

Volume 26 Number 2

August 2005

CALIFORNIA THE ORNIAN

Magazine of the California History Center Foundation/De Anza College—
A Foundation Supporting the Study and Preservation of State and Regional History



Uncovered Roots — Common Ground

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FEATURE

Uncovered Roots—Common Ground

By Sharon McCray

Osborne Hall, the Woman's Relief Corps Home, and the University of California's Bay Area Research and Extension Center

In the center of Silicon Valley, surrounded by upscale shopping malls and quiet, single-family homes, sit 17.5 acres of Santa Clara Valley history; a history which includes a facility for children with mental and physical challenges, a home for Civil War widows of Union soldiers, and, most recently, an agency responsible for critical agricultural research guiding the farmers and home gardeners of Santa Clara County, once famous for its orchards and lush landscape.

This is the story—the last 120 years—of the land beneath the University of California Cooperative Extension's Bay Area Research and Extension Center (BAREC). The BAREC site is located at 90 North Winchester Boulevard (once known as Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road and Santa Clara-Santa Cruz Road) near Stevens Creek Boulevard and is bordered also by Forest Avenue, Dorcich Street, and Henry Avenue. The property, originally part of a larger parcel, is currently within the limits of the City of Santa Clara but has also been part of the City of San José.

BAREC, the agricultural research facility operated by the University of California (UC) beginning in the 1920s—initially called the Deciduous Fruit Field Station—performed critical agricultural research that set standards for orchardists, farmers and gardeners until the station's closing in 2002.

UC's mission was to research fruit, vegetable, and flower crops—crops that play an important role in California's multi-billion dollar agriculture industry of today. This research facility was the only UC agricultural facility with a focus on the central coast region of California. Although it was the smallest research facility in the UC system, it was the most heavily used.

In 1991 the station's name was changed to the Bay Area Research and Extension Center better to describe the work it performed for the post-World War II community it was now serving. The "new orchardists" were the home gardeners locating in this fertile valley by the tens of thousands annually since the 1940s.

About the Author

A native of Oakland, Sharon McCray moved to Santa Clara County in 1959. She has been interested in history since she began researching her family history in 1963 while in high school. A Master Gardener, Master Composter and president of Prusch Farm Park Foundation, she resides in Campbell, McCray is married and has three children.

Beginnings of the Cooperative Extension

Three acts signed by President Lincoln in 1862 shaped the U.S. agricultural history: the act authorizing a U.S. Department of Agriculture; the Homestead Act, encouraging settlement of public domain lands; and the Morrill Act establishing land grant colleges in every state and placing instruction in agriculture and home economics in higher education. The Homestead Act caused a stampede for land (which was practically free) and new problems arose. How could all these new landowners learn about farming and how would it be possible to educate the poor people working on farms now?

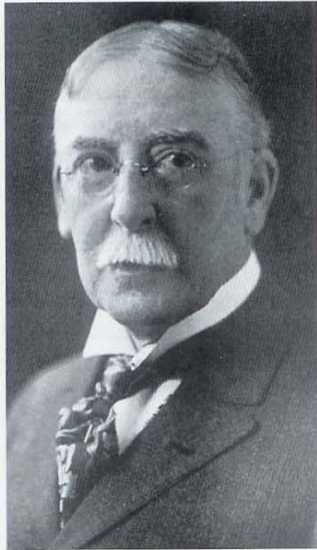
The history and formation of the cooperative extension date back to The Hatch Act of 1887 which established a cooperative bond between USDA and the nation's land grant colleges allocating annual federal funding for research. This was one of the ways to improve the productivity of the farms and by doing this, build up the economy and also help the communities. It was the driving force for the land-grant colleges to meet the agriculture's needs. The Smith-Lever Act in 1914 provided funds for cooperative administration of agricultural extension education by USDA and the state land grant colleges.

From: <http://are.berkeley.edu/extension/bkground.html> 5/13/05



Since California achieved statehood in 1850, the property had been put to a variety of uses, principally farming. In 1884 state legislation authorized the acquisition of the original 51-acre site in Santa Clara County to establish the California Home for the Care and Training of the Feeble Minded ("feeble minded," a term no longer used in the field of psychology, described a variety of physical and mental conditions) after problems developed at a facility near Vallejo. The home opened on the Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road (now Winchester Boulevard) site in 1886 to serve deaf and blind children, and those with developmental challenges such as autism.

Former Pennsylvanian Dr. Antrim Edgar Osborne, the home's first permanent superintendent, was one of very few physicians on the Pacific coast working in the field of mental health in this period. At one point there were 110 children under his care. His work included innovative programs such as using marching and music therapeutically, and providing uniforms for staff and patients. When the home closed in 1889, patients were moved to what would become Sonoma State Hospital, later renamed Sonoma State Developmental Center. Osborne moved with them and served as superintendent there until his controversial dismissal in 1901. He



Dr. Antrim Edgar Osborne

also served as superintendent at Napa State Hospital. Osborne returned to Santa Clara County and opened Osborne Hall, another home for children, on Franklin Street in Santa Clara. The Franklin Street home quickly proved inadequate for the care of the large number of residents. Osborne then removed his practice to the Winchester site and built a hospital, also called Osborne Hall, which would accommodate nearly 200 patients.

By 1911, Osborne was treating elderly patients at Osborne Hall, according to an advertisement in a directory of that year.

Dr. Osborne continued to practice medicine and work in various capacities including that of professor at both the College of Physicians and Surgeons in San Francisco and Oakland Medical College. He was also on the staff at O'Connor Hospital, was twice president of the Santa Clara County Medical Society and the California State Medical Society, and held state political office. He was a founder of the Santa Clara County Historical Society.

Osborne's wife, Margaret H. Paxton, daughter of Colonel John C. Paxton, a Civil War veteran, helped organize the Santa Clara Woman's Club. The Osbornes's status as family of Civil War veterans played a part in the next chapter of the history of this acreage. Across town, another story was unfolding.



Few people realize that California provided over 15,725 soldiers to the Union armies during the Civil War. These soldiers were ordered to keep the land between California and the rest of the Union under control, to keep the Confederates in Texas from gaining power further west, and to secure the Pacific coast for the Union. Additionally, California gold and mercury helped to finance the Union effort. The 71st Pennsylvania Volunteers were known as the "1st California Regiment" because the soldiers had spent at least some time in California.

The 1886 encampment (convention) of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a civil war veterans' charitable group, and an auxiliary organization, the Woman's Relief Corps (WRC), was held in San Francisco in early August of 1886. Along with many thousands

of men the convention was attended by over 2,500 women from throughout the nation. Railroads provided special discount fares to accommodate the numerous travelers. Side trips via rail were arranged to various parts of the Bay Area, including the Santa Clara Valley. After visiting this fertile and beautiful valley, the GAR and its Woman's Relief Corps sisters resolved to build a home here.

In 1889 the Grand Army of the Republic, through the Woman's Relief Corps, opened the first of three charitable homes in the nation in the Evergreen District of San José. The Cadwallader Home, a gift from Mr. Nirum Cadwallader, was located on a parcel comprising a little over five acres. The facility became home to 23 women who were mothers, widows, unmarried daughters, and sisters of Union soldiers. The cornerstone for this home was laid April 6, 1889, and the property dedicated December 28, 1889.

The State of California provided financial support for the women. The home was furnished exclusively through the efforts of the California and Nevada chapters of the WRC. Each chapter individually selected and outfitted the rooms in the home at its own cost. While the facility was not elegant, it was held in esteem by Evergreen townspeople.



Geraldine Frisbie

Geraldine Frisbie, first matron of the home, was the daughter of Hiram D. and Sarah B. (Hall) Sutton. Geraldine Sutton came to San Francisco from Rochester, New York. Miss Sutton married Lester P. Cooley, a California rancher who later owned the Ravenswood ranch near Dumbarton Bridge. The couple had five sons, one of whom, Charles Phillip, became a member of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

Lester Cooley passed away in 1882 and, in November 1883, Geraldine Cooley married Will Frisbie, a Civil War veteran who had served three years with the Wisconsin troops as a first lieutenant and also was private secretary to General Charles Devens, who later held the post of Attorney General in the cabinet of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Mr. Frisbie passed away in 1885. In the year 1887 Mrs. Frisbie became very active with the WRC. She served as president of the National Woman's Relief Corps from 1912-1913 and was matron of the home in Evergreen until 1920.

All those connected with the WRC homes, from the time of the Cadwallader home's opening in 1889 until its successor's closing in

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)

In 1866 Civil War veterans of the Union Army and Navy established the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). Founded and headed by prominent members of the military, membership peaked in 1890 with more than 490,000 members, nearly one percent of the total US population.

The organization's mission was to strengthen the bonds of comradeship, to preserve the memory of their fallen comrades (they secured the adoption of both Flag and Memorial Days), to give aid to soldiers' widows and orphans and to handicapped veterans, and most of all, to fight for pension increases and other benefits. The first Memorial Day was celebrated May 30, 1868.

Auxiliary societies associated with the GAR included the Sons of Veterans (1881), the Woman's Relief Corps (1883), and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic (1886). The national organization held its last encampment in 1949. The last GAR member died in 1956. California and Nevada chapters, however, continued to function and they hosted their 78th and final convention May 4, 1954, at the Hotel Sainte Claire in San José. There were 150 members in attendance with one Cornelia Pendroy presiding.

1962, had direct personal links with the Civil War. The women's compassion and patience were bestowed upon residents on a daily basis. True to the motto of the GAR, "fraternity, charity and loyalty" were shown to those in their charge.

The building on the five-acre property in Evergreen housed 23 "inmates" until Sunday morning, October 10, 1920, when it burned to the ground. The residents escaped with their lives but little more. All the hard work and dedication of the California and Nevada WRC appeared to be lost. The former dwellers were scattered throughout the valley. Many were housed at a new Agnews State Hospital building while the rest were taken in by local families.

A search began to find a suitable place for the women. The resourcefulness and commitment of the WRC helped to secure a new permanent home.

Dr. Antrim E. Osborne, of Osborne Hall, was adamant that seniors should not be housed in facilities for the mentally ill as was the practice at this time, and felt strongly that Agnews was not the best place for these frail, indigent women.

Because Dr. Osborne had been elected to the California State Senate in 1920 and his attentions had turned toward political activities, he no longer needed the six-building hospital on Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road. Dr. Osborne felt that the best place for these dependents of the state would be Osborne Hall.

At Osborne Hall there were six buildings, surrounded by a

beautiful orchard, close to both transportation and O'Connor Hospital. And, although the University of California was beginning to use, by agreement, part of Osborne's property as an alternate site to an agricultural station in Mountain View, the location and facilities were ideal for the needs of the WRC. There was plenty of room and university researchers were respectable neighbors. A "gentlemen's agreement" would be struck between University of California and the Woman's Relief Corps for the research facility to use 13 acres of property neighboring the WRC home.

The property was offered to the WRC on very good terms and, in 1921, \$20,000 was collected from various sources, including \$12,500 in insurance money as a result of the fire. The state purchased the 18-acre hall and grounds from Dr. Osborne for \$55,000.

So, in 1921, with little fanfare or celebration, the WRC residents were moved to Osborne Hall. The two facilities would share the grounds for the next 40 years.

Mrs. Jennie Boynton was matron at both WRC homes from 1920 until her sudden death in 1935. Mrs. Genevieve Charette followed as matron, later marrying Dr. Charles E. Holderman. Dr. Holderman was himself a descendant of Nelson M. Holderman, a World War I Medal of Honor winner and Commandant of the Veterans Home of California, in Yountville in Napa County.

In 1954 the state legislature decided that it was no longer financially feasible to continue operating the WRC facility. It was costing the state \$3,000 per year to care for each of the remaining 20 residents.

Dr. Holderman signed a five-year lease with the state in 1954 and the WRC home's name was changed to Holderman's Sanitarium. He and his wife, Genevieve, operated the hospital until its closing in 1962. From 1947 on, the hospital accepted patients



In 1928 a new and specially designed research facility and building was finished. The building was designed by UC Davis students and constructed from old-growth redwood taken locally.





An aerial view of the BAREC campus shows growing areas. In 1958, on a half-acre of the original 17.5-acre parcel at Winchester Boulevard, a State Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) building was constructed. The WRC office and hospital buildings had been located in the center of the property. Wells provided water for the hospital and for the agricultural station. Water was held in a large water tower.

from the general population and worked predominantly with an aging indigent population. In 1962 the remaining resident was moved to a new hospital at 340 Northlake Drive in San José. Today on the site of the former Northlake Convalescent Hospital is Courtyard Care Center.

Each year the state legislature voted to continue to support the Civil War women in this facility, allocating \$3,800 in 1962 to pay for the one remaining WRC patient, Miss Eva Simpkins. Miss Simpkins had been admitted to the hospital in 1911 with polio and died in 1966 at the age of seventy-three, having spent most of her life in the care of the state.

More than 400 women were accommodated at the WRC home during its operation in Santa Clara County. The original structures were bulldozed in the mid-1960s yet there remain to this day sidewalks and other artifacts from the original hospital. The name on the curb still reflects a time long past, "Santa Clara-Los Gatos Road."



This fertile valley, with its unique alkaline soil, abundant sunshine and mild winters, was destined to play a critical role in California's agricultural dominance, thanks in part to the innovative research accomplished by the University of California Bay Area Research and Extension Center.

Fruit and nut trees were of critical importance to the Santa Clara Valley, but research by the university also included work with tomatoes, corn, cut flowers, lettuce, melons, nursery stock, and many plant and soil diseases such as oak root fungus, *Armillaria mellea*, a disease that has plagued this region for centuries. The oldest established test plot for oak root fungus in the country remains on the BAREC site and the research that was conducted there is still a critical resource for landscapers and homeowners today.

One key element to the BAREC site is its location within an urban community. "BAREC, located on 17 acres of prime agricultural land in the heart of the heavily urbanized Silicon Valley, is unique in northern California for its research in home and community horticulture, turf management, urban forestry, small farm specialty agriculture, floriculture, and nursery production. Emphasis is on horticultural research and education programs relevant to urban environment.

"Urban/agriculture interface issues such as water management and urban landscape waste management will be critical areas of research focus in the future." This quote comes from the *Agriculture in Partnership with San Jose Growers' Newsletter*, July 1998.

Of the remaining nine research facilities operated by UC, none has a focus on urban horticulture. The closest facility is located in Hopland in Mendocino County, 150 miles to the north.

The Return of California Strawberries

Most of the strawberries grown and enjoyed on the central coast today were the product of University of California research, including the Tioga, Lassen, Shasta, Aptos, Brighton and Hecker varieties. "In 1954 the American Pomological Society awarded its highest honor, the Wilder Silver Medal, to the California Agricultural Experiment Station for strawberry research." This is reported in a June 26, 1983, article in the *California Living Magazine* section of the Sunday *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle* "Just 40 years ago, California strawberry production went down to nearly zero. At that time, 30 other states grew enough strawberries to feed their own populations as well as those of neighboring states. During World War II, this state's production hit bottom for a reason that had more to do with an irrational fear of people than effects of plant disease. The Japanese-Americans who produced most of California's strawberries were sent to detention camps in 1942.

"In Santa Cruz County, for example, strawberry production went from 340 acres in 1940 to nothing from 1944 to 1946." The article continues, " 'After the war,' says Howard Tsukiji, a grower and president of the Watsonville Berry Co-op, 'there wasn't a lot available for them [Japanese Americans] to do, so they took what they could. The opportunity to get into farming was easier. The people who lost their farms became sharecroppers, and slowly worked their way back to the positions they had before the war. Today, more than half of California's strawberry growers, including five of the six largest producers, are Japanese-Americans.' By 1980, California would go on to grow 75 percent of the nation's strawberries, 14 percent of the world's."

In 1969 UC researchers were looking into chipping tree trimmings and using them for mulch rather than burning them, which had been an established practice among the valley's farmers. The implementation of recommendations of this innovative research helped mitigate a hazardous condition in the valley, air pollution.

Another research project was started around 1981, when 8 tiny landscaped yards were created. Each yard was planted with exactly the same plants and was separated from the others by an opaque reed screen – the only difference was the ground cover. Bark, wood chips, decomposed granite, turf grass and other covers were used, with various watering techniques utilized.

The purpose of this research was to determine if homeowners could be happy using less water in their gardens. The new predicament was how to encourage landscape with low water use and achieve gardener satisfaction. The researchers needed local homeowners to offer honest opinions, so to nearby Valley Fair shopping



center they ventured, gathering up a handful of shoppers. After explaining the research project and its goals, the shoppers were asked to evaluate the yards. To the dismay of the researchers, the shoppers preferred the turf grass yard that was watered on a daily basis. An article appeared in *HortScience*, August 1982, about this research project.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District established weather station No. 69 at BAREC to monitor weather cycles including drought and temperature extremes. The California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) would provide valuable and consistent information for decades. This information has been an important management tool for many valley growers such as airports, local nurserymen, and home gardeners. The data collected from this station, one of two serving Santa Clara County, has helped establish probable viability of certain fruit trees and ornamental plants. Because there was no station in San Mateo County, this strategically placed monitor was of significance there too.

The California Integrated Waste Management Board awarded grant money to the extension to study the practical use of green garden waste for the growing of edible mushrooms. The research, though incomplete when the station was closed, was very useful in providing clues to the management and development of green-waste programs throughout California and the nation.

There was also research regarding weed control on cut flowers and the use of plastic tubes to encourage root growth on oaks. A



Three greenhouses were donated to UC in the late 1960s by a grateful group, the California State Florists Association Growers' Research Committee, chaired by Yosh Nishimoto. At the time the greenhouses were built in 1968, floriculture was the number one crop in Santa Clara County. The total cost of the three greenhouses was \$40,000.

project involving corn had been ongoing for over 20 years. Turf plots can still be seen through the fence – research that has helped hundreds of golf courses develop watering and mowing practices that are gentler on our environment and less taxing to our limited water resources. Because these projects were stopped before completion, new researchers at other facilities, beyond our community, will need to start over to produce the conditions necessary for a true science research project.

For decades annual field days were hosted by the station staff and researchers. The goal was to honor UC Cooperative Extension



The Bay Area Research and Extension Center used tree chambers to measure root growth.

sion's (UCCE) mission to "bring the University to the people" and share the knowledge gleaned from their research. The events were open to the general public and horticultural professionals alike.

During the all-day events, UC researchers would explain to the attendees the results of their specialized research on various projects at the station. These events allowed UCCE to bring scientific and practical information to a community in need. Printed scientific reports were written in laymen's terms and distributed to everyone attending. Afterwards they were published in trade publications and further disseminated in the community. For many landscape professionals and city agencies, this was their only direct link to a valuable resource.

With the hiring of urban horticulturist Nancy Garrison in 1981, BAREC would become home to a new group of volunteer

UC Cooperative Extension

University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), ANR's (UC Agriculture and Natural Resources) outreach arm, has farm, 4-H, and nutrition, family and consumer sciences advisors based in more than 50 county offices. In addition, Cooperative Extension specialists are headquartered at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and UC Riverside, where they conduct research and coordinate advisors' activities. As a land-grant institution, the Cooperative Extension mandate is tied to the welfare, development, and protection of California agriculture, natural resources and people.

— From: <http://ucanr.org/CES.CEA.shtml> 5/19/05

researchers/practitioners, the Master Gardeners. During the past two decades trained Master Gardeners have connected with home gardeners, giving research-based answers to their questions as well as recommendations to UC as to what areas needed further investigation. Master Gardeners also performed dozens of research trials, including experiments with cut flowers, tomatoes, peppers, melons and other typical home garden crops.

At the last field day hosted by the Master Gardeners on August 17, 2002, over 1,200 neighbors visited BAREC, some for the first time, to taste dozens of tomatoes and peppers grown on site by volunteers. From this event, UCCE learned which varieties were



The UC research facility reached out to children with innovative educational programs.

preferred by the general population and therefore which plant varieties should be sold in local nurseries.

Also, during the past decade, children from several local schools, including Washington Open Elementary and St. Christopher's Elementary, visited BAREC to learn first-hand about where food comes from and to be introduced to foods they typically would not eat. For some of these children, this was their first, and perhaps only, experience picking fruit from a tree and tasting it in its freshest form. The smiles and giggles were infectious as researchers, staff, and children joined in the happy exchange of knowledge.



Deeds dating from the 1920s and the 1950s transferred the property to the University of California. The last two deeds stipulated that "In the event the regents of the University of California shall by resolution at any time determine that the whole or any part of the property granted and conveyed hereunder is no longer desirable or necessary for use in agriculture research, the fee title to said property described in such resolution shall revert to and vest in the State of California upon the recording of such resolution." A small portion of the property was also given to the City of Santa Clara for the widening of Winchester Boulevard including the installation of sidewalks.

In 1999 the University made a decision to allow the property to revert to the state for a permanent budget augmentation, a budget promise that has never been fulfilled. The 2000 California state budget was signed into law by Governor Gray Davis. In this budget, it was promised that UC would receive a permanent annual augmentation to its Cooperative Extension budget of \$2 million. One key element of this transaction was that the annual augmentation is at the discretion of the sitting governor. The current governor has not honored this agreement nor did his predecessor, though an initial \$600,000 transfer was made.

Research continued until the closing of BAREC in 2002, research that continues to play an important role in our community, our state and our country.

Today, the BAREC property lies idle. The Master Gardener program has moved to county offices on Berger Drive. The 17.5-acre research farm remains zoned for agricultural use only. Title is held in the name of the State of California. The City of Santa Clara is

We invite you to let our community leaders know how you feel about the future use of the BAREC site considering its rich history and the critical agricultural research conducted there.

For more information about BAREC, including related legislation, please visit this website: www.savebarec.org

advocating high density, very low cost housing along with a large multi-story senior housing complex. A one-acre apple orchard on the back corner of the property is being considered for preservation as a park. There are no plaques or markers to acknowledge the prestigious history of the property and its relevance to our community, and there are no plans, thus far, to work toward recognition of the site's historic importance. The next chapter in the story of this property will soon be written.

Thanks to

Mary Amstutz, April Halberstadt, Janiece Jelatis, Sunday Marzano, Kathryn Mathewson, Willys and Betty Peck, Delma Sled, Joanne Watkins, Barbara Wilson and to the following institutions: Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, California Room, San José, Redwood City Public Library History Room History San José Santa Clara City Library Heritage Pavilion

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CALIF^{THE}ORNIAN

is published tri-annually by the California History Center & Foundation. The Magazine is mailed to members as a benefit of annual membership in the CHC Foundation. Membership categories: \$30 Individual; \$40 Family; \$50 Supporter; \$100 Sponsor; \$500 Patron; \$1,000 Colleague.

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ISSN: 0742-5465