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Public Dump . . . Burial Place for a Shattered Dream



— Photo by Gene Tupper

Clarence Kavanaugh, standing amid debris where Ravenswood Wharf once flourished, is grandson of early settlers.

The Story of Ravenswood, Our First Peninsula Town

By PAT HATT

A ghost lies buried beside the bay,
Buried deep, 'neath tons of
debris.
An occasional mourner wanders
there
To reminisce with a memory.

Inglorious—even bizarre—endings are not too unusual in the Peninsula's fiery, unconventional history.

Paupers became rich men, the rich fell from their golden towers. In the rags-to-riches saga there is always joy . . . "It could only happen here." In the fall from fame and fortune, whether it be man or town, there is sadness.

Such is the sadness in the sound of the blue bay waters which lap gently at the edge of a public dump at the end of Bay Road in East Palo Alto. It is an ugly, grotesque stretch of shoreline.

Yet little more than a century ago, as early as 1848, this same spot harbored Ravenswood Wharf, the nucleus of a shipping center more powerful and influential than any

neighbor to the north.

Jutting proudly into the cool water, a 1,500-foot wooden pier welcomed the ill-fated side-wheeler "Jenny Lind" on her regular voyages between San Francisco and Ravenswood; lumbermen used the strength of oxen teams to haul timber down from the hills to the port; hay from surrounding oak-studded meadows was baled and brought to the pier for shipment.

Around this flurry of activity thrived the Peninsula's first regularly platted town: Ravenswood. Here in 1851 William Paul, a native of Scotland, established the first store in the southern half of San Francisco County. (Until 1856 San Mateo and San Francisco Counties were one entity, bearing the latter's name.)

Many unrelated factors combined to create this early-day prosperity in Ravenswood and gave credence to dreams of greatness for the town.

In 1846 California ceased to



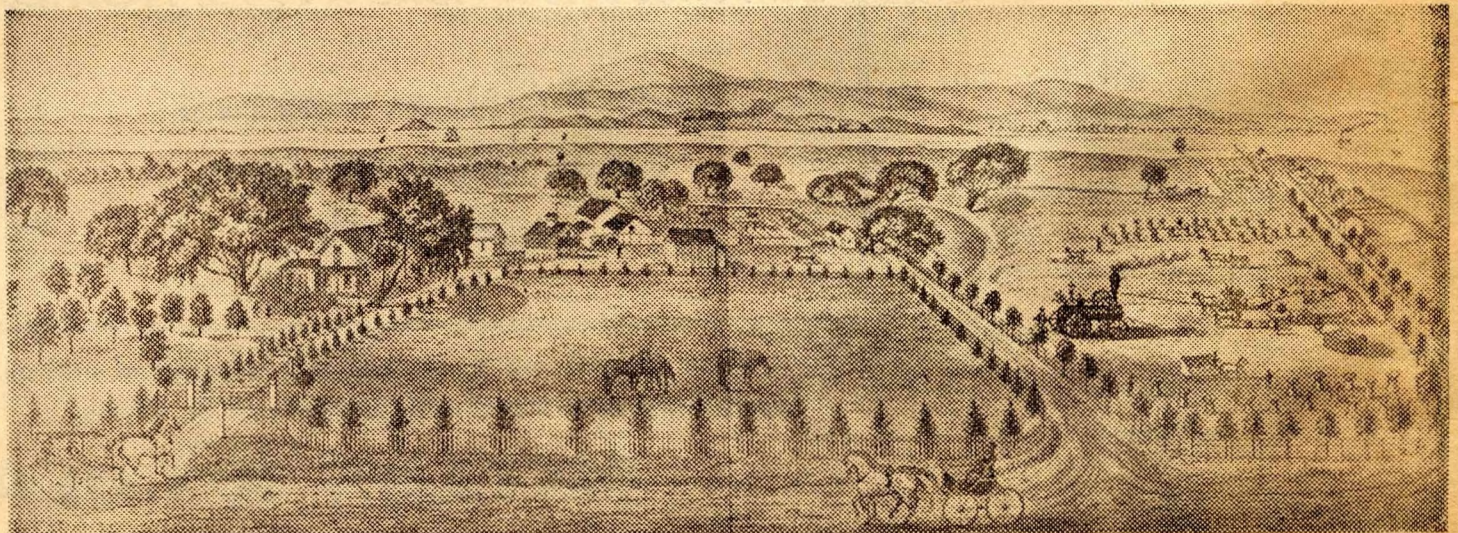
Old frame house, demolished after being photographed several years ago, was typical of Ravenswood "hey-day".

be under Mexican rule and was free to develop its resources. In 1849 San Jose became the first capital of the new territory, making Port Ravenswood the obvious emporium for all incoming and outgoing capital commerce; 1850 brought California's entry into the Union, and 1853 saw U.S. Coastal Survey teams erect a sandstone monument near the wharf as part of a project triangulat-

ing the bay. This Pulgas Base Monument still stands in Jack Farrell Park in the University Village subdivision.

But perhaps most important was the plan to make Ravenswood the prime western terminus for the Central Pacific Railroad. This was to have been accomplished by means of a ferry and later a bridge.

The passing years served to increase prosperity for the
(Continued on next page)



Perhaps hoping for railroad boom in town, Lester Cooley established this large farm near bay in 1868.

Ancient Landmarks Bear Mute Witness to Once-Promising Past



—Photos by Gene Tupper

U.S. coastal survey monument, erected 102 years ago, still remains in neighborhood park; swimming pool, built in 1863, was abandoned just this spring.

Beginning Of the End

(Continued from Page 12)

port and town. And then, just as a series of circumstances had instilled life, another series sounded the death knell.

In 1855 one of Ravenswood's most active and financially able supporters, Isaiah C. Woods, left California after the failure of Adams and Company, a San Francisco banking firm with which he was associated. All of his Ravenswood property was attached by creditors and auctioned at a sheriff's sale.

The first railroad line from San Jose to San Francisco was completed in 1864, diverting much of the San Jose shipping from Ravenswood to the San Francisco port. In strangling succession over the next 15 years San Jose lost out to Sacramento as a permanent state capital and, most important, the Central Pacific Railroad decided to make Oakland its western terminus.

Ravenswood withered into unimportance.

In 1874 a second chance breathed life into the town. Hunter, Shackelford and Company established the largest brick manufacturing plant in the county at Farrell Park. Clay and sand were scooped from the site and molded into bricks for use in construction of William G. Ralston's Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Barges swarmed to the pier, then called Cooley's Landing.

But when the hotel was finished so was the brick plant. And so, except for local use, was the proud old wharf.

It rotted long ago. Even the one last piling which stubbornly resisted the water's ravages to remain as a landmark, has succumbed.

The town area itself has survived. Not in realization of the dream of an influential metropolis, but as a healthy residential community of 10,000 population.

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