

# *History of Millbrae*

.50 cents



*Southwest of Millbrae: STONE DAM (after a snowfall, 1921)*

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## THE HISTORY OF MILLBRAE

by

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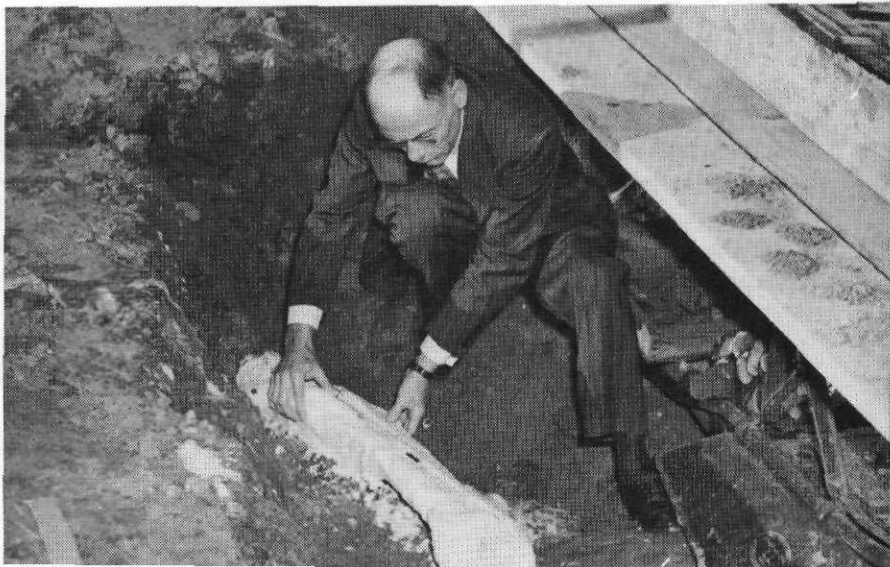
### *Indians, Elephants and Other Things*

Millbrae's hilly terrain and bay site indicate to scientists deposits dating to the early or middle Pleistocene times when the land washed from the hills, forming alluvial fans along the shore. Life in a prehistory period was confirmed in 1943 when excavations for the Bayside Manor tract turned up animal fossils buried twelve feet under the top of the hill. The discovery of the tusks of five wild elephants and the accompanying bones, the tooth of a prehistoric horse, insect remains, as well as pine cones and wood specimens give some picture of the natural history of the area before the coming of human beings.

Early Indian tribes called the Costaños also lived here, as evidenced by their fish-shell refuse mounds, most of them now leveled for homesites and streets. Their existence is still within the memory of several of today's citizens who grew up in the area.

It is difficult today to imagine that this territory was also the home of bears, but Father Juan Crespi, who accompanied Portolá on his first Bay-sighting expedition, records in his diary on November 5, 1769, that a "small detachment of men under the command of Sergeant Ortega had seen bear tracks near the Crystal Springs Lakes." Later, in 1776 the Anza expedition party on March twenty-ninth sighted bears on the Buri Buri Ridge (which they called the "Sierra de Pinabetes"), west of present-day Millbrae. They killed a bear that was over six feet tall and, according to Father Pedro Font's diary, "horrible, fierce, large and fat, and very tough."

Dr. Frank M. Stanger, founder of the San Mateo County Historical Museum, conducting excavations of fossil mastadon bones in Millbrae, 1943-1944.



### *The Singing People: Millbrae's First Family*

Millbrae's first family was that of José Antonio Sánchez. In 1827 José Antonio was granted permission to occupy the Presidio's lands of Buriburi (the Spanish corruption of the local Indian name for one of their villages, Wuriwuri) in repayment for his years of service in the Spanish and Mexican armies. He and his family moved into the old Casa Buriburi (near today's intersection of Hawthorne and Redwood Avenues, east of Junipero Serra Freeway), which had been headquarters for Ignacio Martínez's cattle ranch a few years earlier. In 1835 José was given an enlarged grant to the Buriburi, and he promptly built two identical adobes, abutted end-to-end, on a small knoll by marshland (near today's *Travelodge*), a welcome sight to early travelers on El Camino Real. José lived there until his death in 1843. When a final decision was made for a patent to divide his property among the heirs, the Sánchez Ranch (or Rancho San Rafael de Buriburi, as it was sometimes known), was found to encompass 14,639 acres. In 1871 D. O. Mills leveled the hill with its one remaining Sánchez adobe. The ranch area from about this time on became known as the Buri Buri.

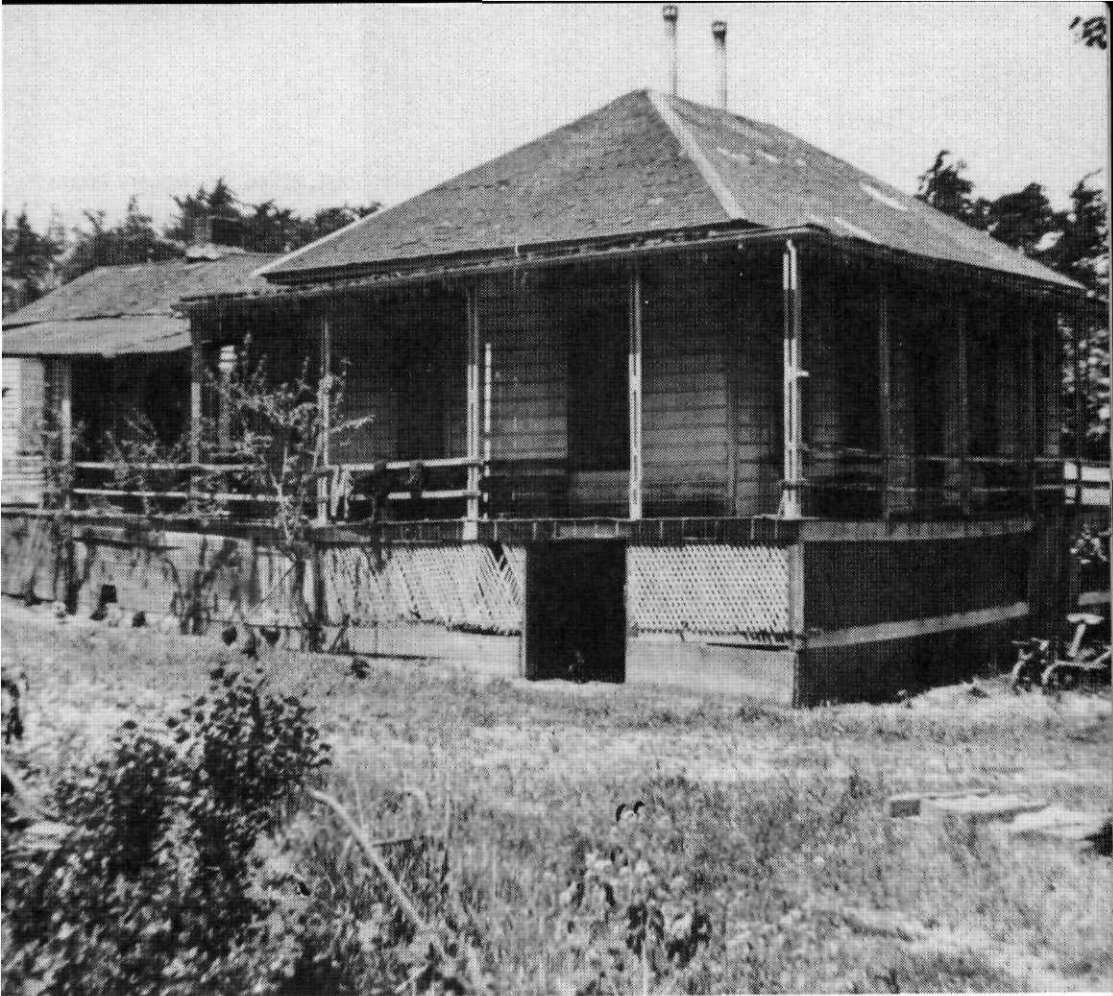
These early Spanish were often referred to as "The Singing People" because of their love of life, poetry and music, and happy, hospitable and generous natures; Millbrae's first family seemed to be no exception, as witnessed by several pieces of their hand-written poetry recently acquired by the Millbrae Historical Society.

Tall and handsome in their saddles (which were works of beauty in themselves), the early Millbrae Spanish owned literally what they could see to the San Bruno Mountains on the north; the Bay on the east; the Sawyer Ridge on the west; and to the middle of present Burlingame on the south. The healthy, robust women also rode well, their long black hair trailing down their backs except on formal occasions.

After José died, his ten children divided the land into equal parts, ignoring the will he had executed on October 8, 1842 — a half year earlier. Dealing in the hide-and-tallow trade, he and his sons had made considerable money but were always land-rich, money-poor, and it was evident that the land would soon be dispersed.

José de la Cruz Sánchez, the eldest son, sold his one-tenth to Darius Ogden Mills and purchased 300 acres farther north from his brother Manuel. It is José de la Cruz who figures most in Millbrae's history, since it is his family and heirs who have continued to live in the area ever since. Previously, in 1835, he had been one of the first *alcaldes* (mayors) of San Francisco, and between 1836 and 1840 had administered the Mission Dolores lands under Mexican rule. Married to Maria Josefa Mercado (of another early California family), he had six children — three sons and three daughters. One son, José Maria, lived and worked on his father's land for some years. But the others seem to have married and moved away except for Soledad (born in 1823) and Maria Cueva (born in 1852) who remained with their father until his death in 1879, living in the four-room frame house he had built near





*Abandoned home of José de la Cruz Sánchez*

Ludeman Lane in the 1850's. Calling himself a "rancher" or "farmer," José de la Cruz was a shrewd businessman and, as the oldest brother, advised his own sisters and brothers on their land deals and mortgages. In 1862 he sold flume-rights to the Spring Valley Water Company in its efforts to bring water to a thirsty San Francisco.

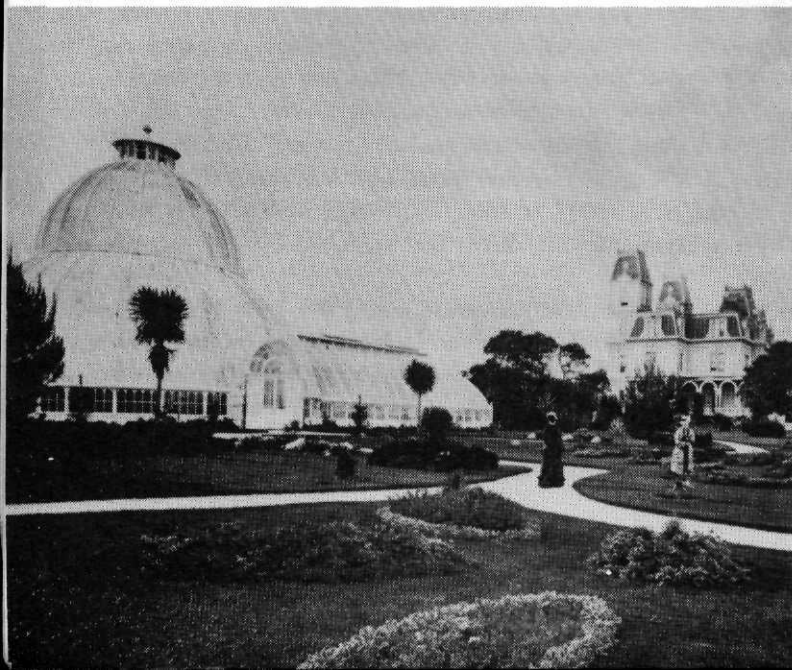
After her father's death, Maria Cueva married an Italian immigrant, John Mangini, and they had two daughters in the home he built for her on Ludeman Lane, on land she had inherited from her father. Rose and Linda Mangini went to school, married and lived most of their lives in Millbrae. Of Rose's two children, Mildred Cavanaugh Wilson still lives in the Buri Buri Rancho area in San Bruno. Few Sánchez family heirs own any of their original inheritance since time and space decreed its division into the hands of many.

## *The Mills Family*

Darius Ogden Mills, pioneer California banker and philanthropist, called his country estate "Millbrae," combining the Scottish word meaning "rolling meadowland" with his own surname. Formerly the one-tenth portion of the Rancho Buri Buri inherited by José de la Cruz Sánchez, it is reported to have cost Mills \$20 an acre by the time he obtained clear title. He built his home in 1866, and it was surrounded by botanical gardens with shrubs and trees imported from around the world. The many-storied, many-towered building with its mansard roofs was the scene of fashionable events in the period of the great mansions on the Peninsula — including a visit by ex-President Ulysses S. Grant.

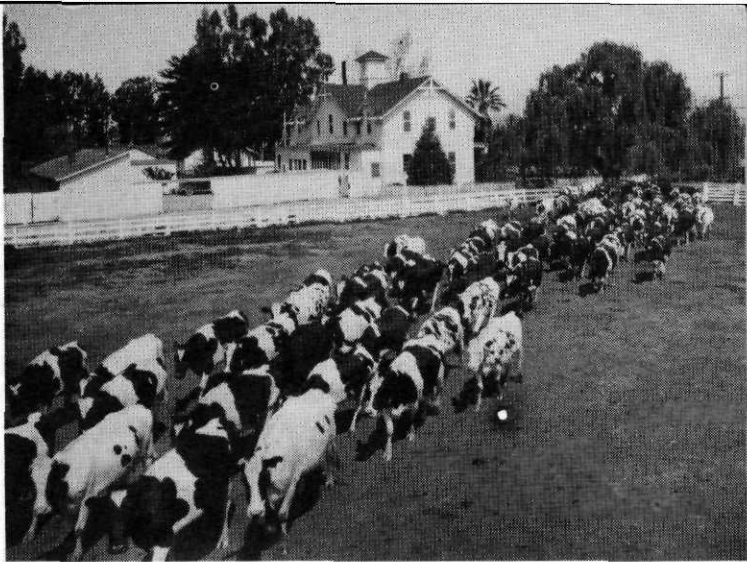
Mr. Mills, well-known for his business connections in gold mining towns and San Francisco as President of the Bank of California, also owned another mansion in New York City. He spent his time between the two, although his family preferred the sophistication of the east. However, for some years the family made trips by special train for vacations in Millbrae, bringing along horses, automobiles and an army of servants. His daughter, Elizabeth, married the New York Tribune's outspoken publisher, Whitelaw Reid (who was President Harrison's Minister to France, and also Ambassador to Great Britain under Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Taft). Darius's grandson, Ogden L. Mills (the last of the family to live in the Millbrae mansion for any period of time), was President Hoover's Secretary of the Treasury.

It is interesting to note that early in January of 1910, Mills and his former partner in the Millbrae Dairy Company, Alfred F. Green, died a few days and a few blocks apart, in Millbrae homes where they had lived for four decades.



*The Mills Estate  
in its days of glory,  
late 19th century*

*Caretaker's home  
and herd from the  
Millbrae Dairy*



The Mills mansion, in which Darius Ogden Mills had in 1876 proudly installed two most elegant elevators, among the first on the west coast, was used as a seamen's rest home during World War II. In general deterioration, sold to a real estate developer, and in the process of demolition, the lonely old mansion accidentally burned to the ground on the day of June 23, 1954. It was the city's most famous fire. As hundreds of spectators watched, they realized they were witnessing the end of an era.

#### *The Village*

The village period for Millbrae extended over seventy years, from 1850 to 1920 when home industry finally created a town. It developed in two portions about a mile apart.

The northern and older section dated to Spanish days. José de la Cruz Sánchez' four-room bungalow with hip roof and four covered porches is supposed to have been there since 1846, although his daughter Mary Cueva was born in the old adobe in 1852. Francesca Sotello Sánchez, José's sister-in-law and widow of Manuel, lived in a small farm house near him until 1903. Other Sánchez relatives — the Sobranes, Bolcoffs and Valencias — together with several Indian families (all professing to be farmers), lived across El Camino Real near its intersection with Center Street where Francesca's son, Juan, built the 16 Mile House in 1872.

The southern portion developed near the Mills Estate. The 17 Mile House (where Soledad Sánchez had received her mail in stagecoach days) was at the north-west corner of Millbrae Avenue and El Camino (where the Union Oil Station is today). Nearby was a two-story Victorian home built by A. F. Green in 1865. Green and Mills were partners in the Millbrae Dairy Company, one of the largest in California, and their barns and the caretaker's home were in an area between El Camino Real and the railroad tracks. At the end of the Mills estate, in a building owned by Mills, was Frenchman Hiliable Garnot's grocery store (where José de la Cruz charged items he could not grow or raise). Down from the grocery store stood the train depot operated by A. F. Green's son, who also served as postmaster there. Built in the 1860's on right-of-way land deeded by Mills, the depot was protected by the San Jose Railway's agreement to undertake its continuous maintenance — an agreement in effect even up to modern times. The original station was destroyed by fire

in July of 1890, rebuilt in November of that year, and again burned to the ground in 1906 by an explosion of a powder-laden car on the siding. The postoffice was then moved into a new grocery store with the name of Lauer & Lovegreen, on the northeast corner of El Camino Real and Millbrae Avenue (*Ken's Pancake House* is there today).

Across the street the 17 Mile House stood in a grove of trees at the intersection of El Camino Real and a dirt road (now Millbrae Avenue) which went over the hill toward Half Moon Bay. In the tradition of other "mile houses" that dotted El Camino from San Francisco to San Jose, it was for the convenience of travelers as stage stop and horse-changing station. The building was first mentioned in 1844 when a unit of American soldiers on a foraging trip for cattle were supposed to have negotiated with the Spanish near the 17 Mile House. With the advent of the railroad, by 1876 it had become the Millbrae Hotel, with elegant new furnishings, advertising "the choicest of New York-transplanted oysters — to be served on the premises or to carry home" (from oyster beds that filled this part of the Bay, in those days located inland almost as far as the railroad tracks). However, a flag pole bore the 17 Mile House name until the building burned to the ground in 1907 when there was "no fire-fighting apparatus of any description to be had!"

Most people who worked in Millbrae in village days lived in Burlingame or San Mateo. They were employed as gardeners or other helpers on the Mills Estate, for the Spring Valley Water Company or for the Millbrae Dairy. By 1875 the village had thirty-five census children (all between five and seventeen), twenty-two of whom attended the Millbrae School built on the highway in 1870, a little north of 17 Mile House. Also in 1875 a village blacksmith appeared and suggested by advertisement that "Millbraeites no longer need to go to 'Frisco to get their horses shod"! The blacksmith, John Le Cornec, took over the grocery store after Mr. Garnot's death.

Availability of ready water from the Spring Valley Company prompted Maria Cueva Sánchez Mangini on January 12, 1880, to sell 72.64 acres of her inheritance for \$5,000 to Christian Ludemann, and the Pacific Nurseries were begun, the first of many to follow.



*Store of Lauer & Lovegreen, north-east corner of El Camino Real and Millbrae Avenue, 1906*



With the opening of the Millbrae Villa tract in 1889, more attention was paid to Millbrae. James Corbett, Olympic Club boxing instructor, leased the Millbrae Hotel, converting it into a sportingmen's headquarters. Here he let it be known that he was anxious to meet John L. Sullivan.

The village grew slowly, and by 1904 there were sixteen families. With the arrival of the West Coast Porcelain Works in 1919, the population jumped to 300 people, and the period of the village ended. The day of dusty El Camino disappeared with the building of the first State Highway in 1912 — from San Bruno to Burlingame. During its construction young widow McCarthy, who ran a grocery store in the 16 Mile House to support her six daughters, served hot luncheons to the road crews.

Disappearing also were cattle grazing on the hills. The fields south of Ludemann Lane became a mass of color from fields of flowers and vegetables, covering what today is the city's shopping district. Between the highway and the railroad were more truck gardens, interspersed with saloons and eating places — much as it is today.

#### *And Don't Go Near the Water*

For over a hundred years the relationship of the Spring Valley Water Company (later the San Francisco Water Department) to Millbrae has been unique. The first water that began to flow, on July 4, 1862, into a burgeoning San Francisco to supplement its many wells, came from the hills west of Millbrae, flowing through redwood flumes and then pumped north through pipes that had been shipped around the Horn from New York on a cargo sailing ship, "The Flying Mist."

West of Millbrae were the dams. The first earth-filled dam in the system was the upper Pilarcitos, completed in 1863. The present Pilarcitos Dam, also of earth, was finished in 1867. San Andreas, completed in 1870, towers 105 feet above Sawyer Camp Road where *once stage coaches from Millbrae rumbled on the way to Half Moon Bay. Picturesque Stone Dam on Pilarcitos Creek, finished in 1871 as a masonry arch, is today a 31-foot wall of ferns (See cover photograph).*

San Francisco's water needs were irrevocably wedded to the Peninsula and Millbrae with the Company's gradual acquisition of land from portions of original Mexican land grants, as well as from a hand-written flume-rights agreement signed by José de la Cruz Sánchez and his children on May 30, 1862.

Today there are twelve dams in a system of interlocking dams, reservoirs, watersheds, pipe lines, tunnels and aqueducts that would startle even the Romans. They reach as far south as Belmont, across the Bay into Alameda County, and up into the High Sierra foothills to satiate the city's thirsty tongues. Not only San Francisco, but also people from nineteen Peninsula, Alameda and Santa Clara cities drink the sparkling mountain waters blended with rain-catch water. Thousands of miles of pipe lines traverse the State. Total consumption records show an 1865 figure of 2.4 million gallons per day rising today (1972) to over 240 million gallons.



*Gottlieb Furrer and family on Millbrae Hill, 1894. Daughter on far left became Mrs. Lovegreen. Furrer barns and herds at left on land leased from Edward Taylor. Taylor Creek far left. Furrer farmhouse at far right. Behind it, Millbrae Avenue and Mills Estate. Long white building in middle distance is schoolhouse.*



Under the Company's watchful eye, 23,000 acres of watershed country, some of the most beautiful west of Millbrae, still remain as nature intended: undeveloped, untrampled game preserves where even the fish are safe since no one is allowed to go near the water.

The Spring Valley Water Company was purchased in 1928 for \$41,000,000 by the City of San Francisco. Its corporation yards are still in Millbrae, and many of its staff live there in Company-owned houses.

### *A City of Tracts, Lawns and Beautiful Homes*

Millbrae is a city of tracts gradually whittled out of the hills and flat land, changing the area from pasture and farmland into what many have called a "bedroom town." Sixteen miles south of the metropolis of San Francisco, the majority of its residents commute there to factories and offices. Today, little home industry exists, and the tax-base largely comes from light industry, homes, several shopping areas and the San Francisco International Airport.

One can almost pinpoint the date of each subdivision by the architectural style. A few examples of early Victorian houses can be found. Later there were Spanish ones with tiled roofs, beamed ceilings and natural fireplaces. These gradually gave way to more glass in corner windows and shake roofs. Because of the rolling land, a kind of "Millbrae Style" developed: unobtrusive residences melded to the hills, with view windows that overlook the Airport and Bay scene. Surrounded by manicured lawns and shrubs, the houses speak of their owners' pride.

The Millbrae Villa tract, the first, was surveyed in February, 1889. Owned by William Dunphy, Nevada silver-mining millionaire who purchased the parcel for a hunting area and placed his lodge about a mile and a half up Millbrae Avenue, it contained 313 lots. In 1892 he built a new family home on Hemlock near Millbrae Avenue (Considerably remodelled over the years, today it is the Millbrae-Serra Convalescent Hospital). The growth of this subdivision was very slow because Millbrae lacked a payroll until 1919 when the West Coast Porcelain Works were built near the depot. In addition to the Villa tract, Dunphy had envisioned a 41-acre commercial development two blocks wide by eight long, to extend from the railroad tracks east to the Bay; but only the survey maps were ever completed.

Millbrae Park, purchased in 1893 by J. Solinsky and subdivided into 311 units, had Center Street as its core. A former vaudeville entertainer, Solinsky dreamed of his parcel as a retreat for retired theater people; but only a few followed him, and development was slow with only six homes built by 1904.

Another 262 units were laid out in 1907 by J. J. Bulloch, acting for the Union Trust Company of San Francisco, and the North Millbrae subdivision came into being.

The largest single development, begun in 1927 and completed by 1945, was the Millbrae Highlands, on land that originally had been the Edward Taylor farm. Gus Moeller and Niels Schultz and the latter's Bayside Company were largely responsible for its orderly development. A model tract, it originally featured well-built Spanish-style houses. They were probably the best real estate buy during the 1930's, selling for \$4,500 to \$9,000.

Developed in eleven sections, the 1394 homes marched up and over the hills, for the most part hidden in shrubs and trees. Unlike many developers, Schultz and his family lived there while he continued to develop other parts of Millbrae.

In 1933 the Millbrae Golf and Country Club acquired 140-plus acres from the Capuchino Land Company which Templeton Crocker had bought in 1926. The last piece of Sánchez land to pass from the original family, this purchase included portions of Soledad and Maria Cueva Sánchez Mangini's inheritances from their father, José de la Cruz Sánchez; Maria's portion was sold by her two daughters, Linda and Rose, during the depression years. Today (1972) this land is roughly estimated to be worth \$1,125,000 as homesite area.

Bayside Manor, built in 1944 on reclaimed marsh lands east of the Southern Pacific tracks, developed during World War II as housing for workers involved in airplane and ship-building. It contained 250 units.

In 1946 the estate of pioneer Carrie M.P. Coleman, nearly 210 acres purchased from the Sánchez family heirs before 1860, became Meadow Glen.

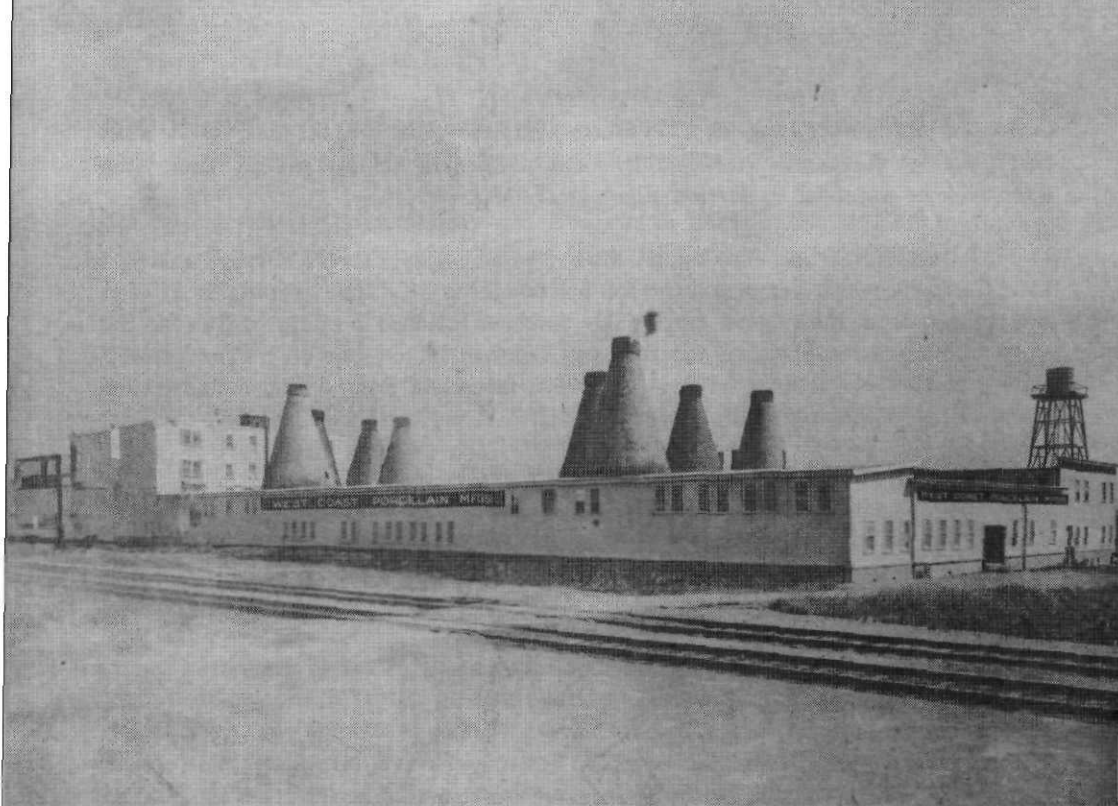
With the enlargement of the San Francisco International Airport, which had formerly been called Mills Field, the Maco Construction Company began the Maco Pit dirt-haul operation in 1944. Several hills and millions of tons of dirt were removed from an area west of Green Hills Country Club today, to fill-in the Bay tide-lands. The resulting land depression became the site for Millbrae Meadows, begun in 1954 by the Stoneson Development Company.

The last large land plum in the area, the Mills Estate, was the center of much legal and vocal haranguing between Millbrae and its sister city, Burlingame. Begun in 1954 by Trousdale Corporation and followed by various developers, the Millbrae portion of that once-famous landmark has 807 homes today. When people looked at the beautiful gardens, with botanical specimens from around the world; the three jewel-like lakes; redwood and eucalyptus-crowned hills, a momentous cry was raised. It was of no avail in the wake of the bulldozer and land-mover. Even the houses that today sell from \$45,000 to \$75,000 cannot hint at the splendor of the baronial holding which had been kept in one parcel since Spanish days.

The Silva Ranch in 1963 became the Silva Tract and the site for 338 houses. The last large parcel of land where Spanish long-horned cattle had grazed, and which the California brown bear had once known as home, had passed through Sánchez hands into those of the Chilean family of Manuel F. Custodios de Vellez during gold rush days; then to the Spring Valley Water Company and its successor, the San Francisco Water Company.

Other privately owned small parcels of land have gradually been developed until today there are very few acres available, the city almost fully grown.





*West Coast Porcelain Works, built 1919*

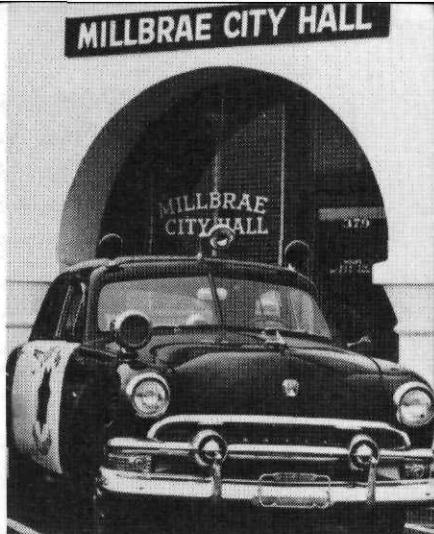
### *A City Groans to be Born*

Millbrae was one of the largest unincorporated cities in the County in 1946 when its citizens finally voted for incorporation. However, Millbrae's dilemma was a long-drawn-out and controversial one. Squeezed between San Bruno and Burlingame, its residents had only two alternatives: annex with either of these sister cities and lose identity; or incorporate and remain forever a small city.

Beginning in 1929 and following through the years, a series of political overtures were made toward this core of the old Buri Buri, especially by Burlingame in the hope that the yet-undeveloped Mills estate would come also into the fold. But there were forces working within Millbrae against annexation, arguing for individuality. By 1946 the political heat created through uncounted meetings, privately subscribed bulletins to voters, offers of cheap taxes and better services, smouldering through the Great Depression and World War II, came near to combustion when the voters finally came to grips with the Millbrae identity idea vs. Burlingame's idea and voted for the former.

But, because of legal wrangling over the division of the Mills Estate, it was to be two years before a bona fide city could function. Millbrae, still a youngster in combat with the older Burlingame, received a smaller share of the estate. On January 15, 1948, Millbrae became a sixth-class functioning city, well aware of its problems and potentials.

*The first Millbrae City Hall  
and one of the two police  
cars new in 1951*



### *Of Volunteers, Watchmen and Tennis Courts*

Stories of fire- and police-protection and of recreational facilities in early Millbrae speak of citizens doing-for-themselves.

Fire presented few problems during the Spanish-Mexican period since adobe homes, made of dirt with roofs and doors of wood, seldom burned. During the village stage, with only a few redwood frame buildings rather far apart, a resident must have left fast and watched it burn — there is no evidence of even a water-bucket-brigade. The famous 17 Mile House burned to the ground several times.

Following County incorporation and until 1931, Millbrae fire protection was under the County Fire Warden system with headquarters in Redwood City. A volunteer fire department was organized in 1931 when a group banded together. Pay was a cold bottle of beer following a hot fire, and firemen paid 25 cents a month for the privilege of belonging to the department. The first fire engine was a homemade affair, a reconstructed Chevrolet pickup truck with a hose reel. Reminiscent of antique movies, the truck scraped the ground, was immobile when the men piled on it to fight their first fire.

Finally, in February of 1937, an *American La France* made in New York became the first real engine. It is today one of the few in existence in the United States. It has now been replaced by modern rigs. And fire-fighters go to college to study the latest in fire-fighting techniques.

The stories of law and order are equally fascinating. During Rancho days, Indians who stole cattle or horses were taken to the government headquarters at the San Francisco Presidio or San Jose, and there was little need for other control. With the coming of the Americans and County incorporation in 1856, the County Sheriff in Redwood City was the law and continued to be through the Village period, in the "roaring twenties" when Millbrae had many speakeasies and even stills hidden in the hills, until 1926 when a few store keepers hired a watchman to rattle store doors each night. Finally, in 1948, a four-man Police Department was established, complete with a new radio-dispatched Chevrolet. However, it was not until the new City Hall was completed in 1957 that police had their own headquarters and a small holding-jail. Today's force includes eight cars and a staff of twenty-five men.

Formalized recreational facilities began with the construction of a 1000 square-foot adobe structure at the end of Laurel Avenue in 1936. Built by volunteer help and W.P.A. assistance, the adobe bricks were made on the site. Surrounded by tennis courts and playground equipment, it eventually became headquarters for Millbrae Nursery School which, in turn, moved in 1958 to its own building on Center Street, this latter formerly the home of the American Legion.

Recreation became organized in 1957 under a full-time director, and on March 21, 1970, opened its own home in spite of the fact that several bond issues had failed to provide money. From other funds \$145,000 was diverted to create the facilities which 55,000 people per year use today.

#### *The Schools: One Hundred Years Ago*

Formalized education came to Millbrae early, in spite of the fact that there were not many homes. English-speaking pioneers wanted educational opportunities for their children although it was necessary to create a school year around crop-planting and harvesting. School closed from mid-December until March first and for another two weeks in July. By 1861 little one-room schools began to appear in the County, and Millbrae followed in 1870 with a crude one-room building on El Camino Real, in the corner of today's theater parking lot. It cost \$600 to build and had \$150 worth of library books. The teacher's salary was \$50.00 a month with \$6.00 recorded in 1876 as cost for repairs, fuel and contingent expenses. In that year Millbrae is described as having thirty-six census children, with twenty-two of them attending public schools, eight private and six going to no schools at all. Millbrae was the Fifteenth District in an eventual fifty. In 1870 it was one of the largest districts, incorporating all of the Burlingame, northern third of Hillsborough and a small piece of San Bruno Park Districts, as well as the present San Francisco Water Company watershed.

The children of José Antonio Sánchez seem to have had very little formal education, although they could read and write some Spanish. Mary Cueva Sánchez Mangini registered her two daughters, Rose and Linda in the new school which replaced the first one in 1889. It was between Willow and Poplar Avenues. Linda's Advanced Geography is preserved today and bears her name and that of "Millbrae School, 1897." Shortly afterwards, Lomita Park School was added.

By 1921 the village had 300 homes and some of the schools needed enlarging: six rooms and an auditorium were added to Millbrae School (which was by then renamed Chadbourne School), at a cost of \$25,450; seven class rooms and an auditorium were added to Lomita Park School, at a cost of \$36,940.



*Mary Cueva Sánchez and John Mangini and their daughters, Rose and Linda*

Taylor School was built in 1939, partially by W.P.A. labor and Government money. Six more schools followed as tracks burgeoned: Green Hills in 1948; Highlands in 1952; Glen Oaks in 1953; Spring Valley in 1955; Millbrae Meadows in 1956; and in 1967 the name "Millbrae School" was again used for another school.

Today Millbrae is a nine-school district with over 3,000 students and 146 classrooms. But, although it is a long way back in time to the one-room rustic school house of 1870, Millbrae education seems to have come full circle as three of its newest plants are open-module schools, not far in concept from the one-room schoolhouse tradition.

### *The 16 Mile House: End of an Era*

For almost one hundred years a two-story, false-fronted Victorian building stood on El Camino Real at Center Street. Built of first-cut redwood from booming coastal sawmills, it was placed on land inherited by Juan Sánchez and his mother in 1856 (the remaining 114 acres of his father, Manuel's, one-tenth share of the Buri Buri). In 1872 this grandson of the original Sánchez, ill himself and anxious to provide an income for his mother for the rest of her life, built the inn for rental property. Francesca Sánchez lived to be 106 years old. Two years before her death in 1906 she sold the inn to a nephew, Eustaquio Valencia.

One side of the building was a grocery store, the other half a popular saloon (which Mary Cueva Sánchez Mangini's husband, John, operated in the 1880's). An original staircase of carved redwood ascended to seven upper rooms where many families were to live.

As is the case with most buildings open to the public, the inn saw many transitions. It was a favorite stopping spot for wealthy San Franciscans enroute to their Peninsula mansions by horse and buggy. In the early 1870's Ralston, of "Belmont," quartered fresh horses there in his famous races against the train from San Francisco. In the early 1890's a saloon for the horseless carriage trade followed; a speakeasy during prohibition days; and even a brothel when the house fell on hard times. The building became a bar and restaurant, keeping alive the colorful history it had witnessed, Millbrae's last visible link with its first family, the Sanchezes.

*Early photograph of the 16 Mile House. Left-hand door led to hotel and saloon, right-hand door to grocery store. Middle door opened on stairway used by family and hotel guests with rooms upstairs.*





No longer paying its way as a restaurant, the house became scheduled for destruction early in 1970. Quickly a community group formed "The Citizens' Committee to Save the 16 Mile House." Millbrae's oldest building was offered as a gift. Next, an affirmative vote in an election gave permission for land-use of the city park, where it was proposed to move the building and restore it as a future museum and community place-of-assembly. A potential war chest of at least \$50,000 was needed for moving and restoration. Opposition to the project developed. Alas, time was too short, people's sense of history was insufficient and the nation was experiencing a "tight money" period. The struggling committee (by then incorporated into the "Millbrae Historical Society") sold "Save the 16 Mile House" buttons, appeared on four television stations, gave innumerable fund-raising functions (one of which was the last large public dinner in the historic inn) and sponsored contests in the schools to awaken interest — but fell short of raising enough money.

On January 4, 1971, as television cameras and a few saddened residents looked on, bulldozers reduced the famous inn to a century of memories. The pungent smell of redwood marked the end of an era.

But, as in all things, some good resulted. The 16 Mile House had been the catalyst that founded the Historical Society and gave the city an awareness of its unique history.

**CITY OF MILLBRAE**  
**STRAW BALLOT**  
**ON**  
**16-MILE HOUSE**  
 TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 1970

MARK CROSSES (+) ON BALLOT  
 WITH RUBBER STAMP

THE CITY OF MILLBRAE has agreed to allow the 16-Mile House to be placed on the Northeast Corner of the Silva Ranch Park site (off of Palm Avenue) under the condition that the 16-Mile House will be moved, repaired, refurbished, maintained and staffed without any expenditure of Millbrae City Governmental funds. THE MILLBRAE HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL PROVIDE ALL NECESSARY FUNDS IN ORDER TO GIVE YOU, THE MILLBRAE CITIZEN, A CULTURAL CENTER.

1. Do you agree with this philosophy of acceptance of this gift with no city financial support?	YES	NO
2. Taxpayers should support the cost of moving?	YES	NO
3. Taxpayers should support the cost of moving and maintenance?	YES	NO

*Today: Airport City*

Millbrae today shares the title of Airport City with her sister city, San Bruno, both within five minutes of the San Francisco International Airport.

Billed for years as "Your Place in the Sun," Millbrae's streets curl up and over the hills to the newly-completed Junipero Serra Freeway (Interstate 280), portions of which were the old Skyline Boulevard. The original plans for that freeway threatened to divide the city, but the alertness of Millbrae citizens caused it to be built in its present location.

Of the eleven cities in San Mateo County, Millbrae has the highest per capita income, with 66.1 per cent of its households earning over \$10,000 a year — probably due to the city's having residences of a large group of professional people, business owners and a high percentage of double-income. Home prices begin at a little below \$30,000 and climb

In addition to nine elementary public schools, there are one intermediate, one parochial and two high schools, the latter part of a Union District. Nine churches serve the people, with St. Dunstan's Catholic Parish the oldest, dating to 1908. There are over 140 businesses, not including professional services.

Millbrae is a sixth-class city with an elected five-member City Council, a City Clerk and City Treasurer. The Mayor is annually elected from the City Council membership. A Civic Center comprises the City Hall, Library, Police and Fire Departments. Millbrae today is a far cry from the little village on the dusty El Camino Real which it was a century ago.



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The Millbrae Historical Society invites citizens, young and old, to join in membership to search out, discover and preserve the city's past. Bi-monthly meetings feature outstanding speakers on phases of local and California history. More information may be obtained by writing P.O. Box 511, Millbrae, California 94030.

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