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Belmont History*

Vol. 7  
CARLMONT HISTORY  
History of Belmont  
By  
Russel A. Estep  
1988-1989

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When showing Belmont houses to prospective customers realtors often hear, "I don't think this one is well built. Let's look at some more."

Many customers from other areas do not realize that Belmont has had a building department for many years, and structures seldom vary in their construction.

Two nails are required on each side of the studs. The studs must be 16" apart, center to center. The ceiling joists must be spaced the same, and rafters must be two feet apart, center to center. The concrete foundation must be poured around the perimeter of the building, and be at least eight inches above the ground. There are many other building specifications, but no room here to list them all.

Builders follow the specifications religiously. Belmont never went through the construction variations found in other places in the country. A first house, built for Count Cipriani, was a frame house, with double walls.

In pioneer areas of California the early residents didn't find lumber sufficiently available, and often with winter approaching, they threw together board and batten shelters. The boards were one by twelves, and battens usually one by fours. Roofs were shake, but not the kind you see today.

Some early settlers needed money to buy necessities for living, and making shakes was a more or less easy way to get

immediate money. They found a ready market. They split the wood until their shakes were only three-eighths to one-quarter inch thick. Such roofs usually lasted about 10 years.

Many early houses were built upon rocks, and had no concrete foundations. Some are still standing. You will find them in the California foothills, in early towns.

Settlers in Belmont never had to live in houses such as those built in the Midwest, dug into a hillside with an adobe front and often no windows. But these houses allowed many people to stay long enough to prove up on their homesteads, then sell out and move farther west.

Sawmills began operating in the Woodside area as early as 1850, and very soon the redwood lumber was available. One old report tells that there were no less than 11 sawmills going at once in 1850. By that year they found many customers.

Belmont houses vary greatly in architecture. Some slope upward with many steps, and others built on downslope lots have many steps going down to the front door. Some have a view and some do not. Their are both large and small lots, and some have more amenities than others. The construction remains the same, but buyers pick out what they want. They can find great variations in Belmont. But most homes are well built.

**Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian,**



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Many kinds of businesses have existed in Belmont since our city started. One not known today was operated by a Chinese man who sold shrimp.

The man rowed out in the Bay each morning and gathered shrimp. Then he went home and cooked them, placed them in small bags, and drove his horse and buggy around town selling the little bags for 5 or 10 cents each.

At his home he operated a laundry. Between shrimp and the laundry, he made a living. Of course everyone had a small vegetable garden and wives canned things for the winter. There was no electricity at that time, and no deep freeze facilities.

Many people in Belmont raised flowers and some people claimed Belmont was the flower capital of the state. The flowers were shipped to the East Coast markets by trains.

Some people in this area operated dairies, and two were well patronized. One was at the Hull ranch and the other at the north end of Belmont.

The dairymen would come along in their spring wagons in the morning and pour out whatever amount your family needed into your containers. Milk was sold in bulk and was unpasteurized. Nobody became sick, but perhaps that was because there were so few people.

A blacksmith shop was on Old County Road, south of Ralston Avenue. Mr. Hammerson was the town's blacksmith. People went there to have new metal tires installed on their wagon wheels, and to

have horses shod. Previously Mr. Hammerson had been blacksmith for William Ralston, and later for his successor, Mr. Sharon.

The Vannier family raised prize chickens and sold eggs in many states. Prices for their eggs were considerably higher than "eating" eggs. Mr. Vannier won awards at fairs in both state and county events.

Before automobiles came to the Peninsula, a stage line operated from Belmont to Half Moon Bay. It was horse drawn and made the trip in several hours. The line folded when automobiles became more plentiful.

The trains that ran down the coast from San Francisco to Half Moon Bay and Pescadero took some of the business away from the early stage line. The trains were operated by the Ocean Shore Railway Company.

As automobiles started to be used, a repair shop was needed. One was started and operated for many years on the west side of El Camino Real, a few blocks south of Ralston Avenue.

In the 1920s a small airfield was established between the railroad tracks and the Bay. It carried people for sightseeing rides, and the operators gave flying lessons. Their strip ran east and west and was unpaved. I flew out of it and enjoyed the view below of the Belmont hills that had very few houses at that time. The Mae Nesbit School occupies that site.

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### *From Page 18*

Other early businesses bit the dust with changing times. They have been replaced by other businesses to suit Belmont's residents.

One must wonder if there will be so great a change in the coming 70 years. Will our present businesses be superseded by later customer demands? Some say that in 70 more years we won't recognize

Belmont. Of course there will be many newer businesses. Belmont has rolled with the punches and can do it again.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont has been the home of many inventors, some of whom you may not have been aware of.

For instance, there is William Holmes. He invented a way to help people off the roofs of high-rise buildings. When Andrew Casper was fire chief in San Francisco he said the invention had merit. It was later used to evacuate people from roof tops.

Holmes also invented a water jack, which has been used to lift great weights to release people trapped in fires and train accidents.

Another inventor was George Tiegel, of the Tiegel Manufacturing Company. His invention was of a complicated machine for assembling storage batteries. Formerly the plates and separators had to be placed in the container by hand. With his invention many storage batteries could be assembled at one time, by only one person, thus reducing the cost of manufacturing. Batteries became inexpensive.

The Tiegel factory is located at the eastern end of Bragato Road, and is operated by his two sons, Eric and Ralph. Both young men received engineering degrees from Stanford.

My own invention was of liquid measuring meters. It measures very low flows of liquid. I noticed one in use behind the large heating stove in the old museum house in Victoria, B.C. The curator told me she knows how much stove oil is in her tank and doesn't need to go out in the snow to check it.

Another inventor formerly of Belmont

was Mr. Ames, of the Ames Dry Wall Taping Company. His invention provided an easy way to cover joints and cracks in sheet rock walls. His dry-wall taping machines are being manufactured in South San Francisco, and are available in Burlingame.

The Eimac Radio Tube Company, known as Eimac, was taken over by Varian Associates, but Bill Eitel and Jack McCullough had been the inventors of their radio tubes. The tubes are sold worldwide, and are still known as being among the best transmitting tubes available. Bill and Jack did well financially and only a few years ago Jack donated \$5 million to Stanford University.

Both Belmont and San Carlos have had many inventors within their cities. One in San Carlos who has done well with his invention is Ralph Ratcliff. He invented a hoist that is being used throughout the world and is exported almost everywhere. It is made in several sizes and several types are available. Without his invention heavy loads couldn't so easily be lifted. The mechanism is extremely clever.

Although we rub elbows with citizens within our communities, we never know which has an invention to his credit. However, many things are yet to be invented. When I was up in the Yukon a man commented that he couldn't understand why someone hadn't developed a vegetarian mosquito. As I swatted, I thought his idea had merit.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

There have been many unusual post offices throughout the United States. One that was especially different was at Oak Run in Shasta County 60 years ago.

The little building was about 8 feet by 10 feet and was beside the single-track rough and rocky road. The postmaster's house was about a city block away.

When anyone wanted to buy stamps, they pulled a wire on the post office porch which shook a cow bell at the postmaster's house. She then came down and sold you stamps.

In Belmont, there have been several locations for our post offices. In the 1890s, it was in the Emmett and Waltermire store located at Ralston Avenue and Old County Road. Then it was in a building on the west side of El Camino Real and about a block south of Ralston Avenue.

Later, it was moved to Sixth Avenue where it remained for several years. Next, it was moved to the north side of Ralston Avenue, where the Bay View parking lot is presently located. The present post office was built by nurseryman Juel Christensen and dedicated in 1967. L.B. Johnson was president at that time and Lawrence O'Brien was our postmaster.

Christensen had the building built, then leased it to the government.

The mail was brought to Belmont by stagecoach at first, in the 1800s. Later the steam trains dropped it off. Northbound as well as southbound trains tossed out the mail bags as they roared through Belmont. Pick-up of mail sacks was by an extending "V" metal bar that hooked the

bags from where the postmaster had hung them on a pole beside the depot.

We have had many postmasters, but our present one is Jeanette Jensen. She is excellent and well-liked, and also is a past president of the Belmont Chamber of Commerce. There are 63 employees at the post office. Mail is seldom late, and seldom delivered to the wrong address.

Old records show that Marcus Flashner was Belmont's postmaster as appointed July 18, 1854. He was followed by John Ellet, who was appointed February 18, 1856. In the first 100 years, we had 23 postmasters and there have been several since then.

Tony Bennett is our superintendent of post office operations. Tony is well-liked, efficient and keeps the post office on an even keel.

Recently, drive-up mail boxes were placed in the post office parking lot, as well as at Hiller and Ralston Avenue. This makes it possible for person in cars to mail letters without getting out of their vehicles.

In addition to Belmont's main post office on Masonic Way, there is also a branch post office at the rear of the Belmont Shopping Center. You can find it by walking through the passageway beside the camera shop.

Although Belmont has had many post office locations, we have never had to "pull a wire to ring a cow bell" to get a postmaster to sell us stamps. Belmont has always been a progressive city.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

The name Belmont has been around a long time. When reading Shakespeare's play, "Merchant of Venice," I find that a character named Portia lived at Belmont.

After seeing Stonehenge, which was built 3,000 years ago, and other really old structures, one realizes that much of what is seen today has been duplicated from earlier structures, and times. The Belmont from Shakespeare was in England. Shakespeare wrote the "Merchant of Venice" in the year 1600.

Although there are many other Belmonts in the United States, maybe William Ralston had read Shakespeare and learned of the name there. Ralston

had called his Belmont property Belmont.

Recently a British real estate man spoke before our realty board. One comment he made was that in the United States we seemed to think our buildings were old when they were only 75 years old, when in England he had sold many buildings that were 500 years old.

He said the British seemed to prefer old buildings, rather than newer ones. He also commented that very few women were in real estate in England, while in this country the male and female members of our board of realtors numbered about equal.

He didn't know it, but there are about the same number of women as men in our

million dollar club. Those people have sold property during the year amounting to more than a million dollars. Some have repeated this volume year after year.

One man in Redwood City who has specialized in selling apartment houses has been a member of the million dollar club consistently for more than 20 years. Others accomplish it once, and that's it.

In May 1946, when I received my first real estate license there were 16 offices. Each had a few salesmen. Today there are some offices in San Carlos and Redwood City that have more than 40 salesmen.

Of course, only a very few ever sell anything. Some are licensed so they can purchase property and share in the commission — thus getting the property for less money. Some of these people do quite well, buying and selling. Some of the women are married to carpenters who can update what the women buy, and quickly get it in readiness for resale. Soon they are driving Mercedes instead of their former Toyotas.

Real estate is up-and-down and the income is not dependable. Many of the women have their husbands working at other work, and the men often have their wives working at something else. As one salesman commented, "It all comes out in the wash."

The British real estate man also told us at a meeting that in England people in the business cannot represent both parties in a transaction. If he obtained a listing, some other real estate person must sell the property.

We have different laws. If we obtain a listing, we can sell it ourselves, but we must always make it plain in writing that we represent both parties. Of course, any other office may work on our listings if they belong to the multiple listing bureau.

We like our American laws better than those of England, and we are proud that our country allows us to operate as we do.

**Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.**



## carlmont history

by Russ Estop

In Belmont and San Carlos, there is sometimes a rush to straighten up a house if folks know company is coming. The same consideration should apply to our cities.

Newcomers come and go all the time. Presently San Carlos has a polish-up campaign going on downtown. Belmont also has such a plan. Things are starting to look better.

We are beginning to see awnings above store windows. They look good and make a person pleased when they see them in place. There seems to be one problem with them. Some that have been installed for a long time have faded. When faded they look dull and unappealing. We find some of that kind in San Mateo along El Camino Real.

Belmont's purchase of the large newly-built office building on the west side of Sixth Avenue, south of Ralston Avenue, near the Wells Fargo Bank, will be a good beginning to upgrade our downtown area. Our City Council has other ideas

for the upgrading, and we will see more improvements within the coming months. Our poor old town needs it.

The new building will belong to the city after October 14, and then the police department will move there. Also it will become the home for other city offices such as the city clerk, city treasurer, building department, and several other departments.

Where the present city hall is located reminds me of the price paid for the six lots there. It was \$3,000 which some people believed was too much at the time, many years ago.

The Belmont Chamber of Commerce is also very active in trying to get the downtown area updated. They are calling on some business and building owners suggesting improvements.

Vacant buildings do not impress incoming persons that our city is a "going concern." It is hoped all vacancies may soon be filled.

Abandoned cars are being hauled away

daily, which helps to improve the appearance of our city. Why thieves abandon stolen cars in Belmont is anybody's guess. This has happened mostly along Old County Road, south of Harbor Boulevard.

The Chamber of Commerce is also trying to get businesses to update their office and store signs. They have made considerable headway, but have farther to go.

The owners of The Van's restaurant have plans to update, but are temporarily held back because of parking

regulations.

With water being a problem due to the drought, some lawns are brown, and more will be so later in the summer. However, this is happening in adjoining towns, so we shouldn't worry.

If business buildings can't be remodeled and updated, perhaps a paint job would help.

Updating now is different than it was years ago. My father was born in 1850 and he used to tell me that when company was coming it was always his job to replace the filling between logs in the family home.



# Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Many newcomers were shocked recently to hear reports that a rattlesnake had been found in Belmont.

Snakes are commonly found in the San Francisco watershed property adjacent to Belmont's west side. They like the surroundings there where grass is high and drinking water is nearby. Rattlers are hardly ever found where Belmont houses are close together and streets are paved. Apparently they don't like to crawl across hot pavement. We have learned to keep our eyes open.

The Water Dog Lake area is one to watch on hot summer days. If snakes rattle, it is only to let you know that you are invading their territory. You should move on.

Before Belmont was built up so much, rattlesnakes were occasionally found in our downtown area. In fact, old reports tell of people calling Belmont "Rattlesnake Gulch."

Soon after the Ralston School was built a student took a rattlesnake into a classroom. The startled teacher nearly fainted, and called for the principal to remove the snake. Luckily no one was bitten.

Snakebite medicine is available at most drug stores, and should be carried by campers who go to the high mountains, and the foothill areas of California. If anyone is bitten it is important to get the poison out as fast as possible. Sometimes persons have been saved if another person cuts across the bite vertically, then sucks the poison out. Don't try that, however, if you have a bad tooth. Remember the old song where the lady tried to save her lover? Both died.

Several years ago when I owned a rental house at the west end of All View Way in Belmont an interesting thing happened. When I went there one August to collect my rent, I found the lady taking a sun

bath in the tall dry grass behind the house.

I calmly suggested that she might be safer somewhere else. She asked, "Why?" When I told her there were rattlesnakes around there in the tall dry grass she jumped almost straight up, reminding me of the rockets from Cape Canaveral. I doubt if she took sun baths anymore.

People say rattlers won't chase you, but one chased me on a hot August day in Shasta County when I was there on school vacation. I came along the dusty, single lane rocky road on horseback. A large rattler was crossing the road and I dismounted my horse, and holding the bridle reins, I began throwing lava rocks at the snake.

I didn't immediately hit it, and suddenly it turned and started crawling straight toward me. My horse reared and screamed, and started walking backward on its hind feet. Finally, one of my rocks landed on the snake, and that slowed it enough so I could finish it off.

Summers were usually very hot at my father's cattle ranch, and I experienced many frightening rattlesnake experiences while there on my summer vacations from school. But I only know of one fatality from snake bite. We hope there will never be any in Belmont.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Far out Raiston Avenue, at the western side of Belmont, is a street named Christian Drive. There is a small church at the street's northern end, and some people claim the street was named because the church was there. Others claim differently.

Perhaps the street was named for Christian Bollinger, who had a farm near there in the valley where the lakes are located.

The Bollinger farm was purchased by the Spring Valley Water Company before the lakes were there. That's where our drinking water is stored.

Whether or not Bollinger was a Christian we may never know. I find nothing in old records about that.

Christian Bollinger's parents were pioneers in Missouri. He was born in Bollinger County, Missouri in 1817.

He was married at age 19 to Miss Sarah Farmer, daughter of Reuben Farmer of Bollinger County. He and Sallie were married for forty-four years before she passed away. The five of their children who grew to maturity were David, George, Mary, Catherine and Emma. Sallie was Sarah's nickname.

His second marriage was to Mrs. Vinnie Weinberg.

The Spring Valley Water Company purchased the Bollinger farm in 1883. According to old records Christian Bollinger then moved his family to Santa Clara County, where his son David later established a stage line to Mount

Hamilton.

The Christian Bollinger family became well-known in San Jose and the city named a street for Bollinger. It is out at the west side of San Jose where there used to be prune orchards, and it is a very busy street.

There were other farmers in the valley west of Belmont where the lakes are. Another was the Harrington family. They arrived in the early 1850s.

Several other people came to the little valley west of Belmont where the lakes are located. The farming land was good topsoil, and the early settlers raised good crops which were sold in San Francisco. Topsoil had washed down from the adjoining hills for thousands of years. The area was ideal for raising crops, for which there was a ready market in San Francisco following the gold rush.

There were no telephones yet. Communication had to be by person to person — or by gossipy persons. Everyone kept abreast of important events.

When the Bollinger family first arrived in 1854, there was no danger from Indians, such as was found in the Midwest. Local Indians were no problem.

Since then the local Indian population is gone and Bollinger moved away and died. Belmont has continued to grow — up to 26,500 now in 1988. And we still aren't sure where Christian Drive got its name.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Probably everyone has heard about the ballot stuffing in early days in our county of San Mateo. This happened in San Francisco and other places too. The stuffing was quite prevalent when our county was formed in 1856, when 250 votes came in from the tiny town of Crystal Springs and only 25 persons lived there.

Old records in the California State Library in Sacramento tell of interesting happenings. One I found was about a fellow named Bill Lewis. It seems he was a notorious ballot box stuffer.

He was so adept at the practice that he helped elect James P. Casey as a supervisor in San Francisco, when Casey hadn't even thought of running. This Casey was later hanged for killing an editor whom he didn't approve of.

The editor was working for a San Francisco newspaper and probably stepped on James Casey's toes. Things were a little rough in the mid-1850s. The old reports state that Lewis elected some who paid him well.

In the mid-1850s, other interesting things kept happening according to the old newspapers at Sacramento. It seems that Leland Stanford, who built Stanford University, had some prize horses at his farm. William Ralston of Belmont accepted a bet of \$25,000 that at times when running all four of the horses feet were

off the ground.

Many people doubted it, and the bet was placed and a running horse was photographed by the famous Eadweard Muybridge.

The camera was fast and showed all four feet above the ground several times during the test. Ralston won the money. Following this photographic test Muybridge began thinking more about the event. He soon was the inventor of the first motion pictures in 1879.

Many think our present generation is violent and wish they would cool it, but in the mid-1850s there were probably more killings per capita. Editors shot editors, and readers, who didn't agree with the newspaper's policy.

Maybe it is a wonder that our state increased its population. Of course that may have occurred anyway from migration. Thousands came west during and following the gold rush.

Few actually discovered any gold. However, some who became wealthy purchased interests in small mines of both silver and gold and then sold stock in what they purchased. Ralston was one of the shrewd persons who saw the value of silver.

He bought into the Comstock mine in Virginia City, and old reports state that his income was soon above \$40,000 per

week. One man is quoted as saying, "that should have provided gravy for his potatoes."

Ralston lived in Belmont and as far as I can learn he was not interested in local politics.

As far as I can learn Belmont has never had a rigged election since 1856. That was when people voted for the location for the county court house. Belmont lost. Ballot boxes had been stuffed.

When local people want approval for

some project they sometimes toss money into a pot and hire others to plaster signs all over our town to influence other residents. If enough money is spent these people usually get a "yes" vote. This is considered to be "honest politics." How can a poor person compete? Obviously, they do, and some even win out. That's Belmont. We all love it.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Perhaps the early pioneers had different ideas than we have in many ways.

For instance, my grandfather, who drove oxen west in 1854 said, "Never look back. Only ahead."

When I climb a ladder I usually want to know if a step is still there below me, so I look back. People who never look back miss some interesting things.

In Belmont, some people often ask me about old houses. I had an inquiry about those in early Belmont, in the downtown area, south of Ralston Avenue, where Waltermire, O'Neill, and Emmett Streets are located.

Of course, the Schmoll family lived on Sixth Avenue when it was called Schmoll Street. That's where the Wells Fargo Bank parking lot is now.

Georgé Roussel and his wife Edith lived at the corner of Sixth Avenue and O'Neill Street. Many old-timers will recall a sign over the Roussel gate saying "El Nido." He was a builder and built and remodeled several houses in Belmont's early residential area.

While many people bypassed Belmont to settle elsewhere after the turn of the century, Roussel discovered a ready list of persons who needed rental houses. He found that when

people came to stay at the California Sanitarium, which was used for a tuberculosis sanitarium, their families often wanted to be near them. The sanitarium was out at Carlmont.

One unusual house he remodeled, that was later owned by Dr. David Sears, had been a tankhouse. As soon as Roussel finished remodeling and painting it, he had it rented. He had moved it from a nearby home, and the "tank" house still remains on Waltermire Street. You can easily recognize it, for it is built a little differently than its neighbors.

Our former City Clerk Catherine Hearstner, lived on Waltermire Street and Fifth Avenue. After her husband's death she had her house jacked up and a store space constructed below it. That space became the Belmont City Library until the new library was built out at Carlmont. A street was named "Kitty" for Mrs. Hearstner. That's what most people called her.

As I recall, a family named Otto lived on Emmett Street, and a family named Kromquist also lived on that street. Mr. Kromquist liked to build boats, and seemed to always get them sold.

There were other houses built in the

downtown area of Belmont. Some have been replaced with newer houses. Some have been replaced with store and office buildings. It's interesting to look back to see what early people constructed.

Architecture was different. Windows were much smaller. Roofs were often steeper. Real plaster was used inside instead of sheet rock. There were many other differences.

In looking back now and then we find that

we have far better housing than most early persons had. We should be thankful that we are living now. And especially in Belmont.

In last week's column I didn't know how Christian Drive in Belmont got its name. I was named for one of the partners in Whitecliff Homes, who were the builders of houses along the street. It was his middle name.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont used to have many more trees than we have now. They were cut to make room for new houses and other buildings. There was a beautiful large redwood on Ralston Avenue a few years ago which the Chamber of Commerce decorated for Belmont's Christmas tree.

Someone who owned the land wanted to build a structure on the property and, even though many citizens were objected, the owner had the beautiful tree cut during the night. Most of Belmont saw the stump in the morning and were horrified. Nothing could be done at that stage, so people mourned the beautiful tree. And some still do at Christmas time.

There is nothing more restful than to lie in a hammock under a tall redwood, or other tree, and look up at it. Belmont people have found this relaxing. Some who go along the coast often lie in the sand, dividing their interest between looking at the ocean or inland at the trees. Most Belmonters seem to prefer spending their weekends in the mountains instead of at the seashore. Roads going east are crowded on weekends.

When the Carlmont Shopping Center was built only a very few trees had to be removed. The land had formerly been the football field for the St. Joseph Military Academy.

Also, when the houses were built near there, across Ralston Avenue where the golf course had been, there were few trees. None had to be removed.

When Sterling Downs and Homeview subdivisions were built there were no trees. The Belmont Airport had been where Sterling Downs is located. Also, a dog racing track had been located near where Homeview subdivision was built.

When the large apartment buildings were constructed on the north side of Davey Glen, a few trees were taken out. The city receives considerable tax money from owners of condominiums built there. The money is needed.

Some owners bought there because there were so many pretty trees across the street. It reminds them of the mountains, and some have said living at Davey Glen is like a continuous vacation.

Keith Davey has passed away. His home was there among those trees. He started the Davey Tree Surgery Company — a national corporation. He, like many Belmonters, enjoyed trees. The trees have been a great asset to our city, keeping our air more clear.

Word is out that condominiums may be built at the Davey property, south of Davey Glen Drive. If that happens it is hoped that as few as possible of the trees will be destroyed. They have been growing there since they were planted about 1988, by earlier Belmonters who liked trees, and we hope they can be saved. Without trees Belmont wouldn't ever be the same anymore. We like it as it is. Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In Belmont, there are streets that were named for outstanding and very interesting people. One was Mezes Avenue. Some people living on Mezes Avenue do not know whom he was.

Sidney M. Mezes was an attorney who cleared the titles for Mrs. Arguello to her 34,200 acre Spanish land grant. The grant was given in 1795 by the King of Spain. It included all of Belmont, part of San Mateo, all of San Carlos, all of Redwood City, all of Menlo Park, and its southerly line was at the north end of Palo Alto. When California became a state in 1850, Arguello's titles were questioned and Mezes managed to get them cleared.

Mezes was a middle-aged man when he died, and the cause of his death was quoted

in old records as an accidental administration of an overdose of chloral hydrate. He was 58 years old when he died on Dec. 7, 1884.

Old records state that he was a native of Puerto Rico and of Castilian parentage. He had come to California in 1850 and was said to be one of the most prominent land owners in the state.

After clearing the titles for Arguello, he was given approximately 15 percent of the large acreage. He not only owned Belmont and a part of Redwood City (then called Mezesville), but he also owned a large ranch in Santa Clara County. He was also owner of several other land grants in Southern California.

The land grant he received from Arguello was one of the first such grants in California.

Being able to speak Spanish fluently did him no harm. The American lawyers were unable to compete with him. His office was in San Francisco, but he had lived in Belmont for 30 years before his death. His house later burned and was never rebuilt. As late as 1945 one of his daughters still held title to the lot.

When Mezes died he was survived by his wife and two children. His son became president of a university in Texas.

His funeral was held from Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in Redwood City, and reports say it was well attended.

He had been so prominent that news of his death appeared not only in Peninsula newspapers but in papers of Oregon and Nevada. Probably if he lived until today, his death would have been reported nationally on television.

In the last century, Belmont has been the home of some very influential people. We sometimes don't know with whom we are rubbing elbows.

For instance, it has only been a few months since Redwood City's largest employer moved from Belmont to Atherton. He is Bruce

Smith. He and his wife Susanne lived on Terrace Drive in Belmont and he is founder and president of the N.E.T. Corporation in Redwood City. Smith's company started about five years ago manufacturing electronics. Now they own and occupy seven large buildings near the Redwood City harbor. Bruce and Susanne's company employs over 1,000 people and keeps adding more.

We in Belmont are sorry to lose geniuses such as Bruce Smith, and hope that we may have more like him moving into our city. We need them. Sidney Mezes and Bruce Smith have done a lot for Belmont and the Peninsula, and they are all remembered here.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

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When you become my age, which will be 85 in October, you will find that many historic things seem to have happened only yesterday. Younger people say they happened a "long time ago."

For instance, there was Davenport Bromfield, whom I knew well. He was a surveyor, and he surveyed Hillsborough, and parts of San Mateo. His home was in Hillsborough. Bromfield Drive was named for him.

He also had a small weekend cabin west of Skyline, up on King's Mountain. He often drove his horse and buggy there, taking his children when they were small. As they grew larger, he used his surrey.

The air up at his cabin was clear and fresh because there were so many redwood trees on his property. When he passed away he gave the cabin and acreage to his children - who were adults by then.

The elevation up at his cabin was about 2,000 feet, and his view was of great distances. One of his children once wanted to know whether she could see Hawaii. He laughed about that, and told the child to look at a globe where she would see the world was round. And how could she see over the horizon?

He was always teaching his children. They grew up and were all intelligent people. One was the head of Levy Brothers stores for many years. Daughter Grace married a Mr. Haver and she lived in Southern California.

Our San Mateo County hired Bromfield to survey the first Skyline Road from King's Mountain northwest to the crossing of the road from Belmont to Half Moon Bay. The year was 1909. He had been using a single-track wagon road at the time, and his survey straightened it. The survey took a slightly different route.

At one of the title companies recently, I was shown a map of a part of San Mateo that was

drawn by Bromfield in 1909. It was a very complete map of what existed, or was soon to exist. The map showed San Mateo just as we know it to be now.

During the past 42 years since I started in real estate in Belmont, I used Bromfield's services to survey at least 50 or 60 vacant lots. At the time Belmont was laid out no survey was ever made. People purchased the vacant lots from a map showing where the lots were supposed to be. This could cause confusion.

For instance, 35 years ago a man took me to look at a Belmont lot he had owned and asked me to sell it. It had an oak tree right in the middle. I listed the lot for sale. Shortly thereafter another man came from San Francisco and bought the lot.

Afterward he frequently came to Belmont just to have a picnic under the tree. He liked the view out toward the bay. Finally, the man was transferred to Salt Lake City and asked me to resell the lot with the tree.

I quickly found a builder who wanted to buy it. He said however, to remove the big tree would be costly. He needed a survey so I called Bromfield.

When his survey was finished, he found what the builder had bought from my client was the adjoining lot without a tree. The builder was very pleased.

The sellers had already moved from San Francisco to Salt Lake City. I presume they never did know that the lot with the big tree hadn't belonged to them. They had netted over \$1,000, above what they had paid originally and told me they had enjoyed their many picnics.

If it hadn't been for Bromfield there might have been problems, but his survey pleased the builder. He started construction of a new house immediately. He had no tree to remove. Bromfield had done his work well.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Frequently school children in Belmont ask where the Indians went if they ever lived here. Yes, they lived here, and in great numbers.

The local tribes had it easy with food such as shell fish, deer and many shrubs so plentiful. It is a wonder they weren't all overweight. Old sketches, however, show them to be as we are now. Of course they didn't wear so many clothes, but they wore loin cloths, and in the colder weather they wore clothing made from animal hides.

Old records tell of one large tribe in San Mateo County, and there were many sub-tribes within the larger group.

When the missions at San Francisco, Santa Clara and San Jose were established, the fathers taught Christianity to the Indians. Many Indians were soon working at the missions and some made their homes there.

Owners of the large Spanish land grants hired Indians to work as ranch hands and cowboys. Old reports state that those Indians were not treated as slaves, but as hired hands.

Indians who weren't at the large ranchos sometimes resented what Indians withing the ranchos were being given and sometimes attacked, drove off cattle and stole horses.

The Spanish missions were here long before the land grants were given. The fathers had already baptised hundreds of Indians in and around their missions such as Mission Dolores. When the land grants were given in 1795, such as Rancho de las Pulgas, many Indians abandoned their mission homes to work on the ranches.

One might think there would be descendants

of Indians still living in this area, but none can be found.

As early as 1860, a census showed that only 26 of the early Indians still resided in this area. All the rest of the estimated 2,000 had either died or moved inland. They could not be accounted for. A census in 1870 showed that there were only eight original Indians living in this area.

The last Indian to be accounted for seems to have been Pedro Evencia, who was reported to still be alive after 1893.

Pedro Evencia had been warned not to walk on the railroad tracks; yet he was killed while walking on the tacks when he failed to hear a warning whistle and the engine's bell.

He had a son, Joe, who grew to manhood, but left this area. No record seems to exist as to what became of him.

Thus ended the saga of the original Indians who lived in Belmont before we came here. They seem not to have been assimilated but just died off.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Several persons have asked me what became of the large Spanish land grants. Old records tell a little of what happened. When Mr. Mezes settled the titles for Mrs. Arguello in 1850, he was given a large percentage of the Rancho de las Pulgas grant as his attorney fee.

He then sold parcels of it to squatters with small down payments, but with high interest, according to old records. Mezes did very well. Something like the early missionaries who went from New England to Hawaii.

It is said that they went there to do good, and they did very well. One married a queen and owned the world's second largest ranch which was on the Big Island of Hawaii. The Parker Ranch.

North of Belmont was the Buri Buri Rancho of many thousands of acres. It was owned by the Sanchez family. The original owner, Jose Sanchez raised five daughters. One was named Julia. Julie Sanchez de Valencia's husband was said to have been incompetent. Julie's portion of the Rancho was said to have been 1,500 acres. Quite a spread. She raised several children, but died before her estate was settled.

Some people say there are always buzzards circling. A guardian was appointed for the incompetent man and the children. Someone had to do it. Old records indicate that the guardian petitioned the court to allow him to dispose of the 1,500 acres.

His appraiser claimed the land to be worth \$10 an acre. This land was located at San Bruno. Court bids started coming in and the highest was \$7.50 per acre.

Costs for administering the estate were suf-

ficient to bring the net for the 1,500 acres down to \$1,500.

Court squabbles began. They continued for several years. The result was that there was very little money left from the Julia Sanchez estate. Thus ended the Buri Buri Rancho.

Of course this took place many years ago. But buzzards still circle. During the depression a 3,000 acre cattle ranch in Northern California was sold for only \$4,000. And a \$1,000 acre level farm near the Chico Buttes went for \$5,000.

Belmont people are mostly well established and if opportunities like these appear someday, we hope someone benefits honestly.

None in Belmont can know what's ahead, but if something happens in the settling of an estate, the process will be done honestly if Belmont people are involved. Everyone would like to win the California Lottery, which we are told is absolutely honest, but no one is waiting for it. Like in the old days, Belmont people have settled large transactions with a handshake. Our Belmont people can be depended upon.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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# belmont history

by Russ Estep

The name O'Neill has been found in Belmont since 1855. It was that year when Captain Owen O'Neill sailed down the bay and wanted to tie his schooner to something and there wasn't even a post to tie it to.

O'Neill immediately built a small wharf and established his shipping line from Belmont to San Francisco. He did very well, and later built a house in Belmont where he lived until his death.

Apparently, he raised two sons. Both became prominent Belmont citizens. Mathew O'Neill was operating a livery stable here in 1876. He sold it on Oct. 10, 1883 and became a partner in the general merchandise store with Walter Emmett. The store was what we call the "pink building" on lower Raiston Avenue.

With our country new, Mathew O'Neill seemed to find opportunities wherever he looked. He became an auctioneer for awhile in 1886, but soon gave that up. Reports claim that while he was an auctioneer he did well

financially.

He built a house on the east side of Old County Road, a few doors south of Raiston Avenue. It was torn down Nov. 11, 1980.

Another old record tells that during the time he had the livery stable he went into partnership with a man named Pruner, and the two of them operated a stagecoach to Half Moon Bay for awhile.

Next, we find that Mathew O'Neill had been active in real estate in San Francisco, working as a partner with W. G. Morgan Co. Mathew remained with the Morgan company for several years, and perhaps until he retired, for there seems to be no further information about him in the old records.

Mathew O'Neill's obituary states that he died in Belmont Aug. 21, 1913. He was survived by his brother Eugene according to the obituary. No mention of offspring was given.

Eugene was Belmont's postmaster and was appointed July 26, 1893. Apparently Eugene wasn't as active as Mathew, for he isn't mentioned in many places in old records.

An item dated March 17, 1888 states that Eugene O'Neill will sell his new grocery store, Monday, July 17, 1888. He sold to his partner Walter Emmett. Henceforth, according to old records, Emmett would operate the store himself. Again, this was what we call the "pink building."

A further item states that Eugene O'Neill, had retired on Nov. 29, 1900.

The O'Neill families helped to build Belmont, and were active for many early years here. A street was named for the O'Neills, but nothing is in the records stating which O'Neill received the honor. Each of them should have been eligible, so perhaps the street name was honoring all three in the family. They were a credit to Belmont.

Russ Estep is Belmont's City historian.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

There is always a centennial year for something or other, and when examining old Belmont records I have noticed several happenings which occurred 100 years ago.

They begin with Mr. P. Swift, a lumber dealer of San Francisco who constructed an elegant residence in Belmont at a cost of \$6,000. Mr. Swift's new house is being painted white which gives it an imposing appearance. It is located north of the depot and west of the railroad tracks. The date was March 17, 1888.

"The post office will be moved from the depot to the new store of Eugene O'Neill," the records note.

June 2, 1888, "C.R. Splivalo, San Francisco merchant, has started construction of his new home, near the Reid School, Alameda de las Pulgas and Ralston Avenue, said to cost \$10,000.

On Aug. 25, 1888, an announcement was made that the railroad company was starting to landscape the property around the depot.

On June 20, 1888, Dr. W.A. Suttmeister married Miss Augusta Janke (ancestor of Miss Doris Vannier).

"Mr. Howell, owner of the American House, has announced that he will build a second story addition onto his hotel so as to ac-

commodate more overnight persons." This is the present Opportunity Shop. The date was Sept. 1, 1888.

On Sept. 1, 1888, an item about Belmont's water supply reads, "The people of Belmont are jubilant over the fact that they are to be supplied with Spring Valley water. A meeting of citizens will soon be called for the purpose of purchasing a hose cart and 500 feet of hose, and thus will be prepared for emergencies. Water from Alameda County flowed into the reservoir pumping works Tuesday morning. Wednesday the engines were used for the first time. Two million gallons of water were pumped into the reservoir (lakes west of Belmont) last Wednesday."

An item dated Jan. 1, 1888, states that "Samuel Ralston, son of William Ralston of Belmont, had committed suicide in Georgetown, El Dorado County. He had been engaged in mining and farming."

Advertisement for the Grand Saloon: "Where are always kept on hand the purest drinkables and the freshest smokables."

Old item dated Jan. 21, 1888, indicates how Belmont used to be a small community where individuals were more noticeable. It reads: "Guy Hull is taking a commercial course at

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### *From Page 8*

Bernard's Business College in San Francisco, and goes there every day."

We wonder what announcements will be in newspapers a century from now. Probably they will contain more sophisticated news items. One hundred years from now Belmont will be a different city than we find it now. Belmont will continue to advance. Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Liquor has always been available in Belmont. Even during the Depression and Prohibition, people could always wet their whistle in Belmont.

An old newspaper item dated July 15, 1882, tells about a James Green of Casper, Mendocino County, selling a lot between the railroad tracks and Old County Road, to Walter A. Emmett. Emmett planned to take over and operate the Grand Saloon which was on the land.

Then a later item dated Oct. 13, 1883 tells that H. Rowell was building a hotel and saloon across the street opposite the Emmett store. The Emmett store was what we call the pink building.

Rowell provided a beautiful curved bar for his new saloon. A picture of it is in the book "Belmont, As We Remember It."

Belmont's famous artist, now deceased, Ruth Holstedt, bought the old bar when the Rowell saloon was closed. She kept it in her garage for many years. The Rowell saloon was what is now the Opportunity Shop.

Collectors have been trying to locate the old bar, but no one seems to know where it is. The San Mateo County Historical Society has been questioned, as well as many Belmont people. Holstedt had one daughter named Jody G. Alexander. She had been traced to Sonora, after which she removed to Florida. Her Florida address cannot be found.

A collector from Drytown on Highway 49

has been trying to locate the old bar, but he has had no success. Incidentally, Drytown is near Jackson where 75 miners were lost about 1922 when the mine caved in. Remember?

Other drinking places came along later in Belmont, such as the Van's restaurant. That building was moved to Belmont from the Panama Pacific International Exposition following the fair in 1915. During Prohibition, a famous speakeasy operated in the building on the Belmont hillside.

It is said there were several other places where liquor was available during the Depression. One was on Arthur Avenue according to some heavy drinkers.

Word went out that anything you wanted was available in Belmont. Little Belmont became famous. But everyone didn't drink.

A story is told about one well-known Belmont man who was a teetotaler. Two friends and he had been out for a fine dinner and he had happened to mention his bar. The friends were immediately interested in seeing it. As they drove home about midnight, the man suggested if they were interested in seeing his bar they stop at his house for a moment.

Upon stopping, he escorted them to his back yard and, leaping upward, he grasped a bar and began chinning himself. His friends avoided laughing, and thanked him, and commented as they left, "Well, everything happens in Belmont."

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Most people in Belmont think our city has been fortunate in having Ken Dickerson for our city attorney. He is a good one. Things haven't always been like this. When Belmont tried to incorporate on Oct. 18, 1926, a problem developed.

Old records tell us that some property owners adjacent to what was to become Belmont objected to incorporation. They claimed that they hadn't been consulted, and when Belmont's papers were filed, their farms were included. They thought that their right to raise this or that might be regulated.

One was raising canary birds, another mushrooms. Still another, pears and prunes. The latter owned land where the Carlmont High School stands. That farmer was John W. Bourdette. He liked his farm just as it was and was afraid his taxes might be increased. He said he hadn't been consulted.

Actually, when the election was held to decide upon incorporation, the vote was very light. The population was 900 at the time, but many didn't vote.

Bourdette had consulted an attorney who explained to him that disincorporation could only be accomplished by the attorney general, or by his permission. Bourdette's attorney obtained permission from Attorney General U.S. Webb. Then he brought suit against the city.

The disincorporation was effected by a decision by Superior Court Judge John L. Hudner of Hollister, who presided over the local Superior Court that day in Redwood City.

The case was said to have been the first case of its kind in San Mateo County history, and our county had been started 70 years before all this happened. San Mateo County came into being in 1856.

Bourdette's claim stated that signers of the petition to incorporate failed to date their papers, that his lands were ranch lands and had not been subdivided, and that he had not petitioned the Board of Supervisors to include his lands.

Bourdette's attorney won the case. Newly elected Belmont city employees instantly out of work were Mayor Harry Warren, C.J. Jordan, Columbus Messner, Lewis Vannier, and Tom Pennington. D. Callan was city clerk, and S.J. Cook, treasurer.

The Board of Supervisors had failed to notice the limitation clause, and the district attorney had failed to warn the group about this.

Whether or not Belmont could be incorporated was not decided until three years had passed. Finally, in 1929 Belmont again became a city. During the interim all city employees

continued to work without pay.

With the case settled, the canary raiser thought his birds sang louder, the mushroom grower claimed his crops were larger, and Bourdette said his crops of pears and prunes had never been greater. Everyone, including Bourdette, was satisfied.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont seems to have established its character very early. An old newspaper item in the library in Redwood City dated March 13, 1875 reads: "Belmont, four miles north of Redwood City, comprises within its limits a hotel, store and saloon, a feed and livery stable and several residences. This is quite an enterprising little business place, and possesses many attractions."

Also another item in the Redwood City paper dated Jan. 9, 1896 states: "The spirit of improvement and a San Mateo contractor simultaneously struck this town, and it now rejoices in several yards of concrete walks. One can now walk dryshod in front of Yount's, Emmetts, Hammerson's, and Waltermire's places in Belmont."

What an improvement that must have been. No more muddy shoes tracking mud into living rooms.

To add to these great improvements is stated, on Jan. 23, 1896: "The latest addition to the comforts of Belmont is lighting furnished by the San Mateo Electric Light Company."

In those years Belmont consisted of most buildings across the railroad tracks, near the intersection of Ralston Avenue.

A planned subdivision of a few lots west of the tracks came years later. The Bay View Heights Corporation was selling lots south of Ralston Avenue in the early 1920s. Daniel St. George was their salesman handling the sales.

You can recognize the development by looking toward the hill, west of El Camino Real, where you will notice a few houses that

have tile roofs. Those were built between 1924 and 1927.

At about that time, between 1924 and 1927 the Belmont Country Club subdivisions were being sold. Persons named Monroe, Miller and Lyon were the subdividers. Their little office was the small round building on the Alameda de las Pulgas, across from the Congregational Church. The church building was the club house built to induce buyers to purchase their Belmont lots.

They seem to have been a bit greedy for they had streets laid out only 40 feet wide.

El Camino Real wasn't moved west of the railroad tracks until 1918. I recall seeing the work progressing with many teams and Fresno scrapers.

El Camino Real remained just two lanes until World War II when it was widened to four lanes, and later was widened to the curbs.

Even with its present full width it is often jammed with cars going both north and south. What the future will bring is impossible to predict. Maybe someday El Camino Real will need to be double-decked, and another highway built down at the edge of the Bay.

People continue to come to Belmont. Word that it is a desirable city has been broadcast coast to coast. Land is becoming very scarce so the future of Belmont may very well be upward. Tall buildings such as we see in San Francisco may be in Belmont's future. Whatever is done, those living here will still be proud of their city. Belmont is a good place in which to live. It will always be so.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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# carl mont history

by Russ Estep

Students frequently ask me where William C. Ralston came from, and how did he happen to come to Belmont. Ralston was no different than other young men. Young fellows have always needed exciting events to participate in.

For instance there was the gold rush, the long hard trek to California, then working on the new railroad to the west, then becoming a telegraph operator, then being a cowboy, then learning the carpenter trade, then being a radio officer on a ship; and don't forget the Alaska gold rush.

All these were exciting events thousands of young men took part in. And many young men received their kicks by working on river boats on the Mississippi. Ralston was one of those, starting from his home in Ohio when he was age 23.

Ralston was soon employed as freight clerk on a river boat captained by Captain Fretz. The two became friends. Later when Fretz went to Panama, Ralston accompanied him, and was placed in charge of the Panama end of the trail leading from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

A ship named the New Orleans was stranded at Panama without a captain. Seeing an opportunity, Fretz placed Ralston in charge of her. Ralston assumed the job as captain and depended upon the mates to navigate the ship. He took 200 stranded passengers from Panama to San Francisco successfully, and at considerable profit for Fretz.

His successful voyage impressed Fretz and Ralston was taken as a partner in the new firm of Garrison and Fretz and company. Ralston continued moving freight, transfers, and

passengers from Panama to San Francisco until 1854.

On Aug. 31, 1854 he landed in San Francisco on a ship of the company known as the Yankee Blade. Fretz met the ship and informed Ralston that the company had decided to take him in as a full partner, and that the concern had also taken in Charles Morgan.

Their business quarters were to be at the corner of Clay and Montgomery Streets. The office was moved to another nearby location later that same year. In 1854, the firm incorporated the Bank of California with William C. Ralston as executive officer.

There had been a depression in the country earlier, and greenbacks were occasionally looked on suspiciously because some were duplicates. Ralston, as executive officer of the Bank of California immediately insisted that gold be used in his bank. His bank discounted paper money.

Ralston had invested in silver mines in Nevada and soon was elected treasurer of the Ophir Gold and Silver Mining Company as well as president of another mining company.

Considerable money was flowing into Ralston's pockets, and soon he made other investments, including the building of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the first dry dock at Hunter's Point, the California Theatre. Wanting a rural place out of the noise of San Francisco he came down the Peninsula and arranged to have his home here. He purchased property from Count Leonetto Cipriani, enlarged the house and died in 1875.

William C. Ralston loved Belmont and California, as we all do. What he accomplished as a young man just starting out, can be

duplicated by any youth in Belmont. They only need to have a goal and stick to it. Our youths in Belmont are capable of almost anything.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

About 40 years ago, someone made a study of the work done by carpenters in San Francisco. The study brought out the fact that more work is done by these workmen in San Francisco than in any other place in America. It stated the reason was fog.

The study claimed the men didn't tire so fast and kept on working in San Francisco, but in the Central Valley, when it became roasting hot, the men slowed down. Houses in San Francisco might be constructed for less money; and greater profit.

Unfortunately, the study didn't check Belmont or other Peninsula cities. With our climate being more moderate surely Belmont's men produce well. There has never been a "throw it together" attitude among the workmen in Belmont.

Our moderate climate also contributes to persons working on technical projects. They don't need to pause every five minutes to wipe perspiration from their faces. Many things have been developed and invented here. William C. Ralston is said to have planned and plotted many of his moves while in Belmont.

Redwood City has always advertised "Climate Best By Government Test," but Belmont is so close that our climate is good too. Probably in all the world there is no climate as moderate as on this peninsula.

Factories here produce more electronic and other things for less money than in many places. Eimac-Varian in San Carlos was the largest producer of radio tubes until everyone

began using solid state products.

Both Belmont and San Carlos have high hills where the view is good looking out toward the Bay. During the last 40 years, many people have taken advantage of this and have had homes built here.

In Belmont, there were two lovers lanes on short streets high on hills. One was Camino Vista, and the other All View Way. Forty years ago, both streets were only single track dirt roads, with brush on both sides. After dark nights, car tracks could be seen quite plainly.

Things change as time goes on, and now many youths have vans with curtains. Although times change, Belmont's people don't change. But our youths are more sophisticated.

Although our young Belmont people liked to drive to hilltops where there was a good view, older people purchased houses on Belmont's hilltops so they too, might enjoy the view. When Ivan F. Phipps came to my office from Portland wanting to start a cemetery on land he owned on the Skyline Boulevard he explained to me that when people have lived where they had a view, many want to be buried where there is a view. He started the Skymont Cemetery and sold it at a large profit.

With Belmont's excellent climate and hills having a view, local adults and youths have a head start on other parts of the country with whatever line of business they go into. Our youths are fortunate to be living in Belmont.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Where were you in January 1932? Belmont was here and thriving. Old newspaper clippings tell that persons living here then were aggressive, busy and happy.

As for myself I was a carpenter working on the Sunnyvale Airbase, now called Moffet Field, and had to live closer to my work so I was in San Jose temporarily. But I came to Belmont frequently on weekends. I had lived here before and had friends here and one relative.

Working on the Moffet Field buildings was hard work. A company from Texas were contractors, and men had to work hard and fast. If you needed a board you didn't simply walk to get it — you ran. If you didn't, you were fired. Dozens of men stood beside a bonfire they kept going inside an empty oil barrel.

In the winter the weather was cold and when a carpenter slowed down his foreman instantly fired him, and called another from the oil barrel to take his place. About 200 men were employed on the job and I was young and active and understood the work and was one of two who worked there from start to finish of the construction. Now I'm glad that I helped to build the airbase.

While we worked there the airship Akron came in. It was moored to a mast that had a circled railroad track around it so the airship could revolve if the wind changed. The Akron was later wrecked, and then the Macon came and tied up. It was larger than the Akron, and stayed moored to the mast for several weeks. Then it was wrecked off the California coast when flying from Southern California back to Sunnyvale.

Although I wasn't living in Belmont in those years, I kept track of some things that were going on. Mr. E. J. Hearstner was elected to the Belmont County Water District as its president. Elwood Curtis was manager. Chris Jordan was Belmont's mayor. Alexander Morrison was president of the Planning Commission, and Bertrand Johnson was serving on the Sanitary Board.

Men in Belmont were mostly unable to find work locally and many had to commute, or temporarily live elsewhere.

When the construction at Moffet Field was finished I started with Shell Oil Company. What a difference! All I had to do was sell. I won many sales contests and acquired a small box full of small "Shell" buttons for my coat lapel. But they transferred me.

I was required to go to many California cities and how I loved it. I enjoyed meeting the people and seeing different areas. Then World War II started. I was too old for the draft by then, but left Shell and started again as a carpenter and soon became foreman. We built the frame buildings on 19th Avenue in San Francisco for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company called war housing. Then several other projects. The Park Merced project covered 47 city blocks.

At war's end I was building houses on the Peninsula and soon took the examination and received a general contractor license. In May 1946, I started in real estate in Belmont, and was glad to be home again. I expect to stay here forever. I'm 85 now and hope to live in Belmont until I grow old.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

In 1850 when Belmont's little settlement was getting started a man named Charles Angelo came here to start Belmont's first hotel. There was a rough single-track dirt road that turned westward from Old County Road where we now find Ralston Avenue.

Angelo thought the road going westward would gain more use, and he built his hotel in the middle of the road. It was on the west side of Old County Road, but east of where the railroad was to be built later. He wanted his hotel to get attention.

Nobody could miss the Angelo Hotel when they went through the tiny new settlement. It was between San Jose and San Francisco, and it proved to be a convenient place for a stopover for many travelers.

It opened April 18, 1850. The anniversary of the Paul Revere ride, and later the San Francisco earthquake which occurred in 1906.

Angelo's hotel was advertised as having a good view of the Bay, and had corrals for

horses, and a hay barn. He also advertised that he could accept a few boarders during the winter months and that his hotel had sleeping rooms for ladies and a separate parlor for them.

He claimed his dining room served game, poultry, butter, eggs, milk, and that his meals were preferable to some other places along the Peninsula.

He must have done all right, for five years later on June 29, 1855, we find another owner of his hotel. He had sold the hotel to Frank M. Schell. Apparently the hotel was sold at a profit. Another announcement states that the post office was located in the hotel and that Marcus Flashner was postmaster.

Travel along the road to the coast that was passing by the former Angelo hotel must have increased, so that the hotel was moved southward beside the Belmont Hotel that had been built in the interim.

Then J. I. Ellet seems to have taken over un-

til June 1863. His name is listed as proprietor of the Belmont Hotel until that date. A man named Maxwell then took over and operated the Belmont Hotel for a few years, and Ellet was reported to have moved to Alameda County.

Next enters the names of Clark and Waltermire, well-known early merchants of Belmont. Old records state they took over the Belmont Hotel on June 20, 1863 — branching out from their general merchandise store across Ralston Avenue.

Their advertisement states that they had

corrals for cattle, horses, and sheep and that drovers would find their hotel a good stopping place.

Old records state that Mrs. George Smith became owner of the hotel May 5, 1864. Another old item states that the hotel burned Dec. 22, 1866.

As for the first owner, Charles Angelo, an old item states that he was in jail in Victoria, British Columbia for embezzling \$10,000 while working in the Custom House.

I'll bet he wished he was back in Belmont. Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



Neither Belmont or San Carlos has been known to be "horsy towns." Of course, several horses are boarded far out on Ralston Avenue, but most Belmont people don't go in for horseback riding.

Neither do citizens of San Carlos. Woodside is the last horsy place on the Peninsula. Many people there own riding horses and frequently can be seen out there on riding trails. But as late as immediately before World War II people were using work horses in both Belmont and San Carlos as they harvested hay.

Most of the White Oaks area of San Carlos was a hayfield until World War II. Men would often be seen with horse-drawn mowers cutting hay in the springtime. The same could be seen in Belmont on the unbuilt area east of the railroad tracks.

After mowing the hay the men left it on the ground for three days to dry. Then they raked it into windrows, and later into shocks.

One group had what we presently consider an old fashioned baler. It was left out in the field and had a long pole extending out of it. When baling, the workmen would hitch a horse to the far end of the pole and they kept the horse walking around in a circle. This caused the baler to function.

One man would pitch the hay onto a platform on the baler, while another would stand by with baling wire. When enough was pressed into a bale the man with the wire would place three lengths of baling wire around the bale and quickly twist the ends to hold the hay

together. Bales usually weighed between 100 and 110 pounds. The men were young, husky, and able to lift the heavy bales throughout the day. They were paid \$3 per 10 hour day, which was the going rate for such work.

The immigration of people from Mexico and the Far East hadn't taken place yet, so most workmen were Americans who needed any work they could find. They did very well for springtime months, then moved on farther south to help with the prune harvest in Santa Clara Valley. At that time the towns were separated and prune orchards were everywhere.

Horse owners living in Woodside presently purchase hay for their riding horses from ranch owners east of us in the Central Valley. We occasionally see trucks loaded with hay going toward Woodside.

Thousands of immigrants and other people have moved to Belmont and San Carlos and there are no longer any hayfields. Everyone uses automobiles. Hay isn't needed any more and the large hayfields have been replaced with houses.

Now we are told that with so many cars in use we have begun to feel the greenhouse effect. Scientists claim this is caused by the exhaust of cars among other things. They even inform us that ocean and bay waters will rise and flood our lowlands in 60 years. Some may need saddle horses to escape. But not in Belmont. We have nearby hills.

**Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.**



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont wouldn't have been as it is today if some proposed things had occurred. For instance, the Chamber of Commerce proposed a road from the west end of the San Mateo Bridge to the east end of Ralston Avenue. It never happened and that area is all developed now.

Other people proposed an overpass at Ralston Avenue. In my files are sketches of the overpass as it was planned. The state or federal government was willing to finance a large portion of the cost.

The proposed route would have turned off east of the railroad tracks and passed north of the pink building, above the railroad tracks and El Camino Real, north of the Standard Station, then terminate its west end a short distance west of Sixth Avenue.

Opponents of the overpass claimed that it would be 40 feet high. When I explained that the highway department sets the height for overpasses on streets such as the El Camino Real, the man laughed, and said, "Don't tell anybody. They won't think of that". Then he added "Maybe it might be 40 feet to the tops of the light standards placed on top of it".

Following an election the project bit the dust.

Other citizens wanted to have Ralston Avenue widened to four lanes. There was opposition. Finally, a compromise was reached, and three lanes were approved.

Then Belmont needed a new post office. Nearly everyone hoped it would be west of the railroad tracks where it would be handy for them. The government audited the number of mailings east of the railroad tracks and learned there were more mailings down there. So they decided to put a new post office where they could gain more revenue: across the tracks.

At that time Juel Christensen owned a nursery east of the tracks and offered to construct a new post office on some of his land. The government men agreed, and wrote up a 10 year lease that would repay Christensen the value of the construction so he would have the building free and clear at the end of the lease. He was satisfied and work started. That's where our post office is now.

Two pioneer graves were west of Belmont, on a hilltop. The gravestones were removed and later placed in front of the mansion in Twin Pines Park, as historic items. Many persons thought they should have remained at the gravesites.

Much of what we see in Belmont represents changes from the first ideas. Going further, most people have had earlier romances before they were married. None of us would have been "us" if our parents hadn't happened to meet. We and Belmont might have been entirely different. Ever think of that?

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont is hilly and many opportunities exist where persons can make money — if they are careful and if they are lucky. Some of these opportunities do not exist where flatlanders live.

Here's one. About 40 years ago a man came to my office wanting me to sell a vacant lot. He said he had advertised it, but couldn't find a buyer. When he told me his price, I purchased the lot. Then I went to see what I had bought.

I found a large lot with a huge excavation which was full of dirty water, with cans and old tires floating on the surface. There were bunches of willows growing up through the mess on the surface.

I had paid \$1,000 to the man and now I began regretting it. Next, I went to a sign painter and picked up a "Clean Fill Wanted" sign. Placing it near the edge of the property, I left feeling disconsolate. However, in about three months after people had dumped dirt into the lot and I had cut the willows, the lot began to look better. I hired Bragato Paving Co. to level the dirt. Then I put up a "For Sale" sign.

I no longer felt disconsolate a week later when a man came offering me \$10,000 for the lot. I accepted and tried to pat myself on the back. But my happiness was short-lived. The buyer of the lot returned and said he had decided that he wouldn't build on the vacant lot, and that he wanted to list it with me for re-sale. He quoted his price which was \$40,000. I told him that I doubted anyone would pay such a price, but that I would advertise it and try to find a buyer.

Would you believe that in only a week a

large company president came to me and purchased the lot for the listed price. Of course I made a 10 percent commission, but I surely felt very unlucky.

Then there was Louis S. Morton. He placed a \$5,000 deposit on land atop the hill west of El Camino Real, near the south end of Belmont about 40 years ago. He intended to sell lots from the acreage. Then he learned there was no water, and that Belmont wouldn't pipe it there. Poor Louie! He sacrificed his deposit and another man bought the land and soon had a water hookup from San Carlos, which annexed the property. Louie was unlucky.

Another who had some bad luck was Tommy Valern (not related to Edward Vallerger, former mayor of Belmont). Tommy purchased acreage where Carlmont High School stands, together with land north of the school. He was unable to find a buyer and finally allowed someone else to develop the property. Tommy was unlucky.

There have been others who were unlucky and some others who have profited during the real estate expansion of Belmont.

But back to the lot I had purchased for \$1,000 40 years ago and for which a second buyer had paid \$40,000. The lot was 100 by 200 feet in size and now it is completely covered with a factory. Its present value, if it was vacant, would be many times \$40,000. Industrial property is becoming rather scarce.

There are still opportunities in Belmont but some luck will usually help. The city will continue to grow and property investments here should always be safe.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Builders have had to use caution before constructing a new house in Belmont. About 1946 someone had shifted surveyor's stakes a few feet and a house was started without the foreman checking just where he was to build it. Fortunately, he only started the foundation a few feet beyond the lot on Covington Avenue, when a carpenter caught the error. They moved their foundation and the house was built where it belonged.

There may have been other such occurrences, but this is the only one I know about. I went by and saw it happen.

Some Belmont builders have hesitated about starting new homes just before Halloween. They say children have sometimes moved survey stakes. The result has been that builders do not order a survey until about twenty-four hours before starting construction.

The first county surveyor in San Mateo County seems to have been Mr. Garbe. He came here with Count Cipriani. Davenport Bromfield later surveyed many of the Belmont lots.

Survey instruments used by Mr. Garbe were not like those used by Davenport Bromfield. Garbe's were more like what was used much earlier by George Washington when he surveyed in Virginia. Most of us have seen the type of instrument he had used in a museum on the East Coast.

When I lived alone on my deceased father's cattle ranch in Shasta County I was asked to help a man survey his homestead. I borrow-

ed a survey instrument that had no tripod, but had a stick with a point protected by a metal cover which I poked into the ground before arranging the survey instrument. The darn thing worked. While surveying to the mile corners through dense thickets of manzanita and chapparel, I came within three feet of the piles of lava rocks placed there by the Geological Survey men in 1910.

When the survey was completed the man hired me to help him place a four barbed wire fence around the section of land. He built a two room cabin and lived in it three years, and later purchased an adjoining section of railroad land.

When the first railroad was built by Huntington, Crocker, Stanford, and Hopkins the government didn't have enough money to pay them. Congress voted to deed them every other section of land in northern California, leaving other sections for homesteaders. The railroad land was sold for four dollars an acre — which most people thought was far too much. Now some of it sells for two thousand dollars an acre. Still some people claim this to be exorbitant.

It is amusing to find in old records how some parcels of land were marked. Most deeds were handwritten, and some tell of corners being a large oak tree, or a big boulder.

Belmont was more sophisticated and I have been unable to find such deeds in the San Mateo County Records. Our county has always been just a little ahead of some other parts of the State.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Possibly the biggest change seen when passing Belmont on the Bayshore Highway is Redwood Shores and the spot where Marine World used to be. That area doesn't look like it did 50 years ago. And that's for sure!

Between Bayshore and the Bay, 50 years ago there were mud flats. Shanty town was down there. (Shanties were built on stilts.)

Once I went along the boardwalk to see a customer in Shanty town. The seagulls were busy feeding and making their usual noises. The wind was blowing from the northwest and I thoroughly enjoyed my excursion.

The tide was in and the smallest destroyer that used to be anchored there was gone, as was the grape stake fence that had been down by the Bay to keep sharks from eating the oysters in the Morgan Oyster Farm. Already things had begun to change.

Looking back toward the hills I saw the large hill that used to be between the railroad tracks and the Bay. Now it is gone. The redrock was all used to fill low land when the Bayshore Highway was built.

There were very few houses on our Belmont hills. West of the El Camino Real, toward the south end of Belmont, were a few tile roof homes. North of Ralston Avenue were a few houses, with the Van's Restaurant predominating with its yellow paint. It had been brought to Belmont following the Panama Pacific International Exposition when it had been the Japanese building in 1915.

Brewer's Island was toward the Bay from the end of Ralston Avenue and was owned by Mr. Therkeldsen who operated a dairy. His milk cows could be seen grazing on the 400 acres of land he owned. His land was above high tide several feet. The area now covered with the Redwood Shores homes was tide lands — unlike Brewer's Island.

Considerable fill dirt was needed before homes could be built and much of it came from the quarry west of Belmont, along the road to the coast.

When the fill dirt was being hauled down Ralston Avenue some dirt fell off the trucks making a mess, until the City Council passed an ordinance requiring the trucks to be covered. For a time, trucks operated two minutes apart.

One driver lost his brakes as he started down the hill east of Cipriani Boulevard. He gained speed and was flying at the bottom of the grade and guided his truck into a large tree near where the Bank of America stands. He was killed instantly, cremated by the explosion and fire. He was buried with dirt he was hauling.

These are just a few things that happened a long time ago. As another Belmont man and I stood by his car discussing these things, the man commented that "he never looked back."

As I happened to glance at his car's rear window I noticed that it hadn't been washed in ages. Then I laughed.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In Belmont we are fortunate to have banks, since 40 years ago we had none. After many years, the Chamber of Commerce was successful in getting the First National Bank started. It was located on the west side of El Camino Real, about a block south of Ralston Avenue.

After several months, Wells Fargo took it over and has continued its operation up to the present time. However, they eventually moved to their present location so as to have more room, and additional parking space.

Since then we have acquired the Bank of America at Carlmont, Bay View Federal Savings and Loan, Sacramento Savings and Loan, as well as the Glendale Savings and Loan Company.

Apparently Belmonters are doing well financially, for each of the banks appears to be busy. This is impressed on us when we go to make a deposit — we usually stand in line.

Money has been used since civilization began in one form or another. During the Depression in the 1930s many people traded farm products for items they needed. In pioneer days gold coins were commonly used. In fact, paper money wasn't accepted for the purchase of land by many sellers. When persons had \$5 in a gold coin it wasn't easy to keep track of. It was about one quarter inch

in diameter. One man I knew had a \$5 gold piece and sold it for \$100 to a collector.

Farmers and ranchers used to exchange potatoes or flour for dental work and medical services. Imagine going out and digging potatoes while you had a toothache, until you had dug enough to pay your dentist!

On early sailing ships the sailors often exchanged walrus tusks on which they had carved designs, to purchase what they needed ashore. This was known as scrimshaw. Commercial fishermen in Alaska, while I was up there, were seen to trade salmon for food in some stores.

Here in Belmont we have had some very well-known and good bank managers. Among others, there have been Milt Adamson, Ed Morey, and Kathy Mainini, who have all joined our service clubs and Chamber of Commerce and tried to help our community. There were others whose names I do not recall — all excellent people.

Although items other than money have been used for exchange in Belmont, our banks have always required currency or coins. Fortunately Belmont citizens have not depended on exchange and seem always to be able to come up with real money. Belmont people are proud and well established.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Purchasing real property now isn't like it was seventy five years ago. I recall seeing two men sitting on a log, discussing land while they each whittled on sticks. One spat tobacco juice occasionally when his jaw became too full. The other emptied his pipe, then immediately refilled it. They were dickering. That took a while. Occasionally they stopped their discussion of land and changed the subject while they rested. At last they reached agreement and shook hands.

With the agreement reached, the man smoking the pipe told the other that he would go to an attorney that same day and order an abstract of title. No money changed hands up to this point. No written agreement was drawn up. The hand shake was proof enough of the reliability of the man and, afterward I heard, their transaction was completed without any problems. How different it is now!

Nowadays when property changes hands in Belmont there are very easy ways to obtain title. The realtor will prepare the offer. Then you sign and the Realtor takes the paper to the seller. Often the seller has a higher idea and makes a counter offer. The realtor has to go back and forth several times before agreement can be reached.

When the agreement is finally reached the realtor will go to one of the title companies and order a title search. This usually takes about a week to 10 days. The search of the title is absolutely necessary to determine the condition of the title. It will show whether the

seller actually owns the property. The recorded documents must be notarized before the County Recorder will accept them.

If there are no problems concerning the title, the property will change hands. Only then can the new owner take possession.

Notaries are used all over the world. They are appointed by the notary division of the secretary of state's office in Sacramento. Presently a lady named March Fong Eu is our Secretary of State.

Notaries must keep records of whoever signs before them. A driver's license or other positive identification is required. Also, the person signing the legal paper must sign the notary book. These books are retained by the notaries forever but, if a notary dies, the books and all notary equipment must be delivered to the county clerk in Redwood City. They keep these old notary books forever, and must have a great pile of them since our San Mateo County started in 1856.

Many early deeds were written in long hand, some with misspelled words. Often descriptions denoted corners were from trees, mounds of earth, 100 feet from Osborn's barn, or other local landmarks. I have several of these old deeds. They are interesting to look at.

Typewriters were invented, civilization has advanced, Belmont has grown, and become sophisticated. At least we think we are. Persons living here 200 years from now may think we are far behind in what we do. Probably they will be right.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont's mild climate has brought health sanitariums here in the past — some of which still remain.

The Howard Foundation for tuberculosis was here for many years. What was the Alexander Sanitarium is now the Belmont Hills Sanitarium, where nervous disorders are treated. The Twin Pines Sanitarium in Twin Pines Park is no longer a sanitarium. Although two grave markers are there, patients were not buried there. The gravestones were taken from graves on the hill west of Belmont and brought to Twin Pines Park.

The Buena Campbell Sanitarium on Hill Street still takes elderly patients, and is presently a convalescent hospital.

The Gardner Sanitarium is now Ralston Hall, and is a state and national landmark. It is owned by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, a Belgian order. Of course it is no longer a sanitarium. With all these sanitariums in Belmont one might think

sickness didn't exist here, yet Belmont's weather appears to have changed. Rainfall is down and the climate is colder. People sit at bars and wonder whether they may have water to drink.

Possibly the weather is colder in winter and hotter in the summertime. And perhaps it is because of the effect described by scientists. If so, our Belmont climate will become worse. We found it very hot in Belmont last summer for a few days. The heat was awful and was depressing. People coming here from other parts of the country wonder what has happened to the California climate. It just isn't the same.

One man told me had found ice on his windshield and that he had to scrape it off "Almost like New-York," he said. "Anyway," he continued, "I haven't found my radiator frozen, nor have I had to use tire chains."

"You see," I told him, "Belmont is still a better place to live."



A new historical room at the mansion in Twin Pines Park will be open soon. Pictured here are (L-R) Verne Holte, Belmont recreation manager; Tom Selvert, chairman of the Belmont Historical Committee; Russ Estep, Belmont city historian; and Karl Mittelstadt, Belmont park superintendent.



## Belmont history

by Russ Estep

Transportation has greatly improved since our settlement was started in 1850. At that time most people traveled by horseback. Women rode sidesaddle. It was considered indecent for ladies to ride astride a horse. That idea was dropped following World War I.

The ladies' sidesaddles had a hooked cantel for them to hook their right leg over. The left leg was kept in the stirrup. It is a wonder they managed to stay aboard. Saddle horses often shied and the rider easily could have become unseated.

By 1864 when William C. Ralston came to Belmont, it was more fashionable to ride in a carriage. Ralston owned several carriages and kept them in his carriage house - now a storeroom and office space for Notre Dame College.

One fancy carriage of the type he used is in the museum at the College of San Mateo. The San Mateo County Historical Society own and care for it. The driver's seat was high up in front (and one wonders whether seat belts were even thought of!). Other Belmonters used surreys, buggies, carts, wagons and other horse-drawn vehicles, depending on where they planned to go that day.

Trains came to the Peninsula during the Civil War, in 1863. The old records indicate

that travel time from Belmont to San Francisco or to San Jose was reduced from five hours for a carriage down to only three hours for the 25 mile journey. People arrived in better condition and such rides were claimed in old records to be a "great adventure."

The steam engines seemed to be alive and, if one had imagination, he could almost hear it breathing. Following World War II, the old steam engines were replaced with diesels. The whistles sounded differently and some Belmonters complained that they were kept awake. Our city council passed a resolution that trains must reduce their speed through Belmont and not make so much noise. The Southern Pacific engineers weren't happy because of time schedules. Often their whistles could be heard from one end of Belmont to the other in the middle of the night. Soon our city council relented and allowed the trains to increase speed again. Some Belmonters may have begun using ear plugs.

Starting about 1908 some Belmonters had horseless carriages. Now, of course, everyone has an automobile. Transportation isn't what it used to be. Neither are our Belmonters.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont struggled at first in trying to decide on a suitable name for its settlement. Belmont was first called Ocean View, then Water View, then Belmont Terrace, then just Belmont.

A few years ago a man named Lyman wrote a book about William C. Ralston in Belmont. He told of Ralston's guests being lulled to sleep by ocean waves crashing on the beach. Obviously Mr. Lyman had never been in Belmont.

Many early towns started with different names. One was Hang Town, which was changed to Placerville. Then there was Buzard Roost which was changed to Round Mountain. San Francisco was named after St. Francis, which often became shortened in later years to "Frisco." Of course those people may be on better terms with the saints than most of us, and can give a saint a nickname. Personally I think it's awful.

The name Water View suited Belmont better than Ocean View. Because of our hills the name Belmont Terrace probably would have stuck if William C. Ralston hadn't named his property "Belmont."

While researching town names throughout the United States I find 38 Belmonts. Perhaps there may be more. Mr. Ralston may have read Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" and found the name Belmont mentioned.

Other towns have been named by their developers. One was "Azusa" in Southern

California. The story goes that the men stood beside a wagon before work began and one man said the development "just had everything." So why not call it Azusa? "A to Z in the USA." The name stuck and soon all vacant lots were sold.

Some early towns were named for their developers, such as Hayward. It carries the name because Mr. Hayward developed in the area. Then there was Burlingame. After Mr. Ralston acquired 1,000 acres there from Mrs. Burlingame following her husband's death, Ralston named the town Burlingame. But he didn't lose out entirely. A street there was named for Mr. Ralston.

Here in Belmont we find streets named Monroe, Miller and Lyon. Those three men developed our Belmont Country Club Properties. San Carlos was named for King Carlos of Spain. San Bruno was named for St. Bruno and Redwood Shores because it was the wet side of Redwood City.

It's always interesting to research names of early towns, especially here in the west. The 49ers (real miners, not football players) named some foothill strikes, such as Humbug, Rough and Ready, and others. Those names are perhaps descriptive of how the miners thought of the locality. We wonder what they would have named Belmont if they had mined there.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Among Belmont's old-timers who did much to shape our city years ago was Mr. Vincent O'Donnell. He was Chairman of our Planning Commission and served with that group for many years. He worked full-time as an engineer for an airline, and part-time in my real estate office. He was a jolly person, friendly to everybody, and a pleasure to have around. But he had one hang-up. He didn't like signs.

In my office O'Donnell obtained listings, then went to place a For Sale sign on the property. He said he not only didn't think signs should be allowed, but if they were, they should be small such as those used in Hillsborough, and should be only two colors, black and white. He thought they should be no larger than 10 by 12 inches in size, and if not black and white, then gold leaf or brown.

Everyone has heard about Hood River, Ore., and their sign ordinances. O'Donnell claimed their merchants were dissatisfied with the sign restrictions. Presently Belmont has excellent sign ordinances but some aren't being enforced. Our city soon will have a population of 30,000 and when illegal signs are scattered throughout the town newcomers will wonder why our people are leaving. What's wrong with Belmont?

We have an "A" board ordinance and often out-of-town real estaters place their "A" signs on city sidewalks or private property. Both are against our city ordinances. When

"A" board signs are placed on private property, written permission must be obtained from the property owner. The Board of Realtors tries to control its members but policing isn't simple. Each weekend dozens of illegal signs can be seen throughout Belmont. The sign problem is something Belmont didn't formerly have. Problems come with growth.

There were very few people here in the 1800s. When they had property to dispose of they had a simple way of doing it. They passed the word around. Someone always turned up to make an offer. At that time, people were arriving from the eastern part of the United States and all hoped for a home. When some arrived in California with oxen teams, they traded their oxen for lumber to build a house.

Land was cheap by our standards. After Huntington, Hopkins, Crocker and Stanford completed their first railroad, the government didn't have enough money to pay them. Every other section of land in Northern California was deeded to the Big Four. Alternate sections were held for homesteaders. My father bought several sections of good land for \$4 per acre. He thought the Big Four were robbers, because they charged so much!

Back to Vincent O'Donnell. He didn't like signs, but when he died, our city named a park on east Ralston Avenue for him. Then they put up a large sign saying, "Vincent O'Donnell Memorial Park." I hope he liked it. It was brown.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Many of us recently heard an Eastern radio announcer comment that our early Californians were lucky that they didn't have trouble with Indians. How wrong he was!

While Indians here on the Peninsula apparently didn't fight constantly, there were tribes who caused headaches to many settlers north of here.

I cannot find anything in old records indicating that the Indians in Belmont fought to protect their hunting grounds. Everything they had here made for easy living. They had no reason to attack other tribes, and other tribes apparently failed to discover what was available here.

Farther away, the Indians in Northern California were always looking for trouble.

South of here, priests hired Indians to help build missions and to farm. In San Francisco, the priests also hired Indians to build Mission Dolores and to herd cattle. But away from the Bay Area the Indians were quite wild, as shown in some early newspaper items of the 1850s to 1870s. In 1853 a rancher's cattle were killed by Indians, and that same year some horses were stolen by Indians.

On the McCloud River in Northern California in 1854 Indians attacked a group of white men and Chinese, and succeeded in killing a dozen of the Chinese and two of the white men (all without any reason, according to the report). The Indians had been invited to enjoy breakfast with the white men and, while eating, they suddenly arose and began using their arrows and tomahawks.

In 1856 a report states that the horse-drawn stage coach was attacked by Indians near Fall River. In 1858 a report stated that Indians stole some livestock in Shasta County and escaped. Also in 1858 it was reported that three white men were massacred at Pit River.

Sam Burney, an Englishman who was an early immigrant, was butchered by Indians in a place later named for him, Burney, Calif. He had been sitting in his log cabin writing a letter, when the Indians entered and tomahawked him.

Near Yreka in 1859 two men were killed by Indians on the Immigrant Road. By December 1859 most Indian trouble in Northern California seems to have ended. Four hundred Indians were rounded up and moved to a reservation.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

When Spanish missions were operating in the late 1700s, things here were quite different from what we see now. I recall seeing a cartoon 70 years ago that amused me. I shall never forget it.

The cartoon showed an ox cart driven by a Mexican American approaching a hilltop on El Camino Real. The ox cart had solid wooden wheels and was pulled by two oxen. The road was a single track, unimproved, and appeared to be rough. A sign by the road at the top of a hill stated, "Resume Speed." This amused me.

Everything moved slower, but probably people weren't relaxed. There must have been constant problems, just as now, but along a different line. "Vaqueros" would be out herding or looking for certain cattle. The missions owned thousands of cattle. Missions had brands — possibly Mission Dolores would have branded their cattle with "MD," or just "M." Mission San Jose might have had a brand such as "SJ," and Mission Santa Clara an "SC" brand.

Blacksmiths were clever at making branding irons and, when seeing some, I was amazed how letters were formed out of white-hot iron. Modern blacksmiths can also do this. Before World War I, I had a brand at my father's cattle ranch in Shasta County. It was "RE" and was registered in Sacramento. Livestock ran loose even then, and pastures weren't all fenced. The brands were very necessary to identify cattle.

Here on the Peninsula there were the

Arguello cattle. The Arguellos had received their 34,200 acre land grant in 1795. They had several thousand head of cattle. All ran loose, intermingling with cattle of the missions. Once each year a round-up was held, livestock separated and identification brands placed on the left hip of the cattle. Ears were also marked at that time.

In Shasta County, when I lived alone there, I placed my ear mark on my own cattle. The mark was a "crop, swallow fork, and underhack in the left ear, and swallow fork in the right." Everyone recognized the mark at that time, just as earlier people had done more than a century earlier.

None of this was put into use when fences were built. Cattle could be kept separate from the neighbors. Old reports tell of Mr. Stanford having several thousand head of cattle on his large holdings in the late 1800s. At first the cattle were butchered for meat and the hides dried and shipped to the east coast for the manufacture of shoe leather. When the dry hides reached New England, the raw hides were tanned so as to make the leather soft so it could be worked. Tanning was crude, and very slow — not at all like it is done today.

In the old days there were several ways of doing it. In Alaska I noticed Eskimo women tanning animal hides. After the hides had been soaked in thin yellow liquid the women would chew on them. Perhaps this was why Eskimo men prefer not to kiss their women. They rub noses.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

When the early settlers were here on the Peninsula they found our roads not yet gravelled and had water breaks where small culverts were later built. When traveling across a waterbreak they slowed their teams so as not to be bounced out. On the east coast these water breaks were referred to as "thank you mams." I suppose the ditch caused riders to suddenly lean forward in a sort of bow.

It was a long time before our El Camino Real, which was then Old County Road, was gravelled. Much later it was paved. Stores were established very early so items could be bought locally and people wouldn't need to travel to San Francisco.

Now, we see commuter trains and busses crowded in commute hours. Yet many Belmont people seldom travel to San Francisco.

Everything they need is available right here.

Belmont and San Carlos have a great variety of stores and service facilities. When your vacuum or washing machine breaks down it is easy to find a local person who will repair it. Repairs for an automobile here are quickly done and prices are usually reasonable. Most Belmonters don't find it necessary to go elsewhere to find good repairmen.

One man told me that he only goes to San Francisco once a year, and that isn't when he needs to buy something. He said he goes for the excursion. Some Belmont people travel to San Francisco to see shows, and plays. But these are available here, especially at the Circle Star Theatre, and Notre Dame College, or

our other colleges and high schools.

How fortunate we are that we have fast double-deck trains, and busses. Riding on a double-deck train should be a thrill for Belmonters who haven't experienced it. A pleasant excursion would be to ride such a train either to San Jose or San Francisco without disembarking at the other end — then ride it back.

Belmont was quite different many years ago. A book was compiled of stories by old-timers a few years ago. It's title was "Belmont As We Remember It." The first edition sold out quickly, but a second edition is now in the process of being prepared. It should be available by summer. Many of the old-timers have passed away and it is good that we in Belmont have a good source of early information as contained in the book. Some call it a "classic."

The El Camino Real is wide now and a fine highway. There is no longer a need for water breaks. The water on low places flows beneath the highway in pipes. However, the El Camino dips at several locations where overpasses have been built. The dips are gradual — not little ditches such as old-timers were bounced from in earlier days. We are lucky to be living in our modern times and especially in Belmont.

As our city grows the time may come when San Franciscans will be coming here to do their shopping. A former mayor says "that'll be the day!"

**Russel Estep is Belmont's city historian.**



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

There doesn't seem to be anything in old records telling how the Indians in Belmont communicated. They don't appear to have used signal fires and smoke, as Indians in the Midwest did. Perhaps our local Indians didn't wish to communicate. They could talk to members of the local tribes verbally and they don't appear to have had a desire to communicate with other Indians.

Following the era of the Indians, William C. Ralston had a telegraph in his Belmont home before 1876. Before Ralston's telegraph, local people had to drive their horses to San Mateo or Redwood City to send messages. When early people received a telegram they shook and some fainted. Such messages weren't sent unless it was a matter of life or death. They frequently contained a notice that a relative or friend had died.

Many other telephones were installed during the next few years. Now Belmonters could communicate with others anywhere. Long distance calls were expensive and they didn't always come through, but at least people could somehow be heard. Those early telephones were usually mounted against a wall and operated with a crank. The cranks were on the right side (left-handed persons found it almost impossible to use a telephone).

Telephone calls were much different than now. Calls such as two shorts and a long were issued. By turning the crank you could reach another party, if you spaced your cranking correctly. Magnetos were used for power and there was usually a hum on the line. When someone wished to talk away it was necessary to go through several central stations. Privacy wasn't possible. The central

operators usually listened in — also the neighbors.

It was many years before the Bell System was improved so a telephone conversation was satisfactory. Much later when cables were laid to Hawaii and Europe, most of the noise cleared up. Our modern telephone service is excellent. We can converse with friends in Europe, China, and anywhere in the world and the audio comes through on both ends of the line. Hawaii calls seem like locals.

Another method of communication came to this area with the establishment of radio. A KPO transmitting tower stood near where Marine World came later. The KPO broadcasts were heard over the western United States and engineers claimed the low, wet ground helped. Presently we see broadcast towers near the eastern end of the Dumbarton Bridge.

There are dozens of amateur radio operators in Belmont and San Carlos, some of whom are in daily communication with Europe and Asia. They do it for a hobby — and a good hobby it is!

Now we have new "Fax" machines for Belmont communications. Many people have had them installed in their homes and offices. The "Fax" machines are capable of sending letters, word for word, or confirming checks or bill payments within seconds across the country. When someone says you didn't pay a bill, your "Fax" machine will instantly display your cancelled check before the man in New York.

Since the Indians were here our communications have improved greatly. They are better than smoke signals.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

Belmont streets were named for persons who were well-known at the time. One street was Carmelita. Most Belmonters don't know how it received its name. The name is a good one, and invokes a pleasant thought. First, most people like the city of Carmel, others like candy containing a part of the name, while others just like the musical sounding name itself.

The street was named for a well-known person who lived here in former years — Carmelita Wynn. Her father had been Sidney M. Mezes. Sidney M. Mezes was the attorney who helped Mrs. Arguello settle her land grant estate of 34,200 acres here on the Peninsula. Mr. Mezes was a very prominent person in the old days. There are still descendants of Mezes living in San Francisco. They too are well-known, although not in the same circle as their ancestor.

Carmelita Mezes married an English man, Ernest M. Philips-Wynn. He was from an old, distinguished family. Several members of the family had been active in diplomatic work for England.

Carmelita and Ernest raised two children, Edward Cyril Wynn, and Sidney Mezes Wynn. Edward was a cum laude graduate from Harvard University. When World War I started he quickly enlisted in the British army, and within a short time he rose to the rank of captain. He saw active service but, as far as I can learn, he wasn't wounded. He was decorated for bravery twice — by England and the United States. At the end of the war he

helped at the Peace Conference. Following that, he returned to the Diplomatic Service.

His brother, Sidney Mezes Wynn, graduated from the University of California and when World War I started he entered the Navy. At war's end he went into business in San Francisco (he had business ability he had apparently inherited from his father.) Some of his descendants still reside in San Francisco and on the Peninsula.

Carmelita Mezes Wynn's mother had been Miss Juliet Johnson, a daughter of Mr. Sidney L. Johnson. Mr. Johnson was an attorney, and he had helped Justice Field revise California's codes. He was well known and highly respected. It is said that if he hadn't died early many other changes might have been made in our codes.

Carmelita's mother had been a lady of highest culture and attainments, a distinguished linguist, and she was highly traveled. She was a social leader.

Mr. and Mrs. Mezes lived in Belmont, although he had his choice of "anyplace with the original settlement out of the Alameda de las Pulgas land grant." It is reported that he loved Belmont.

Belmont originally was the home of many very prominent people. This has continued to the present. There are so many that we cannot name them here. But if you aren't one, just look around you. The people you see may be well-known throughout the world. Some might even be descendants of Carmelita Wynn Mezes, an early Belmont celebrity.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

### By Russel Estep

When early people came to Belmont in the 1850s, they sometimes found themselves with toothaches. Things weren't quite as we find them now. Dentists were scarce.

If their teeth hurt so much that they thought they couldn't stand a buggy ride over the rough unimproved road to San Francisco, they sometimes wished they hadn't come west to California. Trains were not yet running to San Francisco. That came in 1863.

But, there was one dentist a little nearer than San Francisco. He was Dr. Tripp of Woodside. Dr. Tripp pulled teeth and did his best to fill cavities with his primitive equipment. His office was in his Woodside store, which is now an historical site. It may be visited and the displays are interesting.

Early dentists worked on their patients while the patient was sitting upright in a chair. Dentists had to lean down and they had difficulties in treating cavities. Nowadays their patients lie stretched out in a dental chair and the dentist can better see what he must do.

Old reports tell that when Belmont people had tooth problems in the 1850s, before trains came to the Peninsula, they had to drive a buggy to either San Francisco or to Woodside. The roads weren't yet graveled and in places they were rough. The road conditions didn't do much to help a person with a severe toothache. According to old reports some patients arrived at Dr. Tripp's store in an exhausted condition. Dr. Tripp had established his dental practice soon after he arrived in Woodside.

There were some people who believed they couldn't stand the drive to Woodside (or to San Francisco) and these persons sometimes resorted to any available method to gain relief. One cowboy doubted if he had enough money to pay Dr. Tripp, so he discussed his toothache with a blacksmith. The blacksmith looked into his mouth and then commented that he believed he could help the fellow. The blacksmith went to work.

He filled the cavity in the tooth with cement, and told the poor cowboy to keep his mouth open while the cement set. Afterward the cowboy commented that sitting there on the tree stump with his mouth open for two hours was really difficult. People said afterward that he couldn't talk right for a long time, but he could still yell at the cattle. Incidentally, the report states that he recovered, and had no further trouble with the bad tooth.

Belmont acquired several dentists before World War II. One was Dr. Lee Gambitz. Dr. Gambitz practiced in his Belmont home and had many patients. He was well-liked, and served as treasurer for the Lions Club for many years. He had come to Belmont from San Francisco where his sign could be seen high up on a building along Market Street. Presently Belmont has several excellent dentists.

But back to the cowboy: People said he went around spitting for months following his bout with the blacksmith. He doubted if the blacksmith had washed his hands. He said he had a strange taste in his mouth.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

In 1925 when Belmont people drove to Los Angeles they found the town surrounded by many small towns, separated by farms. The farms were either row crops or orchards. Unlike the Santa Clara Valley where prunes were raised on all the farming countryside, the Southern California area was planted with citrus fruits and other crops requiring a mild climate.

No one ever dreamed that the city of Los Angeles would be developed so greatly until it had absorbed the small towns. Neither would Belmonters have believed that San Jose would become so large as we find it now. It, too, has absorbed several towns within its greater area.

In 1925 when Belmonters rode a train to San Jose or took the interurban street car from Palo Alto, they found prune tree limbs almost brushing the car windows. Some small towns such as Mayfield have been absorbed by larger cities. Big fish eat little fish!

Sometimes we see Peninsula cities permitting shopping centers in their outlying areas — far from the town's center. Belmont is such a city. The shopping center between El Camino Real and the Bayshore Highway is one and the Carlmont Shopping Center is another. Citizens living in the two areas can shop close to their homes so they appreciate the convenience. But do they think ahead?

Of course it will be many years before the city of Belmont grows enough to connect the Plaza Shopping Center with downtown — but it will come.

When the condominiums and large homes

were to be built on the hill at the west side of San Carlos, the area west of Crestview at the corner of Brittan Avenue was set aside for a shopping center. A later city council changed the zoning and refused a later builder permits for his proposed shopping center. The result is that San Carlos is keeping its city center in one place. It has amenities that it wouldn't have if it were smaller.

So far San Carlos doesn't have parking meters, and still permits angle parking on Laurel Street which allows for more spaces for cars. Their town center will, no doubt, expand as time goes on, and it is presently not likely that the city center growth will expand as far as Crestview.

But who knows? People keep multiplying, and more and more keep moving to the Peninsula. We live in a much desired part of the United States. While San Francisco seems to be losing its citizens, the Peninsula towns keep enjoying growth.

We like our climate and easy living here. The time will surely come someday when our city has skyscrapers. After all, Belmont has a good foundation base of shallow bedrock, so piling wouldn't need to be driven down but a few feet.

While San Francisco isn't growing, all cities around it are adding to their population. Within a century there will likely be no vacant lots in Belmont, or any other Peninsula city. It might be interesting if we could reappear in 100 years to see the entire Bay region as one big city, probably called "Greater San Francisco." One joker said, "Or Greater Belmont!"



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

### By Russell Estep

There are some places along the Peninsula where the winds can be depended upon to blow consistently. One of these places happens to be Belmont. The wind here comes from the northwest and this is why the air strip for the former Belmont airport slanted westward.

Airplanes were small when the local Belmont airport was in use. It was located where the Mae Nesbit school was built later. In 1945 I won a contest for an article telling why everyone should learn to fly. I was given a free airplane ride for myself and family. Although I had flown many times before this, my family hadn't and they were thrilled. We flew out from Belmont.

Flying lessons were given at the little airport and many Peninsula persons took advantage of this and received pilot's licenses. Some became commercial pilots. There were other small airports along the Peninsula, such as in San Carlos, Redwood City, Palo Alto, and others.

When World War II started, one of the most noticeable things for persons living on the Peninsula was sudden quietness because the airports were closed immediately. Then Army trucks began rolling northward along El Camino Real, and big guns could be heard up at Fort Point in San Francisco as they boomed out their large shells toward the sea, probably for practice. Mills Field was operating for commercial flights on a limited scale.

At the war's end, the larger San Francisco airport was built and many members of the

Belmont Chamber of Commerce attended the opening ceremony. Mayor Robinson gave a talk. The Irish Airlines sent a helicopter to circle over the reviewing stand and they dropped plastic bags of shamrocks to us. We sat on folding chairs on the Bay side of the central terminal. Each of us were handed badges with our name and "Belmont" on them. I still have mine.

But back to the local airport. Belmont began to grow. The land was needed for homes. Soldiers had been returning for several years and many liked the Peninsula and desired to remain here. Airplanes were larger and runways had to be longer. The little Army camp that had been built on a part of the Belmont airport site had been taken apart and removed.

Oddstead Builders purchased the land and built what they called Sterling Downs. Their homes all had concrete floors, which they claimed no termites could eat, and their homes had three bedrooms and two car garages. They were sold quickly and Belmont's population soared. With our present inflation, the first owners who held onto their houses can resell now at a large profit. Some houses there are selling for up to \$250,000 if they have been updated and kept in good condition. A very nice reward for deciding to come to Belmont! Those people are glad they came, and stayed here. Other Belmont citizens are glad to have them here also. They are more quiet than the little airport used to be.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

A Belmont school child asked what kind of buildings the first people in Belmont lived in. I explained to him that wherever people lived, most tried to build the best shelter available from material they found locally. I told him the first people had possibly lived in log cabins. When lumber became available from sawmills at Woodside, it is probable the same Belmont people built single wall houses; later to be replaced with double wall dwellings.

Most settlers in our outlying areas first built single-wall homes. Anything for protection from cold weather. Over in Hawaii most houses are single-wall dwellings. The mild climate makes it unnecessary to double the walls for warmth. Northern California was far behind this Peninsula until Shasta Dam was built, causing more people to go there. Early ranchers lived in single-wall houses for the most part.

Some people wonder how our East Coast settlers could have built the four-story buildings in eastern cities. Perhaps those persons had not traveled. If they had, they would have seen many well-built homes and buildings in Europe. Some, of course, were built of stone, but even those were put together carefully and the stones fit well.

In England, those people would have seen the Shakespeare house. It was built with lumber that must have been sawed with long crosscut saws — one man under a log and one above. (I pity the man that was under where sawdust would have floated into his eyes.)

When our first Americans arrived in this country they had already lived where housing was fairly good. The single-wall houses came later when people traveled westward. All were in a hurry to get their crops in, fences built, and their homes ready for winter. They often

built homes in a great rush. Homes of board and batten were perhaps not as warm as double-wall homes but people were able to keep warm. Wood was usually close by.

In the Midwest where there were no trees; the early settlers dug into small hillsides and then built a front of adobe bricks that they had made. Openings were left for windows and, at night when it was cold, sacks or other cloth could be placed across the window openings.

In areas of the early West where there were no sawmills. The settlers usually had to use whatever was available. Trees were plentiful and log cabins were built. About the hardest work I ever did was to help a doctor friend construct a log cabin for his recreation home in Mill Valley.

But back to Belmont. It is amusing to think that our Belmont Count Leonetto Cipriani didn't know about the nine sawmills that were operating in Woodside when he planned to come to Belmont in 1850. He had a house constructed in Italy which was then taken apart and shipped around Cape Horn to San Francisco. All the while, lumber was actually in Woodside.

The Cipriani house had double walls and when William C. Ralston purchased the Cipriani property in 1864 Ralston began adding to the Cipriani house until it had 50 rooms. The Ralston addition, as well as the Cipriani house, had double walls. Both lived very comfortably.

Now, of course, all homes must be constructed with double walls. All of us in Belmont live comfortably. Pioneering days are past.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

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# carlmont history

by Russ Estep

**By Russell Estep**

Many Belmont and San Carlos people are unaware that there is an old house in San Carlos on Dale Avenue that was built in 1872. A group of San Francisco businessmen had it constructed as a weekend party house where they could come and relax. It is at 125 Dale Ave. and is presently occupied.

The house has three stories, terminating with a tower at the highest point. It's situated in the woods where it isn't easily seen. Presumably the location was chosen for that very reason.

Probably those early businessmen never made the business trips their wives believed they had. They came to San Carlos. Although the house is more than 100 years old, it is still very livable.

With women admitted to clubs as they are now, one must wonder how the early people would have felt if they saw women in local clubs. It wasn't a problem for the men. (Perhaps women had something similar where they too might go for a weekend!)

Of course, nowadays many business people own mountain cabins. It seems that people haven't changed much in the last century. Men go without their families now and then to the mountains or seashore to get away to think and relax.

The famous Janke Picnic Grounds in Belmont were well-patronized during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Dozens of "men only" groups congregated there to talk business and relax. Other picnics were family affairs. Old news items tell about some of the carousing which indicates some of the patrons were loaded with liquor and broke train windows

en route down the Peninsula to Belmont.

Old records tell us that drinks weren't diluted with soda or water as they are now. It didn't take much for the "businessmen" to absorb too much. They were ready to party before they arrived.

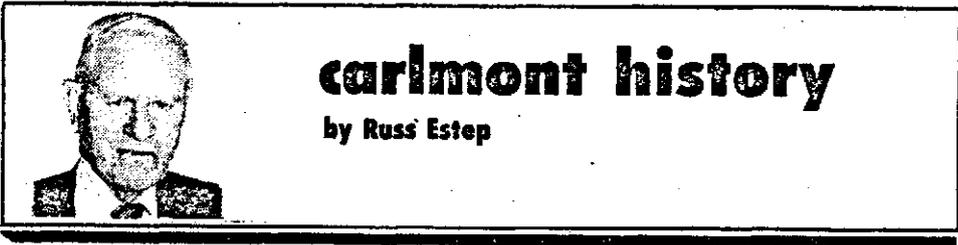
People don't change much. There is a "Grove" in the redwoods north of San Francisco, on the Marin side, where men meet once a year to party — and talk business. No doubt they enjoy their stay, and perhaps some large transactions are initiated there. This group has never allowed women to attend the gatherings.

Old newspaper items describe how Senator Sharon frequently came to Belmont when he took over William C. Ralston's house. His numerous parties are described. Following a shooting over in Lathrop, however, there weren't so many people at his parties. Both he and Mr. Ralston maintained homes in San Francisco as well as in Belmont; Ralston before Sharon's takeover, and he before then.

But back to the old house on Dale Avenue in San Carlos. It would have interesting things to tell us if the walls could talk. When a circus performer heard about the partying by the men from San Francisco, he was heard to say, "It must have been something like putting a dozen bull elephants in a pen all at once." I don't quite know his reasoning, but he may have understood elephants and men better than I do.

Anyway, there is no telling what California and this Peninsula might have developed into if men hadn't congregated now and then at 125 Dale Ave., San Carlos. It is a historic place.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



By Russel Estep

Two men named Reed and Reid are mentioned in old Belmont records. They were not related. One seems to have had more education than the other, although both appear to have been a success in their endeavors. One was a dairyman and the other an educator.

On May 17, 1873 Thomas Reed is mentioned in old records as having built a barn which was 60 by 100 feet in size and was two stories high. He was to use it for his 50 dairy cows and the storage of hay.

Another old newspaper item states that the Reed milk wagon will make daily deliveries of milk and that a quart a day delivered would cost \$2.50. If anyone wanted a gallon at the dairy undelivered it would cost them 50 cents. His delivery wagon could be seen each day being pulled by a single horse which some claimed would make its regular stops in front of houses without being told "whoa." His advertisements in an old paper are dated March 1882.

A street was named for the other Mr. Reid. Reid operated the Reid School for Boys at the corner of Alameda de las Pulgas and what later became Ralston Avenue. There are still men in Belmont who, as boys, had attended the Reid School. They speak very highly of W.T. Reid. His school later became the St. Joseph Military Academy. The Reid School opened in 1885 and closed in 1918.

Mr. Reid had been a president of the state university, although its location wasn't included in old records. He had also been assistant to the head master in the Boston Latin School, and principal of the Boys High school in San Francisco. He was apparently well qualified for his new position. His students received an excellent education.

Mr. Reid's assistant was Mr. W. Leverett, a graduate of Harvard University. He had

received high honors in the classics. One old article tells of Professor Reid adding an addition to his school so his enrollment of 25 could be increased to 50. The new addition contained 18 rooms.

Mr. Reid had special buttons made for the boy's jackets. The jackets were blue and the large brass buttons had a bas relief of a California bear. There was also raised lettering adding, "Belmont School."

In 1918 the Reid School was purchased by Archbishop Hanna and thereafter it was operated as a preparatory school for boys. For awhile the school was a semimilitary school and the boys were required to march and learn basic military training. Of course all public schools also required that during World War I.

I recall marching during that period, and think I was lucky to receive such training.

Mr. Reid retired after selling the school to the Catholics and he didn't live long in retirement. He received \$100,000 for the school so he must have lived comfortably.

Mr. Reid's death occurred in 1922 in Berkeley when he was 80 years of age. In his life he had done a great deal for Belmont and a street carries his name.

There doesn't seem to be anything in old records as to what happened to the other Reed, but his presence had been felt in early years when he owned his dairy here. He dispensed milk while the other Mr. Reid dispensed education. Perhaps the education lasted longer.

If a man owned 50 cows in some countries he would be considered wealthy and he might be a pillar of the community. In America, education can accomplish the same result and you don't have to feed the cows.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

## Russ Estep

By Russell Estep

Probably most people in Belmont have seen the Catholic church at the Carlmont Shopping Center. However they may not have seen the little St. Michael Chapel directly behind it. There is a narrow paved road along the back of the large church and it will take you to the chapel. The road is directly to the right of the church.

The chapel was built in 1920 to accommodate boys attending the Saint Joseph Military Academy. The academy and its buildings covered much of what is presently the shopping center. The football field for the students was where the stores and shops currently are.

Previous to the opening of the St. Joseph Military Academy in 1918, the boys attending the Reid School had no chapel. Apparently religion hadn't been stressed. Yet the boys had behaved, and no wild reports appear in old records stating otherwise.

It appears that early as well as modern Belmonsters liked to attend church. The first church in Belmont was the one built between the railroad tracks and Old County Road. Both Episcopalians and Catholics held services there until other facilities were constructed.

The little church on Old County Road seemed to be too near the railroad tracks and the noise disturbed the worshipers. The congregation decided to move. Finally, a lot was donated to them on Fifth Avenue and the little church was moved there in 1935. Later the

Episcopalians built a larger church north of the little church, and that one is still in use. It too was built on a lot that had been donated. The creek flows under the church and when the creek is high in some winters you can hear water gurgling under the church floors.

Soon the Catholics had a church built near the entrance to Notre Dame College. It was replaced later by a new, larger church at the Carlmont Shopping Center.

At Notre Dame College there is a large chapel that has amazing acoustics. Like in the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City, you can hear a pin drop from the front end to the back. The first little church near Notre Dame's entrance is used for art displays, and other such functions:

The Catholics also have a church-in-the-round at Sterling Downs. Like in the Circle Star Center, the action takes place from the center.

There are many other churches in Belmont of various denominations. Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, a Jewish synagogue, and others.

It appears that religion really took hold following the incidents which took place 2,000 years ago at the Coliseum in Rome. Without religion there would be chaos.

Chaos in Belmont? Belmont's gears run smoothly although many people say there are a few "high cogs."

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

### By Russ Estep

Several young people have asked me what it would have been like living on the Peninsula way back in the early 1800s. I told them it would have been quite like they find it now in reference to things young people do. Of course the young boys then rode horses. Automobiles, TV, trains, radio, electric lights, telegraph, street cars, and many other things boys now find very commonplace hadn't been invented.

The young fellows asking me these questions came in a four-wheel drive vehicle with everything on it that they found available. It was really dressed up. It had curtains on its windows and the boys reminded me of young roosters — ready to crow. I began research.

I discovered an old item about a boy who worked for Mrs. Arguello on her 34,200 acre land grant. He was a Mexican, 16 years of age, and he herded the Arguello cattle. He spoke broken English, had no education, had black hair, and rode a sorrel horse.

Pedro's pay wasn't much — just \$10 a month and his board. The cowboys were fed in a mess hall, and slept in the barn on the hay. At least that's where they were bedded down. They became very tired at day's end and Pedro didn't sleep much for he found the hay crackled, and the nearby horses stomped. He awoke early every morning almost as tired as when he bedded down the night before.

He liked what he was doing and actually felt lucky to be doing it. He wanted to attend Mass on Sunday mornings, but didn't always have time. Cattle sometimes jumped a fence and broke wires, or horses escaped from their nearby corral. Pedro was kept busy.

At first his saddle was an old one he purchased from another Mexican cowboy, but after the first six months he exchanged it and

paid some boot for a better saddle. He was 16, felt grown up and, like boys of today, he wanted "only the best for his outfit."

His spurs had 3-inch rowels, and had flower-stamped leather straps. His chaps were leather, with a huge shiny buckle. He had an Indian braid and a lariat of buckskin which he found stiff and hard to throw — but he cured that by tying it around his saddle horn and dragging it along the ground a few hours. Then it was loose and usable. He could easily rope a calf by either its front or hind feet. He was reported to have been a good cowboy.

He took good care of his sorrel horse, and brushed and curried it until its hair shone. Pedro made quite a show as he rode out each morning. He hoped to impress the cook's daughter, a short fat Mexican seniorita. But the cook didn't appreciate Pedro's efforts. She had higher ideas for her only child.

Like boys of today, Pedro strutted like a rooster at certain times. But the girl listened to her mother and would not let him take her horseback riding.

At age 16 his thoughts were exactly like those of boys today. He wanted his riding outfit to attract attention. His *rapaderos* were flower-stamped, had large silver buttons on the sides and his bridle bit was inlaid with silver. His bridle reins were of braided rawhide like his lariat, and his flat brim cowboy hat had tassels from the brim.

Local boys today get their kicks from driving four-wheel drive vehicles, decked out with everything available to cause people to turn and look at them. Young fellows want attention, and especially from girls. They were the same 150 years ago.

Believe me, I know. I used to be one, although not quite that long ago.

Russ Estep is Belmont's city historian.

27 • San Carlos-Belmont Enquirer Bulletin • Wednesday, June 7, 1989



## carlmont history

by Russ Estep

### By Russel Estep

Several young people have asked me what it would have been like living on the Peninsula way back in the early 1800s. I told them it would have been quite like they find it now in reference to things young people do. Of course the young boys then rode horses. Automobiles, TV, trains, radio, electric lights, telegraph, street cars, and many other things boys now find very commonplace hadn't been invented.

The young fellows asking me these questions came in a four-wheel drive vehicle with everything on it that they found available. It was really dressed up. It had curtains on its windows and the boys reminded me of young roosters — ready to crow. I began research.

I discovered an old item about a boy who worked for Mrs. Arguello on her 34,200 acre land grant. He was a Mexican, 16 years of age, and he herded the Arguello cattle. He spoke broken English, had no education, had black hair, and rode a sorrel horse.

Pedro's pay wasn't much — just \$10 a month and his board. The cowboys were fed in a mess hall, and slept in the barn on the hay. At least that's where they were bedded down. They became very tired at day's end and Pedro didn't sleep much for he found the hay crackled, and the nearby horses stomped. He awoke early every morning almost as tired as when he bedded down the night before.

He liked what he was doing and actually felt lucky to be doing it. He wanted to attend Mass on Sunday mornings, but didn't always have time. Cattle sometimes jumped a fence and broke wires, or horses escaped from their nearby corral. Pedro was kept busy.

At first his saddle was an old one he purchased from another Mexican cowboy, but after the first six months he exchanged it and

paid some boot for a better saddle. He was 16, felt grown up and, like boys of today, he wanted "only the best for his outfit."

His spurs had 3-inch rowels, and had flower-stamped leather straps. His chaps were leather, with a huge shiny buckle. He had an Indian braid and a lariat of buckskin which he found stiff and hard to throw — but he cured that by tying it around his saddle horn and dragging it along the ground a few hours. Then it was loose and usable. He could easily rope a calf by either its front or hind feet. He was reported to have been a good cowboy.

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People lived differently than we do now here on the Peninsula when the Arguello family owned their 34,200 acre land grant in 1795. They had no electricity, radio, telephones, trains, automobiles, and hundreds of other things we think we couldn't get along without. Even sounds were different.

In the early morning they would hear roosters crowing, cattle bawling, cow bells in the distance, horses stomping waiting for their morning hay. Milk cows would be lowing while standing near the fence waiting for young Pedro Peraita, a sixteen-year-old cowboy handyman to do the milking, after

which he would take the milk to the house to be strained.

Although he was young, he worked along with the men and owned several head of cattle. The cowboys gave him a nickname of "Pepe." Pepe's cattle were branded with his initial "P".

Pepe took great pleasure in hunting. Deer were plentiful and it was no trouble to find them. His gun was an old flintlock which, when riding, he carried at a 45 degree angle under his right leg between the leg and his horse's side. He could hit a bullseye target at one hundred feet, 99 times out of a hundred. He was a crack shot, and proud of it.

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He ate his meals with the other cowboys, sitting on a hard bench beside an uncovered wooden table. The cook dished out the food and nobody received a second helping. The cook's name was Senora Vasquez, a fat healthy, black-haired woman who had one daughter and no husband.

The Arguello home was at the intersection of what was later named San Carlos and Cordilleras Avenues. Later, in 1821, it was moved to one block north of San Carlos Avenue, on Cedar Street. You can still see where it was as the street is wider there. One of the old Arguello buildings still stands, and is being lived in.

San Carlos Avenue was the Arguello driveway to the El Camino Real which was across the present railroad tracks.

Pepe not only like to hunt but also enjoyed riding his bay horse. But the horse was lively and he had to avoid spurring it on cold mornings. But one morning he forgot and jabbed his spurs into the horse's side. He was proud that he could stay atop the horse, but then the latigo strap holding the cinch broke. Both he

and his saddle went flying. He was unconscious momentarily, then woke up and found that he couldn't move.

The cook's daughter came running and took his head in her arms, rubbed her fingers through his hair, and tried to soothe him. Then her mother appeared with her red apron flying in the wind, calling "Come away. Come away."

Pepe recovered quickly. Before re-entering the kitchen the cook called over her shoulder, "You bring me some venison tonight. You bum." Then she closed the kitchen door.

Pepe held the reins tightly as he re-mounted his horse so it couldn't get its head down and start bucking again. He knew he could bring home the venison and that he could do it with one shot. He had heard talk that someone somewhere was working on a new type of gun that could shoot faster and more than one shot at a time. He decided he would never want such a gun. He was proud that he aimed well and saved bullets by always using just a single shot. He wondered why everyone wouldn't be proud to shoot as well.

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