

# THE RECORD

## William B. Bourn II, Builder of Filoli

In January 1875, 17-year-old William Bowers Bourn II left his home on Nob Hill to begin college at Cambridge University in England. Like other privileged young men his age whose fathers had acquired great wealth during the Gold Rush, he was expected to obtain a degree from a prestigious university, return to San Francisco to grow his family's fortune, and finally to engage in civic activities and building projects that would project a more sophisticated San Francisco image -- one that was more urbane and less Wild West frontier.

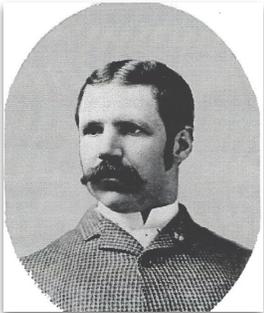


Photo courtesy of Filoli

In 1878, however, William's mother Sarah summoned him home before he could complete his prestigious degree. She explained that his father's estate was nearly exhausted and she needed him to assume responsibility immediately for all the family's finances. (Six months before William had left for Cambridge his father was found dead on the bathroom floor at their home at 1105 Taylor from a gunshot wound to the stomach. Despite newspaper headlines that blared "Shocking Suicide of a Noted Capitalist," his colleagues felt that no man commits suicide by shooting himself in the stomach. They speculated that Bourn, Sr. had fumbled his pistol and it went off accidentally). The family had multiple investments in multiple businesses, but the cash cow up to that date had been the Empire gold mine in Grass Valley, California. Now the mine sat idle, after three separate outside mining engineers said it was spent and that there was no future in continuing the operation.

Twenty-one year old William refused to take "no" for an answer. He reorganized the company and raised new capital (in part, from his mother who mortgaged her Napa Valley property Madrono). His answer to the lack of gold was to dig deeper. He hired his cousin George Starr and together they met numerous challenges at the mine. They made improvement after improvement to processes for

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MEETING

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obtaining gold from quartz rock. Over the next 40 years, until Bourn finally sold all his interest in the mine in 1929, the Empire Mine would continue to provide the bulk of the Bourn family's income. Now a state park, by the time the Empire Mine closed in 1956, the mine would earn the reputation as "one of the largest, richest and longest-operating (1850-1956) gold mines in California, producing more than eight billion dollars in gold by today's standards."

Simultaneous to his investments in gold mines, Bourn invested in many other companies, especially those that sought to provide the growing city of San Francisco with gas, electricity and water. He knew that ultimately the companies providing these utilities would have to merge. In 1905, as President of the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company, Bourn worked with Eugene de Sabla and Frank Drum of the California Electric Company to merge their companies into the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). He also continued to invest in the privately held Spring Valley Water Company. He believed that eventually the massive infrastructure and property owned by Spring Valley Water Company would be needed by the City of San Francisco to supply water to its residents. A sale of the company was attempted the year after Bourn assumed a controlling interest and was named president in 1908, but the City did not end up buying the water company until 1929.

Like many other second generation wealthy Californians (such as the Kohls, the Carolans and the Crockers), Bourn began purchasing property for a grand home on the Peninsula in 1914. As he had with several other building projects (e.g. his SF home on 2550 Webster, his cottage at the Empire Mine and the clubhouse for the Pacific-Union Club) Bourn turned to his friend, Willis Polk, as his architect. The Bourns' peninsula home, which they called Filoli (**F**ight, **L**ove, **L**ive), was completed in September 1917. Polk went way over budget in completing the home and his drinking began to interfere with his work. Thus, in 1918, Bourn hired the architect Arthur Brown, Jr. to complete the home with the building of the carriage house. Another old friend of Bourn's, Bruce Porter, and Bella Worn completed the garden in 1917.

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**NEW ACQUISITIONS! With thanks to...**

Many thanks to **Joanne Louie, City of Burlingame Public Works Dept.**, for two photos of Burlingame City Hall when newly built, circa 1970 (see photo); **Ryan Guibara**, for a photo of a circa 1918 vintage advertisement, located on an interior wall at 251 California Drive, possibly a remnant of a former dining establishment "Quellmalz" once located at 247 California Drive; to **Ray Tyler and Cathy Foxhoven** for an interview and DVD recording of Jean Ann Carroll of Burlingame Village on June 14, 2017, and **Bobbi Benson** for a transcription thereof; to **Sara Stenger** for a large piece of painted ornamental plaster from the Fox Theater demolition, retrieved in 1978; to **Charles Geer**, courtesy of John Geer, for "Burlingame High School 1948-49", a small handbook published by the Associated Students; **John Geer** for numerous real estate brochures and flyers; **Ed Eisenman** for numerous obituaries, ads, news clippings, flyers and real estate records of people and places related to Burlingame and Hillsborough; **Linda Field** for a new tote bag printed with an original woodblock library image print from 1976 and other misc. Burlingame paraphernalia; **Jim Shypertt** for digital images and information related to Burlingame



and Hillsborough residents and their activities; **Georgette Naylor, Burlingame Chamber of Commerce** for an illustrated poster and postcard of *Burlingame On the Avenue, August 19-20<sup>th</sup> 2017*; **Carol Tanzi** for a 1928 "Pine Cone" Burlingame High School yearbook, and a "Student Prints" BHS booklet, Christmas 1927; loan and home construction papers of the R. G. Herda family, of 1268 Balboa Drive, and two early letters, 1913-15; **Jim Kelly** for several photos taken during the Easton Additions history walking tour on August 6, 2017; **Dan and Jenny Diehl**, relatives of **Larry Putman** for two "Something Big in Burlingame" promotional booklets -1953, and an oversized *Lions Club of Burlingame* scrapbook lovingly maintained by Dale Perkins and John Benson during Larry's tenure as President, 1974-75, in the Lions 45<sup>th</sup> year, to **Christine A. Granucci** (BPD) for a collection of *Burlingame Advance Star* clippings and newspapers, 1926-28, and to **Mary Hunt** for a detailed report on Burlingame tree removals associated with the Caltrain Peninsula Corridor Electrification Project (PCEP), *CalMod*, April 12, 2017.

**IN MEMORIAM-**

Florence Whitfield

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:**

Leslie McQuaide - Individual

Michelle Haggland- Individual

Nicole E. Hawkins - Individual

Irv Agard - Individual

Karen L. Norbut-Mcelhany - Individual

Thank you to **John Ward**, for the donation of a microphone and amplifier for use on our walking and passport tours! —to **Patti Flynn**, Easton Branch librarian, who opened the library and served refreshments to those attending our "Easton Additions" walking tour, and to **Gary Doss** for repairs to some of our museum video display equipment. We very much appreciate the generous Community Grant donation from the **City of Burlingame**. Special thanks to **John and Carolyn Root** for the generous donation made **in memory of Nick Baylock**.

**Bourn, continued from page 1 . . .**

Bourn turned 60 in 1917. He and his wife Agnes thoroughly enjoyed living and entertaining at Filoli for five full years. However, in 1921, the man who had met so many challenges in his life, including bringing his father's gold mine back to life and helping create a modern city in San Francisco with beautiful architecture and ample supplies of gas, electricity and water, finally met a challenge he could not overcome. In the summer of that year, at the age of 64 he suffered a debilitating stroke. For the next 15 years, William continued to suffer a series of strokes. In preparation for the inevitable, he began putting his financial house in order and started selling off his far-flung assets. As it turned out, he need not have worried about Maud and Agnes; they both predeceased him. On July 5, 1936, William Bowers Bourn II passed away. He was buried at the family plot at Filoli, near his daughter and wife and a son who died in infancy. At his death, the newspaper *San Francisco Argonaut* noted that "his career was a record of the building of the West, coinciding in its successive phases with the change of San Francisco from a mining center to a metropolis . . . In his passing, California has lost one of the foremost of her builder sons."

**ORAL HISTORIES 101 - The Importance of Preserving Memories**  
*Burlingame Historical Society style!*

**JOIN US TO LEARN HOW TO PRESERVE THOSE PRECIOUS MEMORIES**, of your loved ones through oral history videos and recordings. The Burlingame Historical Society's **Cathy Foxhoven and Ray Tyler**, will take you step by step on how to do this at our **Quarterly Meeting, Wednesday, October 25, 2017, 7pm** at the Lane Room of the Burlingame Public Library.



*Many, many thanks to Rosalie McCloud, who served for many years as our Board Secretary, and was so involved in the Burlingame community for many decades. She has made a return to Orange County. We will miss you and your sassy sense of humor, Rosalie!!*



ROSALIE AT KOHL

**Did you know?**

**William and Agnes Bourn** (see cover story) purchased Muckcross, an 11,000-acre Irish estate with a 100-room mansion for their only daughter Maud when she was on her honeymoon. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Americans, like Bourn, became very rich. Old New York society, however, was unwelcoming to the *nouveau riche*. As a result, in order to obtain social status, many young American heiresses traded “dollars for British titles.” By marrying British nobility, the young women provided much needed wealth to keep the large estates running, while their British husbands provided the new brides with social status and a noble title. William and Agnes Bourn’s only daughter Maud did not marry nobility, but her father ensured that she was treated as if she did.

In March of 1910, Maud, who was then 26, married Arthur Rose Vincent at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in San Mateo. The wedding reception was held at Skyfarm, (current site of Nueva School), which the Bourns had rented so he could keep a closer eye on Spring Valley Water Company business and be closer to the social whirl of the Burlingame Country Club. Maud had met Arthur Vincent, an Irish lawyer, in 1906 on board a ship while crossing the Atlantic on one of the Bourn family’s numerous “Grand Tours” to Europe and Egypt. In 1909, the year prior to their marriage, Vincent had been serving as a judge for His Majesty’s Court in Zanzibar, off the east coast of Africa. Bourn did not want his only child living in Zanzibar. So when the couple returned from their long honeymoon abroad, they learned that Bourn had purchased the Muckcross Estate in County Kerry, Ireland, to be the newlyweds’ home. Bourn also promised the couple a yearly expense account of \$25,000, in addition to paying the estimated annual cost of running the estate (\$65,000). Unlike many other American heiresses who married British nobility, Muckcross wasn’t in England and it did not come with a title of “Lady” for Maud, but it would have to do. In 1911, Maud was presented to the Court of St. James, an indication of the elevated social status she had recently obtained.

**Address Service Requested - Time Dated Material**

### Calendar

#### **Quarterly Meeting:**

#### **Learn How to Do Oral Histories:**

Weds., October 25, 2017  
Lane Room, 7pm

#### **Burlingame Hillsborough History Museum Open:**

1st Sun. of each month, 1-4 PM.

November 5th, December 3rd.

#### **Museum Docents Needed!**

No experience required.

Please call 340-9960 to volunteer.

*Please remember us in  
your trust or will!*

## THE BURLINGAME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2017, ISSUE 152

### **President's Message**

**Our August 6<sup>th</sup> annual walking tours were very well attended.** With perfect weather for the occasion, several participants noted the buzz of activity in our restaurants, several of which had spilled over to sun-filled tables outdoors. Those new to our city may find it hard to imagine a time when activity on Burlingame Avenue was at an all-time low.



While today's retailers compete with a plethora of online merchants offering unrivaled delivery speeds, similar impacts in the 1960s and 70s were a result of shopper migration to the new Hillsdale Mall. Those taking the unsnarled drive southward were rewarded with ample, one-stop (and free) parking, complete with an inexpensive food court to quell hunger pangs, and popular Benny Bufano sculptures adorning the outdoor landscapes, to boot.

Back on the Avenue, there were few "restaurants" in Burlingame; rather, eating out locally generally meant a visit to a "fountain", like Woolworths or Borden's, or a handful of basic dining rooms (with the occasional Asian or Continental offering) not to mention a few taverns. As late as the 1980s, celebrating a nice event locally included a drive out to one of several dining establishments on the Bayfront, because, with the exception of bars, the downtown districts had mostly shut down by early evening.

That all changed beginning in the early 1990s when then Mayor Frank Pagliaro pushed for changes allowing outdoor dining, emulating the sidewalk dining he and his wife experienced in Europe. Together with more recent changes removing moratoriums on new restaurants, and physical and aesthetic changes including wider sidewalks on Burlingame Avenue, virtually any type of food and atmosphere can be found here within just a few blocks...and at least for now, the latter is undeliverable by drone.

### **Current Officers 2017:**

Co-President - Archives  
Jennifer Pfaff  
Co-President - Programs  
Cathy Foxhoven  
VP - Museum -  
Russ Cohen  
VP Technology and  
Education -  
Diane Condon-Wirgler  
Treasurer and Newsletter  
- Joanne Garrison  
Secretary - Jeff DeMartini  
Corresponding Secretary  
- Mary Packard  
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Board Member Emeritus  
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