belmont and San Carlos resident, is the official historian for the City of Belmont. His column is published each week in the Enquirer-Bulletin.**



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

An old article about Belmont in the Nov. 3, 1880 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* relates things about our city that still haven't changed. The early correspondent says: "The wind, sweeping through Devil's Canyon, was sufficient in force and quantity to turn all the wind-mills in Christendom."

The old article goes on to say that "The water supply for Belmont would be adequate for years to come. Although everyone had "dug" wells, the Ralston Lake (Waterdog) would always be the reserve supply." The writer missed out on that prediction.

Mention is made in the old clipping about Senator Phelps's large dairy in San Carlos. In 1880, he had a herd of 150 cows, and 75 were being milked. He also raised hogs, and there were a few goats on his property, but more were raised in Belmont. In addition, both he and Sharon raised stock cattle.

The old article states that Senator Sharon, at the former Ralston place, had been supplying his Palace Hotel with eggs. He was reported to be sending 300, or more, dozen daily for use at the hotel. Reports also were, that his herd of dairy cows were producing milk for his hotel.

Every available inch of bare land was planted with hay to feed the cattle and horses. No row crops were raised such as potatoes, and there were no orchards in 1880 in this entire area.

Even in 1880, there was interest in developing the tidelands near Belmont. In an old clipping it is stated that "if a se-

cond railroad is ever built to connect Menlo Park and San Francisco, along the bay's edge as proposed, the levees would allow fill so the land might be farmed. Water from the hills would flow down into the reclaimed low-land would become productive."

The 106-year-old clipping indicates the writer never thought growth, as we see it, would come to this area.

The writer tells of Belmont's very old hotel, oldest in the county. It was called the Belmont Hotel. He also mentions that there are a few houses in the area—four or five, and two were built 20 years before 1880. He calls them "very old," like the Belmont Hotel.

In addition to Senator Sharon and Senator Phelps, the other farmers and ranchers in Belmont are listed in 1880 as Mezes, Barre, Newhall and Bishop and Hussey. All had cows and sold butter in San Francisco, mainly to the Palace Hotel.

There were several businessmen in Belmont. Janke, Waltermire, Emmett, Schmall, and Elms are mentioned in the old newspaper.

During the coming century there will be more changes in Belmont. It would be simple to suggest there will be dozens of high-rise buildings, Bart extended through Belmont, two at least, elevated eight-lane freeways and a population of many times the present number of 26,500. Maybe even a mono-rail to Half Moon Bay.

Regardless of the Belmont wind mentioned 106 years ago, it will prevail during the next century. Those of us here, now, like it. Those coming in the future may come to Belmont because of it. There is no smog and the climate is ideal.

We like Belmont.  
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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Many people do not know that Belmont once lost a street. This happened during World War I when the El Camino Real was moved west of the railroad tracks. The street next to the early tracks was called Johnson Street. It disappeared.

Old maps show lots along Johnson Street as being only 40 feet by 100 feet. Since the rest of the early Belmont development had been laid out with 50 foot lots one must wonder why they were to be less on Johnson Street. The El Camino Real was formerly east of the tracks, but in 1918 it was moved to where we see it now.

At first the El Camino Real was only two lanes. The rest of the street width was graveled and dust was kicked up when people drove off the pavement.

Although Belmont lost a street, they also lost names of some well-known streets. For instance, Notre Dame Avenue used to be Daisy Lane.

When the first boy from Belmont was killed in World War II a street was re-named for him. It became Robin Whipple Way.

The Alameda de las Pulgas, of course, received its name before the development of Belmont. The Spanish explorers gave it the name because some of their group found themselves covered with hungry fleas after sleeping in an old Indian hut.

The three real estate developers of the Belmont Country Club Properties were Mr. Monroe, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Lyon. Accordingly, when naming the Belmont streets they named three streets for

themselves, so they wouldn't be forgotten. For years, their three streets were the smoothest in town.

Our Sixth Street used to be named Schmoll Street, for one of Belmont's pioneer families. It was changed so that future citizens of what was believed would be a metropolis, could find their way around more easily.

At the north end of Belmont are Ruth and Anita Avenues. Both were named for the Swift girls, daughters of the Swift family who lived in Belmont, and who operated a large lumber yard in San Francisco.

The first prominent person who lived in Belmont was Count Leonetto Cipriani, so when our town was laid out his name was attached to the dirt street (now paved) at the west of Belmont.

William Ralston made the biggest splash in the area so our main thoroughfare carries his name. At the time of his death it was learned that he was the world's largest embezzler. There is no record though, of him leaving poems where he had operated, such as the famous Black Bart did.

Some of the Bart poems were a contribution to literature. Ralston left a large house, but he had others build it. Black Bart wrote his own poems.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

It will be awhile until Belmont has an international airport or an international exposition. However, Belmont and San Carlos people enjoy seeing the displays at expositions. Many from here have already attended the exposition in Vancouver.

Some of these people are taking their children and grandchildren to show them things they might not see otherwise.

There were many from Belmont who saw the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. Some of those also visited the exposition held in San Francisco on Treasure Island in 1939. Since then, our local people have seen Expo's in Seattle, Wash. and in Portland, Ore. All were interesting and in each something could be found that they had never seen before.

The Panama Pacific International Exposition was held at the Marina beside San Francisco Bay in 1915. I was 12 years old and remember it well. My grandmother took me there. We would go to San Francisco by train, then streetcar to the entrance.

We usually had to change streetcars several times. The Fillmore streetcar went directly to the entrance, but it was necessary to change from a California Street cablecar to the Fillmore line, or change from the Market or Fulton Street lines.

The entrance to the fair was under an arch which had a wonderful statue of a pioneer wagon pulled by horses, up high above street level.

Next came the Tower of Jewels. This was a tall tower with lights from top to bottom. When nightfall came you could see the Tower of Jewels from a long distance.

As we entered the fair on our right was the communications building and engineering building. There is no telling how many youths were influenced when they heard the spark radio code blasting loud enough so you could hear it some distance away.

In those buildings was a model of the newly built Panama Canal showing the lakes and locks. Usually when I became interested in those buildings, my grand-

mother would say, "Let's get going. I don't want to spend all day here."

We rode on the miniature railroad that ran along the bay's edge. From there we could see Lincoln Beachy flying his airplane.

Viewing the paintings in the Fine Arts Palace took a long time, and I was always tired when we finished looking at things there.

In another area were several large train steam engines. One was built so the engineer and fireman's cab was in front of the train.

Also in another building there was an

exceptionally well-made dining room table and chairs—made by a high school class in the Philippines.

At every Expo, there has been interesting things to see. A young person doesn't forget these things. An influence develops from seeing the exhibits. Maybe hearing the spark code at the 1915 Exposition influenced me to later become a ship radio officer. I was thrilled by the code. All young people should be taken to see the fairs when the fairs are available. They do not forget what they see.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

William C. Ralston died when in middle age. He was only 49. With so many accomplishments behind in only half a lifetime, we wonder what he might have done if he had been allowed to live longer.

During his lifetime he built the Palace Hotel, the first drydock at Hunter's Point, and many other things. His money came from the Comstock Lode at first. Soon his other ventures provided additional money. He never went hungry. The man was generous and helped his friends when he could.

It was later found that his bank audit showed a shortage of \$4,200,000. but even then, he is reported to have had a source to get the money quickly. The bank directors refused him even 24 hours.

Ralston of Belmont was a real promoter. He is reported to have told one reporter that he always tried to be "ahead" of his ventures, but when he couldn't, he was satisfied if he could just be half way, or a little over that.

Some other people used the half way, or middle ideas too. Going a bit farther out, Charles Angelo built his first hotel in the middle of the street. It was at Old County Road and the road to the coast (later Ralston Avenue). Angelo operated his hotel for three years, then sold it to a Mr. Flashner.

In larger cities, some newsboys stood in the middle of the street selling newspapers. They could catch traffic both going and coming.

Going farther out still, have you notic-

ed that the north and southbound trains pass each other in Belmont? We are located an equal distance from San Francisco and San Jose. This is one of the reasons why real estate is higher here than in some places. Commuters can travel either direction very readily.

In 1795, when the first family of Arguellos established their home on their Rancho, it was located roughly in the center of their property. This made it easier to supervise. Their property was 34,200 acres approximately, and they could have lived on any part of it.

They chose the center portion—San Carlos. Their only transportation was by horseback, but from the middle of their Rancho, they could travel to any part of their land in an hour.

We often hear some politicians say they are following the middle of the road on policy. Others say the politician is straddling the fence. Belmont has a Middle Avenue, but it doesn't divide the town.

Probably most people in San Carlos and Belmont have seen the 500-year-old church in the middle of the street in London. It is on the Strand, near the Thames River. It may be seen for blocks.

If you haven't seen it yet, and go to London, just don't comment as I did. I asked an Englishman, "Isn't that a church in the middle of the street?"

The Englishman looked at the church, then turned to me and said, "By jove! I believe it is a church." He was smiling as he walked away, probably thinking, "Another dumb American."



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

House fires have always been awful. Many happened in Bemont and San Carlos in early years. An item dated October 13, 1866 tells about Mrs. G. M. Smith buying the former Angelo Hotel in Belmont and having it remodeled.

Another article dated Decebmer 22, 1866 tells of the hotel burning. When it was replaced the next building was built south of the road where the present Opportunity Shop is located.

Angelo's Hotel had been in the middle of the street. Traffic had probably increased so the entire street was needed, or people thought it was needed. Likely, there were three or four wagons passing there each day. Heavy traffic for those times.

In 1866, and for many years afterwards, the people here had no way to get running water. Everyone had a water well, and most had to pull the water bucket up with a well rope over a pulley. Electric motors and gasoline engines weren't available. A few people had windmills and those persons piped the tank water inside their houses, but they were a minority in number.

When fires started it was necessary to try to get everything possible out of the houses. Usually the people had but a very few minutes. When my family's nine-room home burned in Shasta County, I happened to be there. I was 18 years old.

My family there had been carrying drinking water from a cold spring a quarter mile from the house for 40 years. The house burned in 1921. When there is no way to stop a fire things become a little snafu.

We were eating breakfast. One of my 14-year-old brothers carried his breakfast

plate out to the yard where the dog ate the food later as the house burned.

I raced to my room and tried unsuccessfully to push a mattress through a window. I learnd it couldn't be done, but by the time I had learned, the fire was burning my back.

I went to another window and managed to jump into a tree nearby, where I then climbed down. I was impressed. The house that burned had been a little too high in elevation for gravity spring water to flow to it.

I soon laid pipe and, with the help of my two 14-year-old brothers, built a new house where water could reach it. That was one of the first houses in the Oak Run area that had running water. Soon after that I returned to the Peninsula again.

There were other fires in Belmont, in addition to that first mentioned. In 1872, the Belmont railroad station was destroyed by fire. In 1874 William Ralston's barn burned. He replaced it, then later replaced the replacement with the stone barn.

In 1874 the Robinson house was destroyed by fire. A portion of the Reid School was also destroyed by fire in October 1908. The S.M. Mezes house burned before Belmont had a suitable water supply.

There were several other early fires. Probably no one had to slide down an oak tree though to get out. Other people weren't as excited as I had been, and things probably didn't become so snafu (Situation Normal—All Fouled Up, as a Submarine Commander commented during World War II). His expression fitted the situation precisely.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

With the school term ending in Belmont and San Carlos, pupils who made the honor roll should be interested to learn that their names will be known a century from now. They are starting to make a name for themselves.

For instance, in an old clipping from the newspapers of 1872, it is stated: "The public school at Belmont closed last Friday, after a session of five months. The great interest and improvements manifested by the pupils throughout the term has been remarkable when we take into consideration their privation of a school house and school furniture. Not many children would attend so cheerfully and regularly...a school where their seats were nothing more comfortable than a straight-legged, rough board bench, without any back. Their Roll of Honor: Willie Reed, Jennie Hayes, Hannah Schmoll, Mary Hull, Lavina Bara, Ellen Reed, Rebecca Reed, Tony Schmoil, Henry Hull, and Willy Newhall."

Their main subjects appear to have been the three "Rs," and these students excelled in those subjects. In later records are found mention of these same names of people prominent in the area.

People in Belmont wanted their children educated and an old clipping one year later, dated Nov. 22, 1873, states, "The schoolhouse at Belmont, after having seen hard times for a year, has been moved across the street, neatly fitted up inside, and awaits a coat of paint on its outside walls." There is no mention of

improved seats, or of desks. The schoolhouse was located on the Old County Road—which was then El Camino Real.

On July 18, 1874, the San Mateo Gazette mentioned the Belmont school with this, "The closing exercises of the Belmont Public School June 26th, consisting of declamations, compositions, reading and singing, were characterized by an unusual degree of interest."

Belmont's school houses were in various places over the years.

On Oct. 5, 1889, a bond issue of \$5,000 was approved for erecting a new schoolhouse on Old County Road to replace the earlier one. The new building was a two story and had at least two teachers. The old school building was sold on Feb. 1, 1890 to Mr. Newhall for \$62.50.

A new and larger building was built on Waltermire Street in 1918 where the Safeway Store now stands. Then in 1967 that building was taken down and a new Central School was built on Middle Road. The latter is still in use.

Lists of Honor Roll students became longer as school populations increased, so it is impossible to include them here.

Two things appear to make it easier for young people to advance as they grow up. One is "making the Honor Roll" in our schools, and then to become Eagle Scouts. I have heard that all American Presidents achieved these goals. I think we will all agree those men have been successful.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Everyone has heard that history often repeats itself. Also what happens today becomes history tomorrow. What Bert Johnson and Tom Pennington's son George, (called Keko), did before 1920 was something no one would have expected to be repeated here in Belmont. Bert Johnson has told about it.

Tom Pennington Sr. gave his son Keko a set of four wheels which had ball bearings.

Being active youngsters, Bert and Keko immediately thought, "How lucky we are. Now we can have a good coaster. With ball bearing wheels we can outrun anything we happen to be up against."

They proceeded to place their materials in the Pennington swimming pool which was dry due to a leak. They could work there without interference.

The boys built the frame and brought the tail end to a point so as to reduce air friction. Then they covered the frame with sheet metal.

Because the Belmont wind blew then just as it does today, they brought the coaster into the shop so dust wouldn't stick to it. They painted the racer white with a large blue figure eight on its sides. The boys were very proud of their coaster and were anxious to try it out on a Belmont hill.

Since the longest hill and the best run would be Ralston Avenue, they decided to try the coaster there.

At that time, Ralston Avenue's hill

fast as Bert Johnson's coaster, they didn't hold back traffic. Maybe they had roller bearings in the wheels.

What they did might not have frighten-

ed them, but people in cars appeared scared to death. They were afraid they might run over one of the boys. Luckily no one did.

wasn't quite as long as it is now. It followed the route of Belmont Canyon Road, so that point where Belmont Canyon Road turns off to the right became the highest point to start their run.

Auto traffic through Belmont at that time was only occasional. The boys arranged with a local citizen to stop cars whose drivers intended to cross the race route. Everyone complied and there were no complaints.

Then one of the boys climbed into their coaster and started down Ralston Avenue going very fast. He thought he was flying.

Soon afterward, Bert Johnson asked a motorcycle policeman to check their speed. The officer told Bert he had been going 40 miles per hour.

Bert says they often didn't get stopped until they had coasted to the highway, probably meaning the El Camino Real.

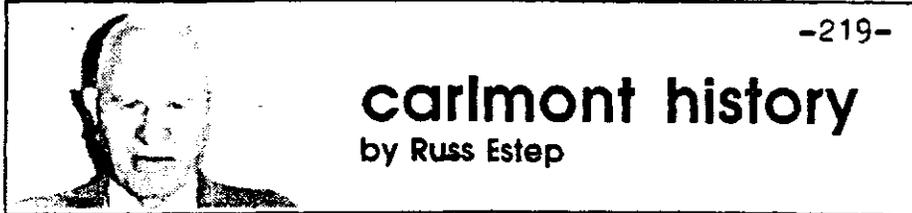
Very fortunately the boys were never hurt. What they did wouldn't be possible nowadays, or would it?

Auto traffic is considerably more now than before 1920. To coast down Ralston Avenue would be hazardous. Yet boys still do it.

As I traveled down the Ralston Avenue hill recently, I saw two boys on skate boards weaving in and out between cars. They were lucky they weren't run over.

People had to dodge them. They had started up at the top of the hill, and finally turned off at Cipriani Boulevard. Although their skate boards didn't go as

ed them, but people in cars appeared scared to death. They were afraid they might run over one of the boys. Luckily no one did.



Many San Carlos and Belmont people go to picnics in the summertime. In earlier times, many were held in Belmont, where Twin Pines Park is located.

Mr. Janke had his picnic grounds there and during the summertime reservations had to be made considerably ahead of arrival time of a large group was expected. Some groups were larger than we find at picnics nowadays.

The *Times Gazette* article dated April 29, 1876 tells of an I.O.O.F picnic at the Janke Picnic Grounds where 8,000 lodge members enjoyed a day.

The old newspaper article reads: "The picnic at Belmont on Wednesday by the I.O.O.F. was the largest and most orderly of any ever held at that place. Seventy-five cars, packed to their fullest capacity, came from San Francisco bringing over 7,000 persons. These together with those from the surrounding country made fully 8,000 persons. Dancing, racing, and sports of all kinds were the order of the day. Excellent music was furnished by the Industrial School Band."

The I.O.O.F. doctrine is such that Protestants comprise the membership.

Recently, the lodge presented me with a 60 year jewel which I will wear with pride at meetings, and lodge picnics. Their next picnic will be at their Old Folks Home in Saratoga. That is a place filled with the older members—both men and women—and they are well taken care of.

There is a view at the home looking out across Santa Clara valley. The residents

With that many people, the little village of Belmont must have been jumping. Within the park there wouldn't have been enough tables and benches for so many and most must have sat on the ground while eating. Anyway, the place they chose was beautiful then as it is now. We call the area Twin Pines Park.

In the year 1876, the I.O.O.F. lodge flourished. It is still a large organization, with lodges throughout the world, except in Russia. When we go to the California foothills and see small ghost towns, invariably there will be a sign on one building proclaiming it to have been the I.O.O.F. hall.

William C. Ralston of Belmont, who died in 1875, had been a lodge member in the order. Old records indicate that he attended many lodge meetings when in San Francisco, and in other cities when he traveled. It was an easy way to become acquainted with many other men, and almost overnight he could be on a first name basis with some civic and business leaders.

formerly enjoyed seeing prune trees when they blossomed in the springtime. Nowadays all they can see is houses and condominiums.

The grounds are spacious and usually there are at least 1,500 at the picnics, where they serve barbecued beef with other things. It isn't as pretty a place as the old Belmont Janke Picnic Ground; our Twin Pines Park.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Sixty years ago, when people from the South wanted to drive over to Half Moon Bay, they sometimes became confused as to where to turn off the El Camino Real. Both Belmont and San Carlos had service stations on the northwest corners of the two turn-offs. Either would get you to the road to Half Moon Bay. Train depots for each town were across El Camino Real.

The Belmont station has been operated by Standard for many years, and Newell Sharkey operated the station at San Carlos Avenue in San Carlos. Some people say Newell was there before Don Gaspar de Portola came along here. Anyway Newell was at the San Carlos site a long, long time.

Very recently the last operator of that service station was evicted. He said he was given seven days in which to clear out things he owned that were there. He said he had heard the large corner lot had been sold for half a million dollars. It is an excellent corner lot with good exposure.

The former station operator said he had heard that a small shopping center

would soon be built there, but that some time would be needed to obtain various permits.

Cities continually change, as does everything around us. Probably most of us will recall the G.M. exhibit at the fair in Portland a few years ago, and their diarama of a city.

The diarama showed a small tree and a town 50 years ago. As people looked at the diarama, buildings appeared, and were replaced by more modern structures. Fifty years later, all the original buildings were gone, and the only reminder of the town 50 years earlier was a large tree.

With the service station gone from the historic site, San Carlos will never look the same again. While people nowadays read road signs, there may be some who still look for landmarks.

If there are still persons farther down the Peninsula who watch their landmarks, Belmont's Ralston Avenue may gain traffic. Traffic to the coast from San

Carlos and Belmont is often heavy.

On some Sunday afternoons, it sometimes is bumper to bumper—especially on warm days when people hope to go to the beach. Sometimes people find traveling so slow that they wonder if their picnic lunches might be appropriately used for their dinners.

A freeway to the coast is badly needed, as is a by-pass at Devil's Slide.

People will miss seeing a service station at the corner of San Carlos Avenue and

El Camino Real, just as they miss Belmont's old red hotel that was on Old County Road in Belmont for so long. Things keep changing. But does an old tree remain? Shuecks! It's been cut to make way for more condominiums.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

There are persons in Belmont who think the only animals here earlier were those in Marine World. However, there was a bear in Belmont in the early 1920s. It was a tame bear and was owned by the Penningtons. Bert Johnson tells about it. The Penningtons were prominent people, and their home was on South Road near the north end of Belmont's Holly Road.

Mr. Pennington attended many conventions, and at one of them he won first prize—a bear cub. He brought it to his Belmont home on a chain. The cub grew fast and was soon large enough to wrestle with. Pennington's son, George, had read about Daniel Boone and his experiences with Kentucky bears. He was thrilled.

When other Belmont boys would visit George Pennington (called Keko) they were sometimes invited to wrestle a round

with the fast-growing bear. The bear usually won. Sometimes boys would turn the hose on the bear during their play, but this didn't seem to bother the young bear. It apparently enjoyed it.

As it grew, a cable was stretched across the Pennington back yard so the bear could get exercise. One night while Mrs. Pennington was alone the bear broke loose.

Mrs. Pennington was afraid the bear might frighten or hurt someone. The Penningtons had a telephone, so she could call for help. She cranked the wall telephone for central and reached Paul Miller, night operator on the exchange.

She requested that he send men with guns as fast as possible. Paul rounded up several men who had guns. The group met Mrs. Pennington, who cautioned them to keep very quiet so as not to ex-

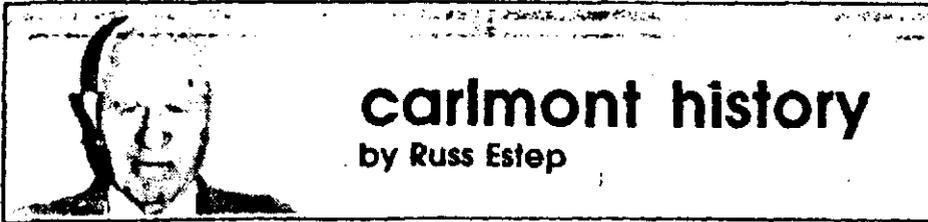
When the hunters came closer, the bear walked toward the house and went through the open basement door. The door was quickly shut and fastened. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Some wiped the perspiration from their faces.

Mrs. Pennington telephoned a circus and the zoo. The telephone calls didn't bring relief. After all, who wanted to get up in the middle of the night to go after a loose bear?

The men stood in a group as one lighted his pipe. Speech was almost in whispers. The men talked for a while about bears, then changed the subject to other local items. Everyone thought the

bear was where it couldn't harm anyone, and the men were almost ready to start for home. Then someone pointed! The bear was out and coming up the house steps. Mrs. Pennington moved to get a chair between herself and the bear. The men moved into position so as to shoot, and one shot from a 44 caliber gun killed the bear.

The men dragged the bear to the yard where it was skinned. Mr. Pennington had the hide tanned and Mrs. Pennington placed it beside Keko's bed. Keko wasn't accustomed to a soft bear rug, but after the first few nights he decided that things weren't so bad after all during Daniel Boone's time.



**carlmont history**  
by Russ Estep

Both San Carlos and Belmont advance along well-established lines. Just about everyone is satisfied. There were some ideas for changes many years ago that were not adopted. For instance, that one by Daniel St. George, real estate broker, made January 22, 1931.

The old clipping reads, "On suggestion

of Daniel St. George, the Belmont City Council went on record last night as being in favor of continuation of Ralston Avenue to connect with the bridge head of the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge. Mr. St. George brought out the fact that the new boulevard would reduce by four miles travel for a certain portion of the

county. Mr. Ray Kelley, city clerk, was authorized to write to all civic and social organizations asking endorsement of this project. City Attorney Albert Mansfield was instructed to draw up a resolution recommending the proposition to the county Board of Supervisors."

The only approach to the San Mateo Bridge was by Third Avenue in San Mateo, on the north side of Brewer's Island.

Mr. Therkeidsen owned more than 400 acres of Brewer's Island and had his dairy there. Each summer we could see his milk cows being pastured, and in the springtime we saw his hay. His retail

dairy outlet on O'Neill Street in Belmont sold his dairy products.

No doubt he wouldn't have looked very favorably on a new road running diagonally through his pasture. He would have had to put up new fences on each side to hold his livestock.

Still, efforts were being made to build the new road. Eventually however, the effort collapsed.

Everything was quiet along the Therkeidsen front until 30 years later, when a group decided to try again to get approval for the road to connect Ralston Avenue to the San Mateo Bridge. There

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**carlmont history** Continued from page 14

was much publicity about it in the newspapers, and the chamber of commerce held several committee meetings to promote the idea. I was a member of the committee in 1951.

Each of us on the committee believed it would help our area if the road was built. Then, one day, T. Jack Foster attended a meeting of the Belmont Chamber of Commerce, and he showed us his plans to develop Brewer's Island. He had started negotiations with Mr. Therkeidsen to purchase the property. His blueprints showed that he had an am-

bitious plan. When he told us that he would provide new housing for more than 60,000 people, and that he would build a town that would have modern architecture, planned streets, and a shopping area. None of us could visualize this. It all seemed so impossible.

Following Foster's description of what he had planned, we dropped all interest in a highway across Brewer's Island. We wanted to see the development. The construction went ahead just like he told us it would.

The project was named Foster City. It

is really a desirable place in which to live, and most houses and condominiums are sold when the construction is finished.

Several connecting roads extend from Highway 101 north of Belmont to the bridge. Time lost is very minimal.

Our city councils in San Carlos and Belmont sometimes find it advisable to turn down projects. Years later people understand the merit of their decisions. The road across Brewer's Island where Foster City has been built was a good example. It was never needed.

**Holy Trinity Women**

An ice cream social will be held at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, San Carlos, in the Parish Hall at Cedar and Manzanita Streets, on Aug. 17, from 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.

This social is sponsored by the church women and San Francisco Branch 8088 of the Lutheran Brotherhood. All proceeds, which the Lutheran Brotherhood will match to a maximum of \$250, will go to the Navajo Lutheran Mission at Rock Point, Arizona. The church women are presently sponsoring a young girl

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Commuter trains pass Belmont, going both north and south. Travel time by commuter train to either San Francisco or San Jose from San Carlos or Belmont is about 30 minutes. This is about the same length of time as driving an automobile. Travel time hasn't always been like this.

Before William C. Ralston died in 1875, the trip to San Francisco took several hours. Horses usually walk about three to five miles an hour, but if driven hurriedly they go about eight to 10 miles an hour.

Ralston used to race the trains with his carriages. He drove his teams so fast that at least two teams were necessary. Reports are that he changed horses at Colma. He often beat the early trains.

Probably a psychologist could understand the reason for Mr. Ralston's hurried trips. Being a very busy business man, it may be that his only recreation and pleasure was to whip up his horses and beat the trains. He must have had many such races, for the trains were here in 1863 and he didn't die until 1875.

Although the engines used steam, that wasn't anything to slow a train. Death Valley Scotty set a record that has never been broken when he hired a train to travel fast between Los Angeles and Chicago.

The railroad company saw to it that all other trains waited on sidings while Scotty's train raced past. The train he used was a steam train.

As late as 1920, the San Francisco to San Jose run required two hours. At that time the trains stopped often, for there

were several stations along the way. One was Mayfield, south of Palo Alto. Another was Bayshore City.

Passengers didn't mind the frequent stops, for the engineer was required to use the train whistle before and after stopping. The sound was thrilling, and always interesting to hear.

In Northern California, where the air was clear, the engine's steam whistle would sometimes be heard for 25 miles. This would happen when the air was clear and cold.

Belmont and San Carlos people didn't always use the train. If they could get to either San Mateo or Palo Alto they could catch the electric cars. It was fun to rid them, for they passed by places where the trains didn't go.

Those going south from Palo Alto went through prune orchards. The prune tree blossoms in springtime were pretty to see, and later in the summer, hundreds of students could be seen down on their knees, picking up fallen prunes and putting them into boxes.

They were paid 10 cents per box, and if they worked very hard, they could make \$2 per day. They were slowed down some by not placing any clods in the boxes. Prunes were never picked off the trees. They had more sugar if allowed to stay on the trees until they fell.

Transportation has come a long way since Ralston raced the trains. Actually, all our transportation is too slow, and BART is badly needed. Someday it may come to Belmont. We like to travel faster and faster.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

People in Belmont and San Carlos have enjoyed their summer vacations. This year many have been to Yosemite and Monterey. They might have missed seeing some exciting things.

For instance, in Yosemite, the elm trees are dying. They were not natives to the area, but seemed to have thrived until this year. Great piles of elm logs lie rotting in a meadow, and the ranger explained that no cure for the disease has been found. Of course, there are many other trees that are healthy and beautiful to look at.

Our people may have marveled at seeing the hang gliders sailing off Glacier Point in the early mornings. With a starting place above 3,000 feet, the people in the gliders must have had long rides down to the valley floor.

This summer the waterfalls are not flowing very much. The water is low, and the waterfalls aren't very spectacular.

The drive into the park takes two hours from Merced—four hours from Belmont. It hasn't always been like this. Many years ago, many visitors to Yosemite traveled by train. In making the drive now, our local people can see the route of the early trains.

Across the Merced River from the present highway is the well-graded narrow route of the narrow-gauge railway. The train didn't go entirely into the valley. Wagons and carriages met the train at the rail-head and took people into the valley. Many camped, and many stayed at Camp

Curry.

The early train rides were noisy and uncomfortable as the train followed the mountainous terrain north of the Merced River. Passengers were ready for a rest after they arrived.

San Carlos and Belmont people who have visited the Aquarium at Monterey would be interested in something that is written on a wall poster. It tells of a deep trench in the middle of Monterey Bay, caused, no doubt, by the Salinas River.

The river flows partly on the surface, and partially underground. It has really cut a trench and a half. Depth is measured as being more than 8,000 feet—more than a mile and a half.

If you sit on the porch at the Aquarium, some interesting conversations can be heard. One man, after reading about the deep trench, wondered whether Santa Cruz and Monterey might tip over into the trench if a big earthquake should occur.

Two men sitting on a porch at Camp Curry were looking up at the great granite cliffs.

One commented, "Sure would make a lot of tombstones."

"Darn it, Dutch," the other replied. "Granite ain't used to make tombstones. That's marble."

"Shucks," the other replied. "you sure got learnin'."

They didn't come from San Carlos or Belmont.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In Hawaii and Belmont, citizens enjoy swimming. Possibly they are in the water more than persons in other places. Belmont's early resident, William C. Ralston took his daily swim, but his swimming was near the foot of Van Ness Avenue, in the Bay.

A 16-foot high monument at the San Francisco Marina marks the location of his last swim. At his home in Belmont, he used a Turkish bath. There was no large swimming pool at his residence, although under his mansion there was a large cistern for water to be used if needed.

At the Reid School for Boys, predecessor to St. Joseph Military Academy, a large swimming pool was built on the west side of the Alameda. It was used a lot by students. By the 1950s, the pool needed considerable repairs, and as Belmont had no municipal pool, our city paid for improvements. Many citizens learned to swim there. An exhibition of swimming by local youths drew many people when work had been completed on the pool, and I was there.

There had been a swimming pool in back of the Belmont Country Club Clubhouse, (now the Congregational Church) but it was filled with gravel as a safety measure.

The Pennington family had a pool in back of their home on South Road, and one of their neighbors up the hill farther had a pool. Those were the only pools I can locate in Belmont in earlier times. Of course there are no others here now.

Eighty years ago many local people

swam in the Bay. An old clipping dated July 22, 1882 tells that Mrs. James Robinson of Redwood City had a bathing house of three commodious rooms constructed on what used to be Mr. Phelps's wharf. Also Mrs. Phelps had a small bath house and Horace Hawes planned to build one.

Ten years later, several Belmont persons joined hands and built some bath houses beside the Bay. They hoped their families would have sole proprietorship, but soon others started dressing in the little buildings. Door locks had to be placed on the doors. Following this, the bathers began using shanties that had been constructed by the Bay by San Francisco hunters for weekend pleasure.

The Morgan Oyster Co. raised oysters in the Bay near Belmont and had grapestake fences surrounding their oyster beds. They went out of business when the Bay became polluted. The swimmers began using their home bathtubs. Everyone missed what they had become accustomed to. But no one wanted to swim in pollution.

Thinking of this, Louis Barrett Jr. left Belmont and moved to Calistoga.

He found that there was instant hot water shooting from geysers. He established bathing and swimming facilities. Soon he was pleased to see again many of his old friends from Belmont and San Carlos. I am told that even to this day he keeps alive many old friendships. All because San Carlos and Belmont people learned very early to enjoy bathing.



## carlmont history

By Russ Estep

Many things keep changing here on the Peninsula. If we had been here in the early 1800s we would have seen things that are not here now. Ships that came into Half Moon Bay were sailing ships.

The first tombstone in the old graveyard at Half Moon Bay is dated 1820. The inscription is in Spanish. There are other grave markers in that old cemetery similarly marked with slightly later dates. Many inscriptions are also in Portuguese.

Sailors jumped ship, and many settled in Half Moon Bay. Old records indicate that some of these early sailor were experienced whalers. Whales traveled up the coastal waters then, just as they do now. There were hundreds of whales and Greenpeace hadn't started operating, so the work of the whalers went undisturbed.

Unlike modern whaling, the early

whalers hunted the whales in small boats. One man stood in the bow, ready with a whale gun to kill the animals. It was dangerous work.

Old records show the first whale station was established about 1861 at Half Moon Bay, and later moved to Pigeon Point.

The whales were dragged ashore, and several inches of hide were reduced to large pieces and cooked in huge iron kettles so as to render out the whale oil. It was used then for lamps, lubrication, and other things. When mineral oil started coming from Pennsylvania, our California coastal whaling began to decline. Mineral oil was cleaner and better.

When County Cipriani and William C. Ralston lived in Belmont, whaling was a major business over at the coast. It seemed probable that Ralston didn't see it as anything very profitable, for I find no record of him investing in whaling. He invested in many other things, however.

Old records show the final whaling at Pigeon Point ended in 1895, and the facility was closed down. At the date, the records show the whaling station was closed, a Captain Perry was in command of it. Since his name doesn't indicate either Spanish or Portuguese, it seems obvious that whalers of other nationalities worked at whaling in later years.

In early days there are records of the Russians whaling in frigid waters near Alaska. They still do it today, and they render out the fat by equipment aboard large ships. The barreled oil is then sent to Russia in other ships.

Greenpeace has helped reduce whaling. Even Russian whaling has declined.

Soon there may be no more whaling along the California coast and people from San Carlos and Belmont will continue to go to the coast and watch the whales' migration each spring and fall. It is very interesting to watch them. Those who have seen the whales have enjoyed the trip to the coast. It makes for a pleasant weekend day.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

West of the last house on Adelaide Drive in Belmont is an old pauper cemetery. Lately it is being vandalized. While few of the old graves had tombstones, many had redwood crosses, and many had white head markers with names on them.

People buried there were just like you and me, except some of them had bad luck and were without money. In some cases, no relatives could be found.

Some of the persons buried there came from San Mateo County's old folk's home west of Belmont. Timing is important, and some of the old folks may have been down on their luck and died at the lower part of life's cycle. At one time or another, some might have been prominent in their communities.

The cemetery is more than one hundred years old. It isn't easily seen. You might get out of your car, then walk a way to get to it. Dry grass is high this time of year, and you may not see the graves. But they are there. So far, nobody has moved any of them. There is no telling, though, what grave vandals might do.

Surely, there must be a group of church people, or other groups who might place signs "keep out" at the old cemetery? Maybe a group could watch now and then and if they see someone vandalizing a grave, they could chase them away. Many Americans seem uninterested in

genealogy. It could be the vandals have disturbed one of their own ancestors.

Here in California graves are sacred. Deceased people should be allowed to lie in their graves undisturbed. We respect the dead.

In some states, this isn't like it is in California. In New Orleans, the water level is shallow, and many deceased are left on top of the ground in caskets. Or if buried, the bodies are removed after a few years so the grave may be used again for someone else.

In Curacao, in the Dutch West Indies, grave space is rented and when rent hasn't been paid, bones are sometimes tossed into a gulch, and the grave area re-rented to someone else.

In Nome, the permafrost is just below the surface, so bodies are put into caskets and hauled out onto the tundra and left there.

Very few persons would vandalize a grave, yet there may be people who have been descended from the grave robbers of thousands of years ago whose genes have caused them to do what some distant ancestor did.

The old cemetery is just "over the fence" from Belmont's western city limits. Our police have no jurisdiction. We should hope that some organization will take over and see that the vandalism stops.

# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

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Following the Ralston and Sharon eras, Belmont's Ralston Mansion was occupied by a ladies' private school for two years until the owner died. Next it was occupied by Dr. Gardner who treated mental disorders.

He came here from Napa and was considered a good psychiatrist. After Gardner died, the place stood vacant until 1922 when the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a Belgian Order, moved there from San Jose.

From 1885 when Sharon died, until the College of Notre Dame came to Belmont, other local people became better known. Where Twin Pipes is located, the Janke picnic grounds were increasingly popular.

It isn't possible to name all the well-ed for him.

Annette Alexander helped Belmont greatly with generous donations to needy persons such as the Sea Scouts, to whom she gave \$1,000 when they wanted a small boat to compete in an event in San Diego.

She also gave \$1,000 to help two ladies buy gasoline to compete in the "Powder Puff Derby" in the year when 50 planes took off from the San Carlos Airport.

An insurance executive, Wallace Benson, was one of Belmont's mayors, and

known people in Belmont, but there were many. One was Alvin L. Penna who owned the Ralston Market on Ralston Ave. across from Bay View Federal.

Also there was Lloyd Malech, who owned a machine shop on Old County Road. Both he and Al Penna were past presidents of the chamber of commerce. Then we come to John G. Maste, jeweler on Ralston Ave. A man whom everyone knew.

Dr. Lee Gambitz, dentist, had his office in his house, and Dr. A. M. MacLeod was one of the town's optometrists.

Jim Lyall was police chief and always proud that he had been Jack Dempsey's sparring partner. A street has been nam-

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served several terms.

George Pyatt's vegetable stand on El Camino Real, south of Ralston Ave., was well patronized.

Although several well-known inventors lived at one time or another in Belmont, one of the most successful was George Tiegel who came here from Anchorage.

He invented a machine that could be used to assemble groups of storage batteries. Previously batteries had to be assembled singly, and soon George's

machines were exported all over the world.

Juel Christensen came down from San Francisco in the early 1940s and established Christensen Nursery. Later he built the post office. When he introduced himself at the local Lions Club he always commented that his business was growing.

Richard Weare replaced Harry Chamberlain as our fire chief.

Before Belmont had been built up much, I, being in real estate, kept 50 "for sale" signs on vacant lots. Embert Brown, who had started the Belmont Chamber of Commerce, was also in the

real estate business.

He had a great sense of humor and sometimes travelled around town at night placing his own signs six inches in front of my signs. Then, I had to follow him and move his signs to one side. When asked him about this, he commented "You always get the best spots."

Many other prominent people in Belmont came here believing the city had everything. One thing Belmont never had was a "Market Street." Many towns have named their main streets Market Street. Ours is Ralston Avenue.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Some people from Belmont and San Carlos marvel at the 2,000 year old Roman baths in England, and the Roman chariot wheel in the British Museum which is 2,000 years old. Or they may be tourists, new to the Peninsula area, and do not realize that the redwoods growing in California may be much older.

In fact, right here in Belmont are two Sequoia gigantea trees. The one in front of the Wells Fargo Bank as planted there by Mr. L. Barrett. He brought the tiny tree from the high Sierras, while he was forest supervisor for Northern California.

The other redwood in Belmont is located on the west side of El Camino Real, one and one half blocks south of Ralston Ave. It too, was put there by Barrett.

The two trees have been growing for about 70 years. In 4,000 years, both will likely be 25 feet, or more in diameter. They grow slowly, and their bark is thick. Termites and other bugs don't eat their wood. Houses built from redwood lumber last indefinitely. The first houses in Belmont were built with redwood lumber, some fastened together with square nails.

Redwood lumber is easily identified by its red appearance. To last so long, the redwood trees have had to fight for their existence.

The first people in America were Indians and the redwood trees carry the name of Sequoiyah—a Cherokee Chief.

It was he who wrote the Cherokee alphabet in 1821. He had been born about 1770, and died in 1843. His alphabet was quickly adopted and was us-

ed by the missionaries. In 1823, after he had written the alphabet, the Cherokee general council gave him a silver medal.

Chief Sequoia was a great man and naming of the redwood trees in his honor was a well-deserved award. Both he and the trees will be known by many future generations of Americans.

To view the giant Sequoia gigantea trees in a grove requires a four hour drive to Calaveras County. The large trees grow best in elevations from 2,000 to 4,000 feet. Take Highway 4 and keep going until you see the sign telling that you have arrived.

Of course, you can see redwood trees easier than this, but they aren't the same variety. Our coastal redwoods never achieve the large diameter, although in the Redwood grove near Felton, there are some trees more than 22 feet in diameter.

One large tree was burned out in the Center. General John C. Fremont, and 16 of explorers camped inside the tree near Felton on one of his trips of explorations.

There is another beautiful grove of redwoods, of the variety Sequoia sempervirens, in Marin County known as Muir Woods. They are being preserved there in the state park for viewing by future generations.

Students attending Sequoia High School must feel fortunate in being at a school that was named for Chief Sequoia. Chief Sequoia was an outstanding human being, and must have had an I.Q. which was extremely high. What he did was as remarkable as that done by Einstein and other geniuses during our era.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

An inquiry came to me asking the age of the old pink building at Ralston Avenue and Old County Road. After considerable research through my old records, I have found this report from the Redwood City Democrat, March 19, 1903:

"P. A. Roussel, the Belmont contractor, has begun building a store for W. A. Emmett at a cost of \$5,000. Mr. Emmett's rapidly increasing business calls for more room and that live merchant concluded that it would be the proper thing to replace the original store with a modern structure." This was the old pink building.

Emmett lived on the west side of the railroad tracks, on the south side of Ralston Avenue. His house is the two-story structure that is still there.

Emmett had been in business in Belmont for several years before having his new building constructed. Another old clipping from the Times Gazette of San Mateo dated Dec. 6, 1884 states that "Emmett and O'Neill have purchased from A. P. Johnson the store building they have occupied for the last three years." Probably Emmett was one of Belmont's oldest businessmen.

Then an article in the Redwood City Democrat dated Jan. 14, 1909 states:

"W. A. Emmett, the well-known Belmont merchant, has retired from business life and his store will be managed by the W. A. Emmett Comany, James H. Doolittle, president, and A. C. SMith, manager." But Emmett's retirement

west of Belmont called Crystal Springs when only 25 persons lived there.

At their insistence, a second election

didn't last long.

The old Redwood City Democrat dated Jan. 15, 1914 states: "Walter A. Emmett has purchased the merchandise business of F. A. Levy at Belmont, and has again taken charge of the store. Emmett established the business in 1887 and retired in 1909."

The location was at the heart of what was then Belmont. It was located across Ralston Avenue from the location of San Mateo County's first court house.

An old item in book 6, of the early deeds, at page 80 tells of land in Belmont being sold along the railroad tracks south of Ralson Ave. by A P. Molitor to Mrs. George M. Smith.

Then another article from the San Mateo County Gazette dated Oct. 13, 1866 states: "The building known as the Angelo House had been sold by Mr. Molitor to Mrs. Smith from San Francisco."

A later article dated Dec. 22, 1866 states, "The house of Mr. G. M. Smith, formerly known as The Angelo House, was destroyed by fire at half past two o'clock in the morning."

A new building was soon built to replace the first building.

The first building was where the first county seat meeting was held after San Francisco cut their county in half at Daly City. They left this area, as far south as San Franciscquito Creek, at the north of Palo Alto, and it became our county.

Some people of the time questioned how Belmont got the county seat. They said 250 votes came from a little village

was held and Redwood City had the most votes so the county seat had to be moved from Belmont.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In 1795 when the Arguello family owned 34,200 acres here, including Menlo Park, Atherton, Redwood City, San Carlos, Belmont, and a part of San Mateo, there was no need for a surveyor.

Corners were indicated by huge rocks, large trees or creeks. The same conditions prevailed when Mrs. Arguello deeded approximately 15 percent of her rancho to Sidney Mezes, her attorney, to prove her claim to the land grant before Congress.

However, when Mezes sold land to Count Cipriani, a survey was needed. Fortunately, Count Cipriani had a friend who could do the job. He was Alessandro Garbi. He was born in Florence March 11, 1828, and had accompanied Count Cipriani to this area.

Garbi surveyed the land for Sidney

Mezes, and became San Mateo County's first surveyor. He served from 1856 to 1859, then returned to Italy where he served as an officer from 1860 to 1861 in the Austro-Sardinian War.

Mezes' land included all of what was then Redwood City, which he named Mezesville, and much of what was then Belmont.

In 1864, Count Cipriani sold some of his Belmont holdings to William C. Ralston, and you may notice the south portion of the large Ralston Mansion as being a little different from the rest of the large house. It is said that portion was Count Cipriani's home that he had brought by ship around Cape Horn in pieces. Then he had the house assembled here in Belmont.

As land became more scarce, and people kept coming to this area, the larger acreages were broken up. More surveys were needed.

There have been many county surveyors, and one of them was Davenport Bromfield. He surveyed Hillsborough, and a street was named for

him. Bromfield owned his Hillsborough residence, but also owned some acreage on the west side of Skyline Boulevard which he willed to his children upon his death.

One was Mrs. Grace B. Haver and she inherited the Bromfield cabin. It was a

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two room cabin and restful to sit in and look out the low windows to see deer in the adjoining meadow. Mr. Bromfield told me it took him all day to drive his horse and buggy to the Kings Mountain property when he went there on weekends.

The vacant lots in Belmont were mostly laid out with a width of 50 feet, while many in San Carlos only had a width of 40 feet.

More and more surveys were required as land was subdivided into smaller parcels such as city lots. Some mistakes were made and it happened now and then that small builders discovered the houses they had started were across a neighbor's line. Then they had to undo their work and start again. Surveyors were in a hurry and had more work ahead than they could take care of.

When land is divided in small portions, the prices advance. One of my grandfathers said, "Anyone who pays more than \$5 for a building lot on the Peninsula would have holes in his head."

Apparently, he was accustomed to buying pasture land in Shasta County from the Big Four—Huntington, Hopkins, Crocker and Stanford, for \$4 per acre, the going price before World War I. People up there were accustomed to paying \$3 an acre, and there was much land available.

The Big Four heirs probably have disposed of all their Northern California land by now. They received it from the government as payment for building the first railroad to connect with the Union Pacific at Promontory, Utah.

Although Belmont and San Carlos people have understood that the men who built the first railroad across the country were wealthy, most haven't known that the Big Four were paid partly with land which they disposed of at the high price of \$4 an acre.

And people had to hire their own surveyor to locate the corners of what they had bought. Sometimes they found that what they thought they were buying was a gulch instead of a mountain.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Now that movies are common, and many people have their own home equipment for making movies—both sound and silent, they may find it interesting to learn that Belmont once competed with Hollywood. It happened during the 1920s.

At that time, movies were black and white. Color and sound hadn't been invented.

Movie theatres were always scouting for short comedy fill-in films. One series that was at the top of their list was the one produced in Belmont. When sound movies first came out, a country fellow in Northern California once commented to me that he went to town to see a movie and, "Would you believe it? The picture talked." Apparently he ran all the way home.

The Paul Gershwin Movie Co. made 10 comedies about Ma and Pa Tuttle. The movie site was Old County Road and Ralston Avenue. The movies were shown throughout California and were titled "Plum Center." The movie company obtained special permission from the Southern Pacific Company to change the name on the Belmont depot to Plum Center.

Belmont resident Bert Johnson recalls that the main character was Pop Tuttle and that a very heavy girl helped with comedy scenes.

Johnson says Pop Tuttle drove an old horse-drawn coach all over Belmont, finally arriving at the train station where other actors were playing horse shoes. In

later scenes, the movie company provided Pop with a Model "T" Ford. They had it converted a little and a coach body placed on it.

Johnson tells of a scene he watched where Pop got the Ford started, but he hadn't learned just how to stop it. When others in the movie company saw Pop having the trouble, they piled boxes in the road, then held a rope across the road.

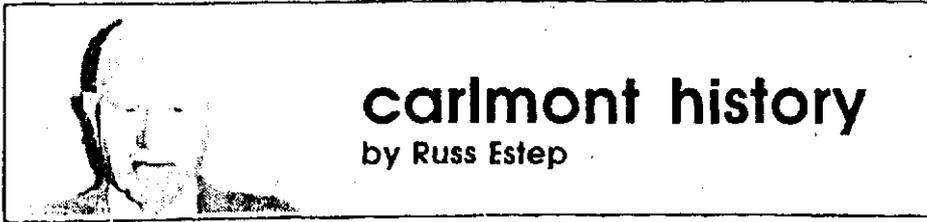
In the scene, Pop drove his Ford into the Hammerson blacksmith shop and on out the back door that had been sawed so that it splintered and looked like it had been struck at high speed.

Johnson says he was one of those holding the rope and that all were instructed to let go as the car hit it. Belmonters intended to hold onto it and stop the car. They were jerked ahead but no one was hurt. The car kept going.

In another scene, a block and tackle with a strong wire was attached to the front of the Ford. As it met the train, the fat girl stepped on the back step of the old automobile and the front of the Ford was lifted up so the girl could enter the train.

Of course the Ford had been lifted with the block and tackle, but in the finished movie, it appeared the girl's weight accomplished the impossible. The scene was funny.

The movies were shown first to people in Belmont then distributed to theatres. Belmont movies provided thousands of people many laughs throughout the country.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

We might think Belmont would be an unusual place for a mining and engineering school. However, in my stack of material about Belmont, there is an old copy of the Souvenir Magazine of San Mateo County.

In it is a half-page covering the Western School of Mines. It was located in Belmont and was operated by Professor John C. Jens.

The school appears to have been conducted at his home. Jens lived in a rather large house on the north side of Ralston Ave., at the intersection of South Road. An apartment house occupies the lot now. A photo shows a rocky entrance to the residence. The rocks are still there.

The school taught persons interested in mining how to place timbers in a mine and other details about mining. Following the gold rush in Alaska in 1898, there was much interest in mining and apparently Jens hit the jackpot in establishing the school.

Although we often saw pictures of miners squatting in the gravel with a gold pan beside a creek, there were others who dug into the hills. Wooden supports had to be split for logs to form rough timbers that would hold the roofs from caving in. Men without schooling, or knowledge of mining sometimes lost their lives.

The Jens family was popular in Belmont at the turn of the century. An old item from the Redwood City Democrat dated Oct. 8, 1908 tells of an engagement party that was held at the Jens' home. Forty guests attended and an announcement was given that Miss Anna Jens would soon be marrying Albert Hansen.

The newly married couple lived on the north side of Ralston Ave., near the end of Fifth Ave. The old clipping states that the marriage would unite two of the most substantial and hospitable families of Belmont.

Jens' students dug several tunnels into Belmont hills which are still there. Bert

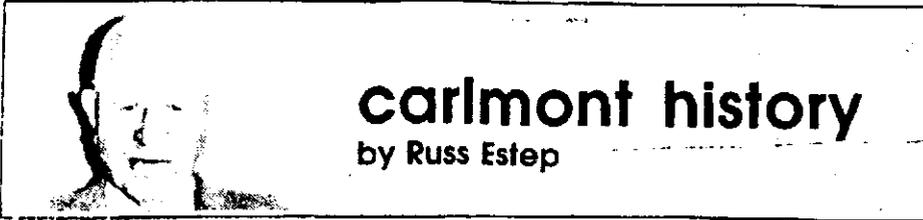
Johnson has told me about entering one tunnel when he was a small boy, after pulling the rusty old mine closure away with the help of other boys.

A picture in my files of the Jens' house shows it high upon the rocky lot. The description states that Mt. Hamilton and Mt. Diablo could be seen from the house, as well as much of the surrounding areas.

Getting to the house from Ralston Avenue was a chore. Visitors had to

climb steep stairs built from rocks.

In addition to a daughter, Jens had a son named Hiram Jens. He attended Sequoia High School for three-and-a-half years, then had to drop out because of his serious illness. He was buried at Cypress Lawn Cemetery, and Sequoia High School was closed at the time so many of the students could attend the funeral. He died in October 1910.



Senator Sharon, who took over the large Ralston home in Belmont in 1875, only lived there 10 years until his death. While he lived, he held some extravaganza parties. Some were very elegant. Many of us have been to dances, balls, shindigs and ordinary parties there. However, the two largest affairs held by Sharon topped anything most of us have attended. One was to entertain President U.S. Grant, and the other was when Sharon's daughter married Lord Hesketh.

In one old report, it mentions "Lord" Hesketh, and in another, he was referred to as "Sir." Probably the man Sharon's daughter married was really an English lord. I believe I saw a lord near the House of Lords in London once. A chauffeur was driving a Rolls Royce with a fellow in the back seat. He might or might not have been an English lord, but chances are that he was one. Probably he had a good head on him.

In the late 1800s, many Americans

were unrefined, and quite a few were uneducated. In fact, records indicate that Sharon himself wasn't up to standards as might have been expected. An old clipping states that once Sharon was in Europe to purchase some tapestries, and he wondered whether they should be hung or put on the floor to walk on.

On the same trip, he wanted to purchase some paintings. It was reported that he asked a local artist if he was an "old master." Sharon had remarked that he preferred to buy directly from the old masters.

With the help of Ralston, Sharon had become very wealthy. Records tell of him using bad language and often poor grammar. There are also indications that some early writers believed Sharon to be quite uncouth.

Other reports tell of his bad manners,

which makes me wonder if such a report came from English people he met while traveling. Many English people have different ways of holding the fork while eating. They hold the forks in their left hands, while most Americans use our forks in the right hand.

An article about one of Sharon's parties states, "In all the lower apartments, the splendor of the floral adornments was beyond that of any display of the kind which Belmont had seen."

When one extravaganza was over, President Grant was heard to comment that after enjoying the hospitalities of the kings of Europe and the Far East, he had no more princely entertainment than he had right here in Belmont.

Old records make it apparent that both Ralston and Sharon left their marks on Belmont. We are all glad they were here.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep



In past years, Belmont residents saw two very exciting events: a train wreck and removal of trees by the railroad tracks. These things happened before World War I.

For many years, the Spring Valley Water Co. had their large pumping station between El Camino Real and the railroad tracks at the north end of San Carlos. When Belmont's old-timer Bert Johnson was a boy, a freight train jumped the tracks just south of the pumping station.

The land there is lower than the tracks, and several freight cars rolled down the slope. Some broke open, according to Bert, and one car had been loaded with shoes.

At the time, many people were short of money, and it appeared at first that the wreck had brought manna from heaven. But the good feeling didn't last long for a railroad detective noticed what was being gathered up and demanded that everyone put the shoes in a pile.

Soon a large crane appeared and lifted the cars back onto the track, clearing up the wreckage. Nearly everyone in Belmont and San Carlos viewed the train

wreck.

The next excitement was removal of the large trees. Many were eucalyptus and some were oaks. Two brothers, George and Ed LaGarde cut the big trees and then split the large chunks into fire wood. It took them awhile for they used long cross-cut saws which they pulled by hand.

Some chunks, too large to be split with an ax, were dynamited. Johnson tells of the terrific noise when a large chunk of wood was blasted.

The Belmont school was situated on the east side of Old County Road, and the noise at times was so loud the students couldn't hear the teacher. The blasting was heard in San Carlos and San Mateo and everyone was glad when the work was finished.

Nowadays, the wood is split with pressure wood splitters by pushing a sharp wedge into the chunk of wood until it splits. All the effort required of the operator is to lift the block of wood onto the machine, then pull a lever.

This was a great invention, although some wood splitters learned how to swing the heavy four pound ax really hard and then twist it as it hit the wood. When I

was young, I split 20 cords of oak wood by hand.

The pretty trees along the railroad tracks are mostly gone now. It became necessary that they be removed because they were becoming so large that our

winter winds might have caused them to fall across the tracks.

Of course other interesting events have happened in Belmont, but removal of those trees beside the railroad tracks and the local train wreck were among those big events never to be forgotten.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

The service clubs in San Carlos and Belmont have various fund-raising projects to raise money to help their communities. Possibly the fund-raising project the Belmont Lions Club had on Sept. 20, 1975 was one of the largest, most costly, and produced less net money than any of the others. That was when the Belmont Lions Club held the "Worlds largest Pie Fight" at the Cow Palace.

The club arranged to rent the Cow Palace for one day for the sum of \$2,000 with the belief that their net would be several times the rental amount. But someone guessed wrong.

The club paid a deposit of \$700. to guarantee the Cow Palace would be left clean.

Movie-type pies were obtained from the pie shop at the north end of Belmont. These pies didn't stain clothing and were easily cleaned from contestants' clothing.

Each contestant paid an entrance fee of \$10. Many companies had their employees participating. For instance, Wells Fargo Bank threw pies at Crocker Bank employees. United Airlines threw at Pan American and Western, in addition to dozens of other similar entries.

Entrants were mostly in their bathing suits or wore very little clothing. All tossed five pies at their opponents.

The ones who threw the most pies and scored a hit in the shortest amount of time were declared winners. The Lions Club provided plaques and certificates for the winners.

The fights were held on the boxing platform that had been set up in the center of the Cow Palace.

At the conclusion of each fight, a clean-up crew scooped up the mess, preparing the arena for the next group of people. There were many viewers in the stands, and the pie fights were televised. Considerable publicity was in the newspapers as well.

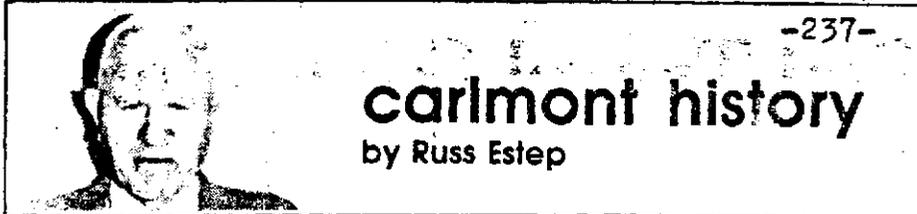
Following each contest, everyone was laughing. People sitting in the stands joined in the laughter and did a lot of applauding. It appeared that most people had chosen who they hoped would win.

When the fights were over and the Lions had cleaned up, a bill came from the Cow Palace for \$700. They had followed up and re-cleaned the place. After two cleanings, people remarked that they had never seen the Cow Place so clean. It really shined.

At the time, the Lions Club of Belmont was told that they held the world's record for pie fights. Since the big pie fight, the Belmont Club has held smaller fund

raising projects, and many lost money since the big effort in 1975.

glasses for people, including students, who cannot afford to buy glasses



Both Belmont and San Carlos have some older houses. For instance, one built in 1872 in San Carlos at 125 Dale is still standing, and the Ralston house in Belmont dates from 1854.

There are a few old houses left in Belmont, but some of the early ones burned and aren't here any more. It is good that both cities respect these older homes and list them as historic houses. They are old for our era in time.

When we travel to England, we see buildings a great deal older. For instance, we see the bathing buildings in Bath that were built by the Romans. We see Hadrian's Wall—yes, a portion is still standing. Then there is Westminster Abbey, a very old structure.

Then going ahead hundreds of years, we go to Alaska and see the town of Kotzebue, named for the Russian who founded it. And Sitka, where we see a city founded by the Russians, for a fishing village when they owned Alaska.

It was at Kotzebue where the missionary asked me to be one of the three judges for Miss Arctic Circle. There were five young Eskimo girls on the platform above the small crowd.

I told the missionary that I could see no difference: What could I judge? He replied to judge one-third on the applause, one-third on how well their

parkas were made, and one-third of what I thought of each girl. In a few minutes, two other men and I had reached a decision that was accompanied by much applause.

Another old house I have visited was the Paul Revere house in Boston. The house is well preserved and large enough to accommodate the many members of his family.

When I was down in Curacao, I saw some houses with dates of 1708 and similar old dates. They were preserved by the Dutch government who own the island.

It was at Curacao that there was a bridge across the channel that rested on floating sections. If a person had no shoes, he could walk across freely; but if he wore shoes, he had to pay two cents. The old bridge has been replaced by a new high bridge, yet the old bridge still remains and local people walk across it.

When in Cournaveca and also in Taxco in Mexico, I was in very old churches—one built in the 1500s. Both were well preserved.

While our American historic buildings and other structures are comparatively new, considering those elsewhere in the world, they are old to us. We should continue to preserve them for our future generations.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

At the turn of the century and earlier, Belmont and San Carlos people found it comfortable to take a Pullman car for long distance travel. Crossing the continent at that time required five days, and sleeping in a Pullman car made for an easier trip.

Most Pullman cars had single beds that folded into the train car ceiling and the visible portion was curved so that it was attractive when not in use.

A porter came through the cars when bedtime came, offering to make up the bed. It was on hinges above the setting area, attached to the car's side, near the top. At night, a curtain could be slid across the open part to insure privacy.

The heavy curtains were usually green in color and could be buttoned. You undressed on your bed and placed your clothing in the net hanging on the side.

The Pullman cars were sleeping cars and were used for long trips. You were quickly lulled to sleep by the clackety-clack made by the train wheels passing over track joints.

The Pullman cars were invented by Pullman, who made considerable money from his invention. Pullman's wife, Hattie Sanger Pullman, owned property in Belmont.

An old newspaper item states: "Sanger Pullman will move to Belmont this week, having purchased the quaint cottage of Hugh Hume, opposite Reid's School at the corner of Alameda and Ralston Avenue."

The Hume family was apparently well established, for an old auction advertisement tells of this auction and the treasures to be auctioned. The auction advertisement was in the May 31, 1902 newspaper.

The Pullman family had used the log cabin for a hunting lodge, after moving to the Large Hillsborough house.

The Pullman house in Hillsborough was built by Harriet Pullman Carolans and it was built of stone blocks and has 99 rooms. Later the property was known as "The Carolans," and more than 400 acres owned by Mrs. Carolans surround-

ed the house. The land has been subdivided, and smaller houses now occupy the acreage. Mrs. Carolans was Pullman's daughter.

The little log cabins that stood in the dense woods at the corner of Alameda and Ralston Ave. burned when a fire log rolled out onto the carpeting. Annette

Alexander owned the cabin at that time.

Although the Pullman cars were nice and comfortable to cross the country in, most of us prefer our present airplanes that make the trip in five hours. No sleeping facilities are needed anymore. Most people in Belmont and San Carlos would rather make the trip across the continent in five hours instead of five days.

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# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

During the Great Depression, many Belmont and San Carlos people could not find work. The era from 1929 until 1940 was very rough.

Most likely, young people today cannot imagine those years. Some persons in San Francisco and other large cities stood on street corners selling apples they had

pumping station at the south end of Belmont. Others went elsewhere to find employment.

various places such as Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Gilroy, King City, Monterey, Burlingame, and Bakersfield.

As for myself, I had to quit my job as radio officer aboard a ship running to South America, and had put in four hard years as a carpenter apprentice, then as a carpenter. I worked on all those buildings at Moffett Field that have tile roofs, and other projects.

While at Bakersfield, I might have become a millionaire. Others who worked for the oil company homesteaded in the desert east of Bakersfield, knowing as we all did, that oil drilling would soon start. Shortly those homesteaders had grocery money without worrying about getting it. They became wealthy almost overnight.

When that job was completed, I started with an oil company. I liked to work for them and enjoyed being transferred to

Prices during the great depression were

purchased from a nearby store. Other people, who were working, stepped up and paid double the usual price to help the poor folks.

Within towns and cities, groups held fund-raisers. In Belmont, the volunteer fireman held dances at the Belle Monte Country Club. They hired Art Weidner's three-piece orchestra, and sold tickets for \$1, plus 25-cents if you brought a lady. Their eighth such dance was held Sept.

lower than they are now. A loaf of bread cost 10-cents, a quart of milk 10-cents, and a lunch 25-cents. A good meal usually cost as much as 50-cents.

To get the telephone operator it took five cents. When I was transferred by the oil company, I was able to find good apartments for \$20 per month. Lesser ones for \$10 per month. Hotel rooms could be had for \$5 per night in most towns.

Finally, everyone seemed to be settled down into whatever conditions they could

21, 1935 in the middle of the Great Depression. At that dance, they charged \$1 per ticket, and didn't collect the 25-cents for the ladies. Let's hope they didn't lose money.

There were many men who couldn't find work anywhere. Those with steady jobs tried to hold onto them. A lucky few in Belmont worked at Notre Dame, one at the train depot, several at the water

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afford when World War II started. Everyone went to work, and prices soared. I changed to defense carpenter work, and was quickly made a foreman.

Then the war ended and I took the exams for contractor and real estate salesman. Passing both tests with high marks, I went into real estate and have been in it for 40 years. It is interesting, and I enjoy it. Each day is more interesting than the last. Belmont has been the world's best place to be.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Many San Carlos and Belmont people enjoy a drink at the start of a new year. Perhaps they want to drown out negative things that have happened to them during the year past. Or perhaps they think they want relaxation in starting the year ahead. It has always been like this in our towns.

An old clipping from the San Mateo County Gazette dated July 29, 1871 tells of the construction of a saloon in Bel-

mont. The old building appears to still be here in Belmont. From the description, it was the blue building adjacent to the pink "County Store" at Ralston and Old County Road.

The clipping reads, "A.N. Ranger, has just erected a new building near the railroad depot in Belmont and fitted it up in fine style for a saloon, and the establishment is to be opened this evening."

If the little building is really the first saloon, then we should include it with our local historic structures. Because the little building wasn't built of wood, it is well preserved.

With California's population increasing very fast over the years, it is interesting to read in old newspapers that on June 18, 1859 there were five schooners sailing from the port of Redwood City and that four had arrived.

Shipping to Belmont and to Redwood City increased over the years, just as it did in San Francisco. Some of us recall that in 1930 there were 25 ships sailing from San Francisco, and the same number arriving every day.

There were some accidents during the

bay shipping, and one in particular was so unusual that it was almost amusing.

The old article is dated Sept. 1, 1859, and tells that: "William Clark, one of the best known men in San Mateo County, was injured while inspecting a boat which is in the process of construction. While walking on the upper deck he fell through a hole, striking first the chin and then the back of his head in his downward flight and landing on the top of his head. It was first supposed that he was killed. His injuries, however, proved to be slight."

The men, in those days, were tough. Some were heavy drinkers. Those coming in by schooners needed to make up time for the weeks away.



When a young couple, accompanied by their nine-year-old son, stopped at my office, I hadn't expected the question the boy asked.

His father said they had flown out from Connecticut to Los Angeles, and had driven a rental car north to Belmont. He needed help in finding a rental house, but first his boy had a question. I nodded toward the boy and told him to go ahead.

The boy said that they had traveled north on the El Camino Real and he had seen bells at many of the towns along the way. He wanted to know if the bells were to warn of earthquakes. So I had to explain.

I told the young boy that the bells were there to mark the route of the padres—those men who did so much for development of early California. Those padres established 21 missions. They extend from San Diego to Sonoma. Father Junipero Serra came to California from Spain in 1769 and established several of the missions himself.

The State Federation of Women's Clubs held a meeting in 1902 in Los Angeles, and at that meeting, discussion came up about a project to place bells along El Camino Real to permanently mark its location. The Native Daughters of the Golden West heard of the project and voted to join that same year.

In 1904, delegates from the California History and Landmarks Division of the State Federation of Women's Clubs met with other civic and historical association

in Santa Barbara and, led by Mrs. S.S.C. Forbes, voted the the pathway of the padres be marked. But with what? A contest was held and the idea of small mission bells received the most votes.

Since Mrs. Forbes had been chairman of the first group of women, she created the post design, and her name was on the first bells. Those first bells weighed over 200 pounds, and were made of brass. Mr. Forbes, with the help of another man, a team of horses and a wagon, erected most of the first bells by his own labor.

When first installed, all bells were made from brass. Each was mounted 11 feet off the ground, and the standards were of concrete.

Almost as soon as the bells had been placed, vandals started stealing them. The first bells cost \$25 each. Replacements were of aluminum and the bells no longer have a ringing sound. Consequently few are stolen.

Dedication of the first mission-type bell was held in Los Angeles Aug. 15, 1906.

Belmont has had two bells, and the San Carlos has one. Mrs. Juanita Doyle of the Women's Club helped to get Belmont's bells replaced when they had been stolen.

The little boy who had inquired about the El Camino Real bells grew up in Belmont, married, then moved to Washington state. I heard that he didn't want to live here because we had no way to let him know when an earthquake was coming. He was evidently afraid of our occasional earthquakes. Now he teaches history.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Although the Western School of Mining, operated by Prof. John C. Jens, taught mining, the students never found gold.

They dug some holes throughout Belmont's hills and found nothing, but they did learn how to place timber in a mine tunnel. Gold was here in Belmont, but no one knew where to look.

There were other mysteries in Belmont that were never solved. One other one was the little lost girl. During a picnic in Belmont Park in the 1800s, little Annie Rooney let go of her mother's hand and was never seen again. Searchers tried for three days to find her, probing several water wells within the park, and beating the bushes all over the nearby hillside, all

to no avail. Following the search, they concluded that the little five-year-old must have been kidnapped. She was never found.

Another mystery was brought about by a character named Charles Mortimer, alias Flynn. Charley came to Belmont the same year William C. Ralston arrived. The year was 1864. Charley robbed a large San Francisco home, gathering up many thousands of dollars in addition to silverware and valuable collectables. Many were of solid gold. Charley buried his loot in Belmont near a farmhouse.

Later, Charley was arrested in San

Francisco. Before his trial, he agreed to accompany a police officer to Belmont to show him where his loot was buried. They brought along a pick and shovel.

Charley went straight to the hidden loot and both men began to dig. Charley explained that it was down about two feet. The police officer was armed, and as he dug his pistol slipped from its holster. Quickly, Charley seized it.

After Charley had beaten the officer almost to death with the pistol butt, he cut the officer's throat as he lay on the ground. Charley thought the officer was

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dead, but he didn't take the time to thoroughly examine him.

Then Charley fled northward, and shortly after, the policeman was able to crawl to a nearby farmhouse. A posse was formed and the search began.

However, they didn't catch Charley. He had a head start and had likely reached Colma by the time the posse started their local search.

Charley managed to get across the bay, then slipped up to Sacramento. It was at Sacramento where Charley killed a

prostitute.

He was hung, and never did get back to Belmont to pick up his loot. Belmont was very small at that time—mainly situated at Ralston Ave. and Old County Rd. There were farms near there. Probably someone later on found a rusty pick and shovel, but never dreamed a fortune lay under ground nearby.

The gold coins, silver and gold collectables, and other loot are likely still within Belmont somewhere near the center of town.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

The shoreline east of Belmont and San Carlos hasn't always been like it is now. It used to be considerably different.

The Bay extended farther west until after World War II, almost up to the Bayshore highway. However, parts of the Bay marshes had already been filed and there were three ranches out there. They were the Balkie, Belatti and Edsburg places.

These ranchers raised cattle and hay to feed them when grass was short. Sometimes a crop was extra good and they hauled the surplus to the Belmont train depot and shipped it to stockyards in San Francisco at Third Street. Butcher-town used to be there, and the smell used to keep traffic light on Third Street.

The last of the bayside farmers was Joe Belotti. He finally sold out and then bought property nearer to town. The Christensen Nursery and the old red buildings were bought by Joe. Joe and his wife lived in the old red building for several years, then his wife died. After a few years, Joe remarried and then he sold some of his land to Juel Christensen for a nursery.

The view of the bay from Belmont didn't used to be as good as it is now. There was a large hill between the present Bayshore highway and the railroad track. Some folks called it Newhall's Hill, while others called it "Redrock Hill."

A Japanese family raised flowers on its north end, while on its south end lived a family in a large house. At least one large oak tree was on the east side of the hill and it could be seen from the Bayshore highway.

All the redrock from the large hill was used for fill when the Bayshore highway was widened. Quarry Road received its

name because it was the route taken by trucks hauling the dirt. Quarry Road's eastern end terminated at the base of Redrock Hill, or Newhall, whichever you prefer.

Although Belmont people were without a swimming pool, many congregated at the edge of the bay to swim on holidays or weekends. At least one family built a bathhouse where clothes could be changed.

It was understood they paid \$5 per year rent for the land, and built their own building. They left the door unlocked and many other people also used the facility.

For many years, before Marine World, Africa U.S.A. came to the Belmont area our garbage dump occupied that site. Garbage brought sea gulls, and the birds came by the hundred. All kinds of garbage was placed at the dump, but no cancer problems ever seemed to develop.

For many years, a few people from San Francisco owned small shacks down near the Bay where they came on weekends to hunt ducks. Board walks, above high tide, connected the little houses. the houses were mostly built up on stilts so they were dry. Toilets were outside and were flushed during each tide change.

Far down at the Bay's edge was a high power radio station, KGEI. It is still there, and blankets China and South America with its broadcasts.

No, things aren't as they used to be. Redwood Shores is mostly built on land-fill. Actually, most Belmonters would rather look at the bay and see houses, than to see the old muddy marshland. The houses seem cleaner, and make us think our area is keeping up with other cities in San Mateo County.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Interesting things happened to prominent Belmont people more than a century ago.

For instance, Senator William Sharon of Belmont had some legal problems before he died. He may have had it coming after what he did to William Ralston. He did not allow Ralston even 24 hours to replace Ralston's shortage of funds in the Bank of California. Sharon was one of the bank directors.

Sharon told Ralston to replace the shortage immediately or else sign everything he owned over to him and he would replace the \$4 million. Ralston begged and pleaded to no avail.

### From Preceding Page

wealthy man, a young woman named Gertie Deitz sued Sharon for adultery. Everyone wondered how this could be since Sharon was a widower. Her case died in the courts, mainly because another beautiful young woman named Sarah Aletha Hill claimed that she had married Sharon secretly on August 25, 1880.

She met Sharon in Redwood City, and

Sharon had Ralston in a corner. He took over the large Ralston home, Palace Hotel, California Theatre, Ralston's farm at Modesto, the woolen mills, the dry dock at Hunter's Point, and all of the furniture and money Ralston had. Ralston helped thousands of people, and many were sympathetic about his problems.

Sharon's wife had died, and he had been alone for many years. With the publicity about his take-over, there were people who hoped to benefit from his increased wealth.

Knowing that Sharon was a very  
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ne offered to help her. He told her that he could help her with her financial interests. Sharon later called on her at her residence in San Francisco at the Baldwin Hotel. She claimed in court that he had offered to buy her a good riding horse, give her \$1,000 per month for life, and many other things if she would become his wife.

She explained to Sharon that she was a young woman, many years his junior,

Sharon was angry and tried to have his agreement with Sarah set aside. The trial was in Los Angeles.

Then a federal circuit court, presided over by Judge Stephen Field decided the marriage was illegal and void.

All parties, including Judge Field boarded the train for San Francisco.

There weren't any dining cars then, so when the train stopped at Lathrop, the

passengers left the train for a short while to eat at a lunch room beside the tracks. Former Judge Terry walked over to Judge Field and punched him twice in the face. A deputy nearby pulled out his pistol and tried to stop the fight. He accidentally killed Judge Terry.

"Following the death of Judge Terry, it was learned that Sarah had secretly married him several years before. No one had even suspected this.

was well established, and didn't need his help. Still Sharon persisted.

Finally, Sarah gave in and Sharon prepared a marriage agreement. Both signed it. According to old records, they lived together for about 16 months, and then Sharon became ill. He didn't think he would recover.

While he was sick, he came to the conclusion that he must get the marriage agreement back. Sarah refused to pro-

duce it, saying she couldn't locate it.

Sharon had recovered enough by then, and he got up from his sick bed and grabbed Sarah. He choked her, then put her in a bedroom closet and left her there, believing she was dead. She recovered and sued Sharon. Sarah hired several attorneys; one being former Judge David Terry, who had shot Senator Broderick in the 1856 duel in Daly City.

*See Next Page*



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In the early 20th century there were only three houses in the Sunnyslope area of Belmont. People living there were the Bulwares, Johnsons, and Lermons. The Bert Johnson's house was down the hill a little and it became the Villa Chartier restaurant when Chartier first decided to

open a restaurant.

They served food on the front porch and my family enjoyed dinners there several times. Later, the Chartiers moved to San Mateo.

It is hard to imagine all the bare hills as they were then. There wasn't much

developed in the area until later when Bayview Heights Corp. came to Belmont. They built a few homes between 1924 and 1927. All their homes had tile roofs, and 1,200 square feet of floor area. This was the only part of Belmont that was restricted for many years.

Bert Johnson was a young boy early in the 20th century and he tells about coyotes howling at night, and often trying to catch his family's chickens.

He says most families living in early Belmont had chickens and some had cows. The Vannier family raised Wyandotte chickens. Mr. Vannier shipped hatching eggs to many Eastern markets.

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Pulgas.

Level lots were in great demand, and usually were available for approximately \$1,200. Sloping lots were plentiful and were priced about \$800 if they had utilities. If there were no utilities, many could be found for as low as \$600, and if sloping greatly some were available for \$100.

Jim Conelly owned many lots in west Belmont, which he sold at a comfortable profit. He and his wife, Geraldine, lived at the north end of Bishop Road, north of Ralston Avenue.

With the coming of the F.H.A. loans, it was possible for people to buy a house with only 10 percent down payment. Prices were less, and good three bedroom houses were on the market for \$4,000 to \$5,000. Interest rates were four percent for veterans, and six percent for other buyers. After World War II, home construction boomed in Belmont. Houses were sold as soon as they were finished.

The hills of Belmont were soon covered, and the Belle Monte Country Club Golf Course disappeared under new construction. It was located north of Ralston Avenue, east of Alameda de las

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A builder soon constructed the Homeview houses, east of the tracks; then Andy Oddsted built Sterling Downs. Homeview had foundations, and three bedrooms, with alternate houses having an upstairs bedroom. Oddsted built slab houses with three bedrooms and a two-car garage. All were marketed almost as fast as constructed.

There aren't many vacant lots left in Belmont. No doubt early settlers here such as Cipriani, Ralston, Mezes and Sharon, would be surprised to see what is here now. And Belmont will continue to grow.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

We often hear about football teams and the competition they get into. Before World War I, there were young boys in Belmont who played football against other teams, and our boys usually won.

Old Timer Bert Johnson tells that at one time, the area east of the railroad tracks was called "Tin Can Alley" because the city dump was at the east end of Ralston Avenue.

The area from Ralston to O'Neill was called "Tar Flat" because, while the county was keeping up the roads in Belmont before incorporation, Belmont's streets were paved with tar. Johnson said two football teams were formed—the Hot Dogs in Tin Can Alley and the Buckeyes in Tar Flat.

He said neither side could afford a football. Instead, they rolled up a gunney sack real tight and used that for their game.

As time passed, boys from other parts of town and from Beresford joined the competition. The gunney sack footballs were easy to pass, but not so good for kicking. They were held together with baling wire.

With the addition of the new boys, there were enough players to field two complete football teams. Johnson said they played in vacant fields and there were many of those.

Finally, the boys decided to combine and form a new and stronger team. They called this new team "The Comets."

As the Belmont youngsters began to grow up, they held dances in Belmont's

only school, where a Safeway store is now located. Soon the boys had acquired enough money to buy a football.

Next, they played San Carlos, Redwood City, and San Mateo. Belmont's boys usually won, but they wished they had uniforms.

The Gershwin Movie Company came to Belmont to make movies. Most of the Belmont Comets helped the movie men set up their scenes and some played as extras.

The movies were made mostly on Old County Road which was then the El Camino Real. They were made usually at the intersection of Ralston Avenue. The movies were shorts, and used for fill-ins from coast to coast. All were comedies, featuring Ma and Pa Tuttle. (Not Ma and Pa Kettle; their movies came much later.)

The Belmont movies were shown at the Belmont school and the Belmont Comets arranged with the movie makers to charge 10 cents for tickets. The Comets were soon financially able to purchase uniforms. They purchased them through Sequoia High School, so they got a good discount. This really helped.

The Belmont Comets finally had excellent players, and their uniforms made them look very professional. They continued to play many other teams and in tournaments. Other people in Belmont often bragged that the Belmont Comets were the best team in the country. People here thought they just had to be. The boys came from Belmont.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont's William C. Ralston and Senator Sharon had large interests in the Comstock silver mine at Virginia City, Nevada. Incomes for each were tremendously high.

Some people said they earned \$40,000 each week while other old statements put the incomes from the mine at \$100,000 per week. Everything looked rosy for many years. Neither had to sweat to provide the necessities of life.

It seems true that where there is a positive, there is always a negative. Something adverse comes up. With the Comstock mine, it was hot water. As miners dug deep into the earth, they began to perspire more. Warm water came up over their boots.

Then the water became still warmer, then it became hot. Steam began filling the shafts. Miners could only work at 15 minute intervals. Some became ill, and others died. But the work continued.

Both Sharon and Ralston pondered what to do. The ore had been coming to the surface with less and less silver, but they both believed the rich veins were still there.

Adolph Sutro, an engineer claiming that he could see a way to drain the hot water from the mine shafts offered his services. All well and good, but he said he wouldn't drain the water unless he received \$2 for each ton of ore that was taken from the hot water shafts afterwards. Although Ralston and Sutro thought this too much money, they finally agreed to pay it.

Sutro began making his plans, and engineered the project for a tunnel from the base of Mt. Davidson into the

Washoe Valley. His tunnel, designed to intercept with the lowest shaft that had been dug by the Ralston and Sharon miners, should easily carry out the hot water to allow the miners to work.

Sutro's tunnel was finished on July 8, 1878. His workmen had blasted, and the hole opened up a view of the shaft from the Savage Mine above. The Savage was one of several shafts comprising the Comstock area.

The men could work again and soon uncovered rich ore. The miners were kept below where better food, soft mattresses, costly wines and dry blankets were lowered down to them. This continued for two weeks until more stock could be bought cheaply by Sharon.

The mine owners wished to keep the secret about what had been uncovered. The miners were happy with the better living conditions and welcomed a respite from the way they had been required to work.

Sutro was soon able to pay off his debts. he sold his Virginia City mining interests for \$2 million and moved to San Francisco. He was elected mayor and tried to clean up the city. He had workmen build him a large house above the Cliff House.

Later, his home burned. The city placed a concrete facing on the cliff surface so rocks wouldn't tumble down onto the road below. People soon forgot where the Sutro remains were. Historians wondered, but couldn't find them.

Finally, some of the concrete facing on the vertical cliff came loose and fell off, exposing an urn containing ashes. It is believed these were the remains of Sutro.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

The beginning and growth of Belmont came very naturally. The town's name had been given by William C. Ralston to his Belmont home, and the railroad used the name for its depot. People knew where to get off the trains when they attended picnics in the Janke Picnic Grounds, now Twin Pines Park.

An early Belmont map shows a settlement at the corner of Old County Road and Ralston Avenue. Later, a subdivision was surveyed west of the tracks. But there were very few people.

They Bay View Heights Corporation tried to promote Bay View Heights west of the railroad tracks, at the south end of Belmont. They built a few houses, which are easily recognized with their red tile roofs.

Their activities were between the years 1924 to 1927. Daniel St. George was in charge of sales for the company.

Almost as soon as they started the Belmont Country Club, promoters hopped in and started selling lots further out. These men—Miller, Monroe and Lyon—had bulldozers working putting in narrow streets.

They built a country club building

(now used for the Congregational Church) and then hired the Union Paving Company to pave a few streets. They were unable to pay the paving company, who had placed liens on many Belmont lots as late as 1950. As lots were later sold, the buyers or sellers cleared the titles.

The developers named streets for themselves. They had people bused here from San Francisco, gave them free lunches, then drove them around the hills. Many bought, believing a fast profit would be coming, but not enough lots were sold to keep the developers from going bankrupt.

Their pretty nine-hole golf course on the flat ground was soon dried up and brown.

Later, the Swift family allowed some of their land on the west side of El Camino at the north end of Belmont to be subdivided. Ruth and Anita Avenues were named for Swift's daughters.

After World War II, the little Belmont airport north of Ralston Avenue, and east of Old County Road was closed, and the army barracks that had been built around it and along Ralston Avenue were

removed.

Soon, a subdivision known as Home View was developed south of Ralston Avenue. Then, Andy Oddstead subdivided the area north of Ralston, east of Old County Road.

Another builder later constructed condominiums along old County Road, north of Ralston, and called the street Crestview. While his subdivision was on flat ground, he still sold the condominiums quickly. Buyers could, at least, see the hills.

Belmont's name came early and no one had to search to decide upon a name as one developer had to do when he developed a town east of Los Angeles.

Being in a hurry, and unable to think of a name, he decided to call the place Azusa, explaining that his development had everything, from A to Z in the U.S.A.

Some people claim the place does come close. People moving up here from down there say "Baloney." Then they add, "We like Belmont better."



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Now and then a coincidence will occur which will surprise me. One that happened to me in 1927 is worthy of recalling because it concerns early Belmont people.

I was radio officer aboard a ship and we had engine trouble. Five blades were stripped off a turbine while we crossed the Caribbean. We waited five days at Balboa while repairs were made.

A large passenger ship came into the harbor and docked near our ship. Radio officers like to see what kind of equipment other ships have, so I rushed over to visit the large ship's radio officer. During our visit he commented that he had just finished reading a good book and wanted to give it to me.

The title of the book was "Cockades." Published in 1927 by G.P. Putnam's Sons, it was the 11th book written by Meade Minnigerode.

Now, 60 years later, I have just learned that Minnigerode was married to William C. Ralston's granddaughter. I read the book as our ship plowed northward. I stood my watch with earphones on, and as code from other ships was coming in. Usually, static is real bad down near the Panama Canal, but the book was so well written that I found I could concentrate on it, and still understand the code I was hearing.

Many people have wondered whatever became of Ralston's descendants. An un-

cle of Mrs. Minnigerode committed suicide over in Oakland. There was another son, I haven't uncovered where he lived after he left Belmont. He went to Oakland with his mother after the family had lived in the "gardener's cottage" at Carlmont for about two years.

People might think the "gardener's cottage" was a tiny place. Actually, a picture I have shows the building to be an elegant, large dwelling.

Almost like a castle, the house burned many years ago. It used to be across the football field, south of where the Bank of America now is, and situated near the tree covered hill.

Alameda de las Pulgas formerly ran south around the present shopping center, then returned to its present location near where the mortuary is.

In 1978, Ralston's granddaughter visited the large Ralston house in Belmont. She must have been impressed, for her husband, Meade Minnigerode, had been a very successful author and had many books published.

Yet an author's income likely could never compare to that of persons owning shares in the Comstock Lode in Nevada when silver was coming out of it in great quantities. Mrs. Minnigerode's grandfather, William C. Ralston, had been a very wealthy man.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

A man who lives in Belmont's Sterling Downs between the El Cmino Real and Bayshore Highway called me, asking who built all those houses. Because most were built from one blueprint plan, he thought the builder must have been a big builder.

He was correct, for the builder was Andy Oddsted, who built homes by the dozens in Belmont. Some of those in Sterling Downs were built on Bemont's early airport. In about 1943, I flew out of that little airport. It was convenient to get to.

Most of the Oddsted homes had concrete floors, and at first the selling price was about \$9,200 for three bedrooms, one bath, and a two-car garage. It was a good buy for the first asking price.

As work progressed, the price rose to \$13,500, for the last homes.

Oddsted also built dozens of homes where the hayfield used to be on the hilltop of Chula Vista Avenue. The streets were named by Oddsted. Those

homes were larger, with concrete foundations and hardwood floors.

When Andy died, I was in Bakersfield attending a Lions California-Nevada Convention. I am not sure of the year, but I think it was 1956. During the time when I was there in January, the fog in Bakersfield was thick at night. You could hardly see across Chester Avenue.

When listening to local news there, I learned of Andy's death. The radio announcement stated that Oddsted had been driving south on the freeway in dense fog when some farm laborers drove into the southbound lanes and hit his car head on. Andy and several laborers were killed.

Oddsted had been traveling to Bakersfield that foggy night in January to speak at a convention being held by the "Muscle Builders."

Oddsted also built dozens of homes in Redwood City, north of Woodside Road, and east of the Alameda. They all had

concrete foundations and hardwood floors. Their selling price was more than those in Sterling Down.

With inflation continuing as it has, the Sterling Downs houses are re-selling for \$150,000, up to \$160,000. Many buyers are glad to find any housing as low priced as \$150,000 because prices in areas other than Sterling Downs are higher.

Although Oddsted died many years

ago, we in Belmont should never forget what he did for Belmont.

The one possible negative thing he did was to build over the little Belmont airport. But we needed housing more than the airport, so we must be grateful that Andy Oddsted spent some of his life in our locality. The housing he provided was needed and appreciated.



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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Cities, like everything else, usually start as a small unit. Of course, some subdividers lay out large subdivisions, and create larger cities. But this didn't happen when our cities were starting.

For instance, the first inkling of Belmont came when Charles Angelo built his roadhouse. Angelo didn't know what would follow the small beginning, for later it was discovered that his little hotel was right in the middle of what later became Ralston Avenue. The date was 1850, many years before the railroad was built through Belmont.

As towns grow, they often incorporate smaller surrounding towns, like Palo Alto has done with Mayfield. Los Angeles is a good example. In England, we find railroad stations within London, where small towns were hundreds of years ago.

In Belmont, we are accustomed to seeing modern buildings replacing older ones. One must wonder what London would look like if their old buildings were replaced with modern architecture.

American tourists would like it. Londoners would be horrified. Bombed out buildings of World War II were replaced exactly as they had been. The fronts are made to look old. You can't tell which buildings had been bombed.

In America, the many ghost towns that

exist are good examples, such as Bodie, Nevada. Mining played out, so there was no reason for anybody to stay. Buzzard Roost in Shasta County disappeared in a forest fire in 1933, and everyone left the area. The town was never rebuilt.

Throughout the West, hundreds of towns no longer exist. Miners prospected for gold, and when it played out, there was no economic base for people to exist on.

In Shasta County, the U.S. Geological Survey Maps show the name of my father in the Millville section. Estep is still on the government maps. The ranch was a favorite stopping place for thousands of travelers.

In 1922, the main highway was changed and the new road bypassed my family's property. A road change had caused a possible settlement to die.

We are fortunate that Belmont has grown into a city and that its citizens can travel so easily both north and south to their work places.

Belmont's growth has been continuous, at first from well-to-do residents, and later as a bedroom community. We are glad that Belmont's growth has continued, and has moved forward. This will continue.