

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 14, 1957

The Murphy Home

Although the Sunnyvale Historical Society was organized only a few short months ago, the members have planned a colossal undertaking. They wish to preserve and restore the historic Murphy home which the Sunnyvale City Council has threatened to demolish. After reviewing the history of the building and family, the membership felt this should be a State Historical Monument and assemblyman Clark Bradley has sponsored a bill to provide \$50,000 for its restoration.

The Murphy family played a large part in early education, agriculture, legislation, finance, and history. The Murphy party came to California two years before the Donner party, who used the same route to cross the Sierras, making use of the cabins built by the Murphy party. They were the first to view Lake Tahoe, and they named the Truckee River. Settling originally in the Sacramento Valley, the rancho of Marlin Murphy, Jr. is credited by Bancroft as the setting for the planning of the Bear Flag Revolt; he planted the first wheat crop in the valley, moving to Santa Clara as a fugitive from the Gold Rush.

John Murphy was mayor of San Jose and Murphys in the Mother Lode was named after him. Bernard Murphy was three times mayor of San Jose, assemblyman, and state senator. Daniel Murphy was the largest landowner in the west when he died in 1882. Martin Sr. built a chapel in about the center of his rancho around which the town of San Martin grew. General Patrick Murphy owned the great Santa Margareta Rancho and was a state senator. Ellen Murphy was wife of Capt. C. M. Weber, founder of Stockton. Diana Murphy became the wife of Morgan Hill, with a town in the Santa Clara named for him.

There are many firsts in the Murphy home history. Milled in Bangor, Maine, prefabricated sections were brought around the Horn in 1850 to become the first and finest frame house in the Valley, the home of the first English speaking resident in that area. Martin Murphy, Jr. The house then stood on an estate that stretched from Mt. View to Lawrence Station Road, from the Bay to El Camino Real. The town that grew up around the home originally known as Murphys is now Sunnyvale.

Martin Murphy, Jr. had accompanied his father and family in 1841 across 2,000 miles of largely uncharted area with the party distinguishing themselves as the first party to arrive in California via the Sierras in a covered wagon, the first to bring oxen across the plains, and the first to use the route which is still being used by the Union and Southern Pacific Railroad.

The estate was the scene of the largest party ever held in California, when the Murphys celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on July 17, 1881. In three days the 7,000 guests consumed seven barbecued beefs, 14 sheep, ten swine, a carload of hams and another of chickens. They drank 500 gallons of coffee, 15 barrels of beer, many kegs of whiskey and a (?) of champagne, special trains brought guests from San Francisco and San Jose, and the San Jose courts adjourned for the party.

Among the achievements of Martin, Jr., in which he had a vital part, was the establishment of the University of Santa Clara, the state's first university, the Convent of Notre Dame. Many of Sunnyvale's streets bear the names of the town's founder, Murphy, Evelyn, Frances, Mary, Mathilda, Bernardo, Carrol, Taaffe, Arques, Pastoria, and Borregas, derive their names from the name Martin Murphy's rancho bore – "Pastoria de las Borregas," meaning sheep's pasture. Curiously enough, the ranch did not raise sheep, but rather grains – wheat, barley, and oats.

In 1951 the city purchased the 20-room dwelling and estate for a city park and monument. Two years later, when neglect and vandalism including arson, had done greater damage than the 105 previous years, a small group of interested individuals handed it over to save the historic home and the Sunnyvale Historical Society was founded.