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# La Peninsula

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- Airports of San Mateo County
- Lathrop House

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imagine the future.

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To inspire wonder and  
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two county historical sites,  
the Sanchez Adobe in  
Pacifica and the Woodside  
Store in Woodside.



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Address correspondence to: Editor, *La Peninsula*, San Mateo County Historical Association, 2200 Broadway, Redwood City, CA 94063 or [lapieninsula@historysmc.org](mailto:lapieninsula@historysmc.org).

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**Cover: San Mateo Airport, late 1940s.**

# The Airports of San Mateo County: Early Days and Growing Pains

by Jack Dowling, Spring 1946



Bay Meadows Airport, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.

## Editor's Note

Dr. Frank Stanger, the San Mateo County Historical Association's first Executive Director, taught history at San Mateo Junior College. In 1938, Colonel Charles Kirkbride, the Historical Association's chairman, announced that he would provide awards each year to the students who wrote the most outstanding research papers on local history.

Many of the student monographs submitted for the Kirkbride Contest became part of the Historical Association's Archives. Some of the students included with their papers pamphlets, flyers, time tables, maps and photographs they took while doing research. In some instances, these photographs are the only images the Historical Association has of buildings demolished long ago.

Jack Dowling wrote *Airports of San Mateo County: Early Days and Growing Pains* in 1946. We are reprinting the article as he wrote it to give the perspective of a time when the growing popularity of air travel called in to question the existence of multiple small airfields. As Dowling was concentrating on the then current "Battle of the Airports," he did not include earlier airports of the County such as the Redwood City airport that opened and closed before World War II.

## Forward

In this term paper on the Airports of San Mateo County, I shall attempt to give a brief story on the controversy that is going on at present. This conflict of opinion was brought about by the following:

1. Overlapping of Traffic Patterns,
2. Private Ownership verses Municipal Ownership.

This story is complete up to May 27, 1946. On June 3, 1946, there is to be a meeting of the interested parties, who may reach a decision on this matter.

## San Francisco Airport

San Francisco Airport, or as they were calling it back in 1927, Mills Field, named after D.O. Mills from whom the property was bought\*, was laid out in what was then mud flats.<sup>1</sup>

\* D.O. Mills died in 1910. The property for the airport was purchased from the Mills Estate Company.



Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* at Mills Field, 1927.

The biggest thrill of those early days was the Air Show that was held on May 8, 1927, which consisted of three Navy fighters and a few stunt fliers.

Mills Field got a bad name from the very beginning in that it was also in 1927 that Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh's plane sank into a chuck-hole and was stuck for hours while San Francisco blushed from nation-wide scorn.

But no one in those pioneer days of aviation could even visualize the huge modern airport that was to turn those very same mud flats into one of the greatest airports in the world. This vision that was to come true would lengthen the runways from 3,000-foot runways into massive dual 8,000-foot runways which would allow planes to land and take-off at the same time.<sup>2</sup> It would also increase the capacity of the field from 30 planes per hour to over 120 per hour. Neither could people who were present that day in 1927 visualize over 15,000 passengers passing through the terminal every 24 hours.<sup>3</sup>

This new airport that is under construction is to be ready in 1950 or thereabouts. It will make San Francisco one of the main calling points of the world-girdling airlines. The total acreage would increase from a scant 500 usable acres to over 1,400 usable acres. This increase will allow the huge runways that are necessary for today's and tomorrow's sky-giants.<sup>4</sup>

While the airport is 12 miles down the Peninsula from San Francisco, it will be accessible in only a



Passengers inside the Mills Field terminal, late 1940s.

few minutes via the new freeway that is now under construction.

### United Air Lines Terminal

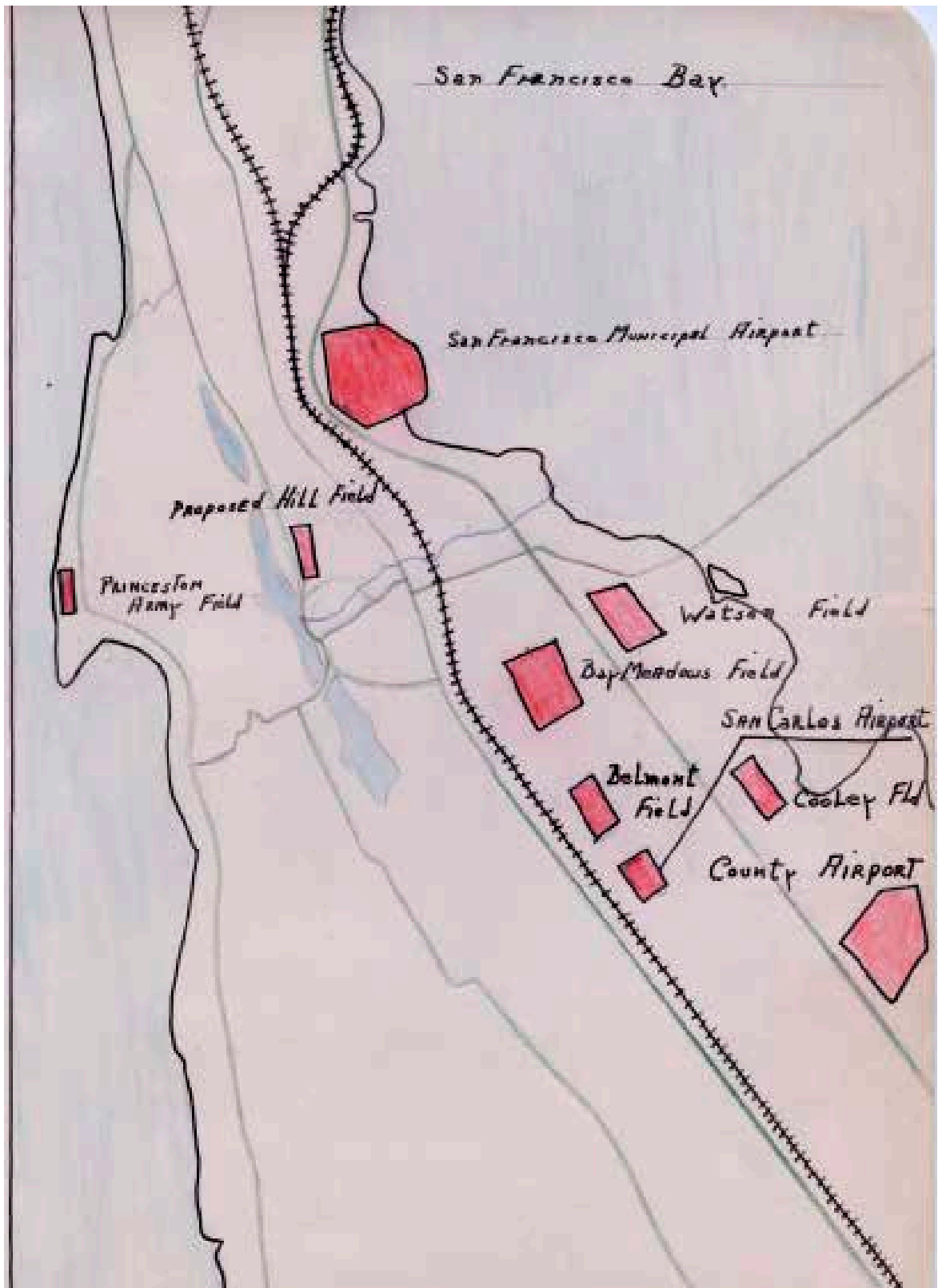
The United Air Lines Maintenance terminal is located on the north side of the San Francisco Airport. At this base are maintained and repaired all of the giant D-C 3's and D-C 4's and all other planes that are owned and operated by United Air Lines.

The base consists of 125,000 square feet and is to be expanded to almost 500,000 square feet by 1955. The personnel employed there at present consists of about 2,000 people. This number will be increased to well over 14,000 when United Air Lines completes its move to the San Francisco Airport. The only phase of the Airline Operations that will not be located here will be the Executive Offices which will remain in Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

### Pan American World Airways Terminal

The Pan American World Airways base was first opened in the early days of September 1944 when the Pan American moved from its former base on Treasure Island which had to be vacated when the Navy took over control of the Island. The facilities now occupied by Pan American Airways were built by the Navy to replace the ones on Treasure Island.\*

\* This was a seaplane base.



Map of San Mateo County airports, 1946. It includes San Francisco Municipal Airport, five existing private airfields (Watson's is the San Mateo Airport), two proposed airports (County and Hill Field) and the Princeton Army Field (now Half Moon Bay Airport). From Dowling's student monograph.

The facilities consist of hangars, administration buildings, operations buildings, seaplane ramps, cafeteria and other improvements.

Future plans call for Pan American World Airways moving to a more centrally located point when the San Francisco Airport is expanded to its future size.<sup>6</sup>

### **Cooley Airport**

#### **San Carlos, California**

The plans for Cooley Airport have been completed and work has been started. It will have complete aviation and maintenance facilities. The field will be unique in that it will have no obstructions for four miles on the prevailing approach. There will be two major runways, the main one being 200 feet wide and 5,200 feet long, the other being the same width and 3,200 feet long. Using the Ohio Building (one of the outstanding attractions of the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition that was floated down to San Carlos at a cost of over \$75,000) as a focal point, the direction of the main runway will be in line with the Cement Plant on the bay shore opposite Redwood City, while the auxiliary runway, east and west, will be in line with the tannery at Redwood City.

The project is being backed by William L. Cooley of the Cooley Industries, owner of the 227-acre plot in which the field is to be built. Cooley has listed the following plans as part of the project:

1. The razing of the Ohio building to make way for new buildings adjacent to the runway.
2. Construction of new type hangars streamlined with accommodations to handle 100 aircraft.
3. Construction of shops and maintenance buildings.<sup>7</sup>

### **Bay Meadows Airport**

#### **San Mateo, California**

The present site of Bay Meadows Airport was originally known as the Curtiss-Wright Airport and a landing field of sorts has been located there for at least the past 25 years.



Cooley Field, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.

The field, if it is completed, will be large enough to accommodate 1,500 planes and will consist of two runways, one 5,300 feet long and the other 2,300 feet long. It is located on a 230-acre tract north of the Bay Meadows Race Track, and runs east to the Bayshore Highway. Plans call for 16 hangars to be built of steel, concrete and glass. It will be owned and operated by William P. Kyne, Manager of Bay Meadows Race Track.

At the present time, Bay Meadows Airport is one of those that may have to be abandoned through the controversy now being fought.<sup>8</sup>

### **San Mateo Airport**

#### **San Mateo, California**

The second airport located in San Mateo is called San Mateo Airport, owned and operated by Edward C. Watson. The two flying dentists, Dr. Joseph Lorenz and Dr. Cecil Smith are also part owners.

San Mateo Airport is located [near] Brewer's Island east of Bayshore Highway. At the present time, there are not planes operating out of this field because of a conflict of traffic patterns with Bay Meadows Airport which is located ½ mile west.<sup>9</sup>



Bay Meadows Airport, construction by Bay Meadows' owner William Kyne, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.



San Mateo Airport, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.



Belmont Airport, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.



San Carlos Airport, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.

### **Belmont Airport**

#### **Belmont, California**

This airport is located about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile north of the town of Belmont, California, and is situated between the Southern Pacific Railroad and Bayshore Highway. It has one runway lying in a northeast-southwest direction. It is owned and operated by Edward Topham, Jr. and Tex Harris.<sup>10</sup>

### **San Carlos Airport**

#### **San Carlos, California**

San Carlos Airport is located approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile northeast of the City of San Carlos, California, and is situated between the Southern Pacific Tracks and the Bayshore Highway. The runway runs approximately north-south and is about 3,500 feet long. There are complete hangars and shops located at the field.

### **County Airport**

The new proposed County Airport owned and operated by San Mateo County will be located on a 600-acre plot in the tidelands east of the Bayshore Highway by Belmont Slough. The financing of the airport would be handled primarily through the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) fund allotted for such projects.



The field would consist ultimately of four parallel runways each 3,500 feet long. It would be fully equipped with hangars, shops and other buildings which private operators could rent.

If the County goes ahead with this project, it will mean eventual abandonment of three of the five private airports located in the County. These are Bay Meadows, Belmont and San Carlos Airports, all of which are located west of the Bayshore Highway. The CAA has stated that it would be best if all airports were located east of the Bayshore Highway.<sup>11</sup>

### **County Airport**

#### **Half Moon Bay, California**

It has been announced that the County intends to acquire the airfield that was constructed during the war by the Army at Princeton. It has one asphalt-paved runway 5,200 feet long that runs in a north-south direction.<sup>12</sup> It was proposed by Supervisor Alvin S. Hatch that the County take control as soon as possible and that Clyde Monahan and Sam Johnson be permitted to operate the field and maintain it for the County. So far, no action has been taken.

It was constructed for interception purposes by the Army as a part of the Coastal Defense plans and was attached for purposes of Command to the McClellan Field at Sacramento. Late in the war it was taken over by the Navy and used in connection with the gunnery school at Montara Point.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Controversy to Date**

The main problem of the airports of San Mateo County is one of space and conflicting traffic patterns. Before and during the war this conflict was dormant. The main reason for this was the lack of private planes and the restriction of private flying. There were three [private] airports in the County before the war: Bay Meadows, San Carlos and the Belmont Airports. These fields were used by the Civil Air Patrol which consisted of the various civilian fliers who had volunteered to serve as aerial submarine-spotters, fire patrol and

various other activities that were necessary to the war effort.

The first real action taken on the construction of the various airports broke out in the early part of 1945 when the Burlingame and San Mateo Chamber of Commerces got together for a joint study of a tri-city airport. This committee consisted of numerous men of some importance in the three cities [of San Mateo, Burlingame and Hillsborough].<sup>14</sup>

San Mateo was the first to attempt to establish an airfield by endeavoring to secure a \$500,000 bond issue,<sup>15</sup> but it met with complete disapproval of the city councilmen.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, the tri-city airport committee made an extended survey of the various sites that had been suggested as the location of the Three-City Airport. Among the sites suggested were Brewer's Island, Bay Meadows and also a site to the north of [Crystal Springs] Dam.<sup>17</sup> The CAA gave as its recommendation Bay Meadows Airport as a site for the Tri-City Airport. The CAA stated that the Brewer's Island site was good except that it is located on the San Francisco Airport Radio Beam.<sup>18</sup> Immediately after this CAA statement, the Three-Cities Airport Committee names its chosen site, Brewer's Island. Their main reason for selecting Brewer's Island was that Bay Meadows was too close to the City of San Mateo.<sup>19</sup>



Cooley proposed removing the Ohio Building as part of his airport improvements. From Dowling's student monograph.



About four and a half months after this momentous stand taken by the Tri-City Airport Committee in opposition to the CAA recommendation, it was announced that construction would start soon on a 1,500-plane airport at Bay Meadows to be built and owned by William P. Kyne.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after Kyne's announcement, William L. Cooley made public his plans for a super airport to be built east of Bayshore Highway with the center point located at the old Ohio Building which has stood alone by Phelps Slough for the past 20-odd years. From this point on, there was really a race to see who could build the best airport in the shortest period of time.<sup>21</sup>

San Carlos gained one advantage over the rest of the private airports by securing the first charter airline to begin regular operation between this area and Southern California.<sup>22</sup> Also, about this time there appeared in local papers the following item, "Airport Chain Planned with Link in San Mateo." This was a chain of six private airports scattered throughout California and it was tentatively planned to build the local airport of this chain on the 130-acre Emma Rose property between Ninth Avenue and the south city limits east of the Bayshore Highway. Apparently this plan was turned down by the San Mateo Planning Commission as nothing has been heard of it since that article appeared in the local papers.<sup>23</sup>

Although it had been announced some six months before, the work to divert Phelps Slough didn't get started until March 15, 1946. Actual construction could not be started until this obstruction was removed.<sup>24</sup>

It was also at this time that Edward C. Watson got the go-ahead signal from the San Mateo City Planning Commission for the construction of the San Mateo Airport [near] Brewer's Island.<sup>25</sup> He also said he had the CAA's ok to start, except for approval of the traffic patterns. Watson had just received the go-head when the Bay Meadows Airport brought suit in the San Francisco Federal Courts to restrain San Mateo Airport from operating because the traffic patterns of the two fields would conflict.<sup>26</sup> Owner Edward C.

Watson announced that there was no injunction issued and also pointed out that the judge said that unless new evidence could be presented by April 4, 1946, the case would be dropped. On April 9, 1946, the courts dropped the so-called "Battle of the Airports" because it was decided it was strictly a San Mateo County fight. This came about because of the stripping of war-time powers from the CAA. The chief point that the Bay Meadows Airport used was that a rival airport only 2,500 feet away would constitute an air-traffic hazard.<sup>27</sup>

On Tuesday, March 26, more than 50 airport owners and managers, CAA officials, county officials and representatives of the six cities involved met to try to iron out the traffic pattern conflicts.<sup>28</sup> The CAA was represented by Ray I. Hell, district airport engineer. Some of the others who represented the airports were: Edward Topham of Belmont; Roy Patten of San Carlos; Edward C. Watson of San Mateo; William Cooley of Cooley Field; Donald Myers of Bay Meadows; and Frank Moore of the Palo Alto Airports.<sup>29</sup>

The CAA's compromise plan was completely rejected at this meeting by all represented except one. Donald L. Hughes of Bay Meadows Airport rapped the CAA for failure to consider the high residential requirements in San Mateo County. The plan that was suggested had the following points in it.

1. Left-hand traffic pattern which would route planes over the residential areas.
2. Combine Bay Meadows, San Mateo and Belmont Airports as one combined traffic pattern.

The only approval of the plan came from Edward C. Watson. The answer to this problem was that the CAA had no alternative but to recommend immediate abandonment of at least one and possibly three of the five airports involved. The CAA regional director, Joseph Marriot, admitted that the recommendations were to make the best of a bad situation. The operators objected mainly to the aerial rerouting which would place traffic over residential areas and thus bring about protests.<sup>30</sup>

It was shortly after this upheaval that Frank Skillman,

San Mateo County Planning Commission Secretary, predicted County ownership and eventual abandonment of two and possible three of the private fields located in the County.<sup>31</sup>

It was only one day after this predication that C.A. Buck, County Planning Commission Chairman, announced plans for a County-owned airport on a 600-acre tract in the tidelands east of the Bayshore Highway. According to Buck, the County does not intend to buy or take over any of the five private airports. He said that this would be a waste of the County's money. The tentative plans are to be projected over a period of 50 years, so that the new developments will not call for another airport in that time. The County-operated field would have the most up-to-date facilities with a main control tower. The private owners would not be forced to close unless ordered to do so by the CAA. Buck also said, "Our plan is to relieve the public of both noise and the hazard of low flying planes by having the field away from residential districts."<sup>32</sup>

The CAA has contrived plans which would eventually call for County ownership of three of the private fields, with construction of a \$2,000,000 airport to be ready within two years. This new plan that the CAA would put forward would contain essentially the following points:

1. Recognize the existence of Palo Alto Airport as a Municipal airport in the county [even though it is in Santa Clara County];
2. Construct a \$2,000,000 County airport east of Bayshore Highway as close to San Francisco as Mills Field operating facilities will permit;
3. Contemplate future construction of a field east of Bayshore Highway in the vicinity of Redwood City.

In the meantime the operators of the five county airports would be discouraged from any further improvements of their present fields.

Planning consultant Ronald Campbell explained that the proposed airport would be financed in part by the County which would provide a 600-acre site and \$200,000 for operating expenses. Campbell further explained that the planned airport would have four runways 700 feet wide and 3,400 feet long. Facilities

would accommodate 80 planes per minute and could also handle planes as large as the DC-3.

County planners took no action, but heard complaints by San Carlos, San Mateo and Bay Meadows Airports.

San Francisco voiced hopes of participating financially and otherwise in the new airport. It is assumed that San Francisco will be the source of the \$750,000 mentioned by county planners on April 16, as expected from outside interests. It is expected that there will be a federal grant of \$750,000 of CAA funds.<sup>33</sup>

San Francisco's interest arises from the fact that Mills Field is crowded with commercial lines and lacks space to handle private planes, including those owned by San Franciscans.

Under the plans now being discussed by B.M. "Mike" Doolin, San Francisco Airport Manager, and County officials, the proposed airport would be administered by an airport authority much like that of a joint highway district.

Actually, the construction of the County-owned and operated airport depends completely on securing the necessary money from the government. This amount totals up to about \$1,500,000. San Francisco will not contribute directly to the airport. Its financial aid would come through a joint San Mateo-San Francisco application for a federal appropriation.<sup>34</sup>

During these discussions of a County-owned airport on the eastside of the Coast Range, it was announced that the County had become interested in the purchase of the former Army field located at Half Moon Bay. Supervisor Henry W. Edmonds suggested a letter be dispatched to the War Assets Board declaring the County's interest to purchase the field at a fair price. Supervisor Alvin S. Hatch recommended immediate use of the field under direction of two former military fliers, Clyde Monahan and Sam Johnson. It was estimated that it would cost about \$400 for maintenance for the next several years.<sup>35</sup>

The Peninsula Chapter of Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association have asked for a neutral study of the airport situation. It is their plan to get a neutral party to study the dispute. They contend that the Airport Committees

of the various cities were not experienced in that line.<sup>36</sup>

The CAA blasted the San Mateo and Bay Meadows Airports with expected threats of reprisal when they ordered these two fields to fly a concentric left-hand traffic pattern.<sup>37</sup>

The order would force the planes to fly directly over the City of San Mateo, including the Community Hospital, which are in the path of the new flight pattern. The move was made by the CAA as a 30-day reprieve given to Peninsula Airports during which time the operators can prepare their claim that their old flight patterns were safe. This decision came as a result of a four-hour discussion with the operators at the Oakland Airport on May 2, 1946.

"If the plan does not work, other steps may have to be taken after the thirty days period," explained Dwight F. Peterson, CAA inspector.

One plan that was suggested in which the best operation of the proposed airport could be managed was through a five-man advisory County Airport Commission. The airports that are to be controlled by this board would be the airport southeast of Belmont and also the airport located at Princeton on the Coastside. Under this plan, Bay Meadows, Belmont and San Carlos Airports would be declared non-conforming and prohibited from expanding.<sup>38</sup>

Edward C. Watson's San Mateo Airport and a smaller airfield to be located southeast of Redwood City would be permitted to operate.

The CAA reportedly has advised that three fields south of Mills Field and north of Palo Alto would be permissible provided they are located east of the Bayshore Highway.

If Bay Meadows, San Carlos and Belmont Airports are allowed to continue proposed expansion, the planning commission staff said it would practically eliminate this area from industrial and residential possibilities.

The operators of the private airports joined in criticism of two County-owned airports. Edward C. Watson, even though his field was unaffected, objected to the fact that the County was going into the airport field now after so much money had been spent on the various

private fields. He also said that a municipally-owned field is just like a post office, in that the employees wait on you when they jolly well please. He also said that the advantage of the private fields is that they pay for themselves while a County-owned airport will cost the tax payers a lot of money.

R.D. McMurrin of San Carlos Airport suggested that the Planning Commission and the CAA look at the situation from the air rather than from an armchair. He also said that proposed County airport south of Belmont Slough would interfere with San Francisco Airport Traffic. He further stated that no matter how large an airport is, it would never accommodate all the traffic. "You can't have everybody operating one airport. Numerous operators on one airport wouldn't get along. It would eventually narrow down to one operator and flying school." He said he recognized the need for a municipal airport for commercial needs.

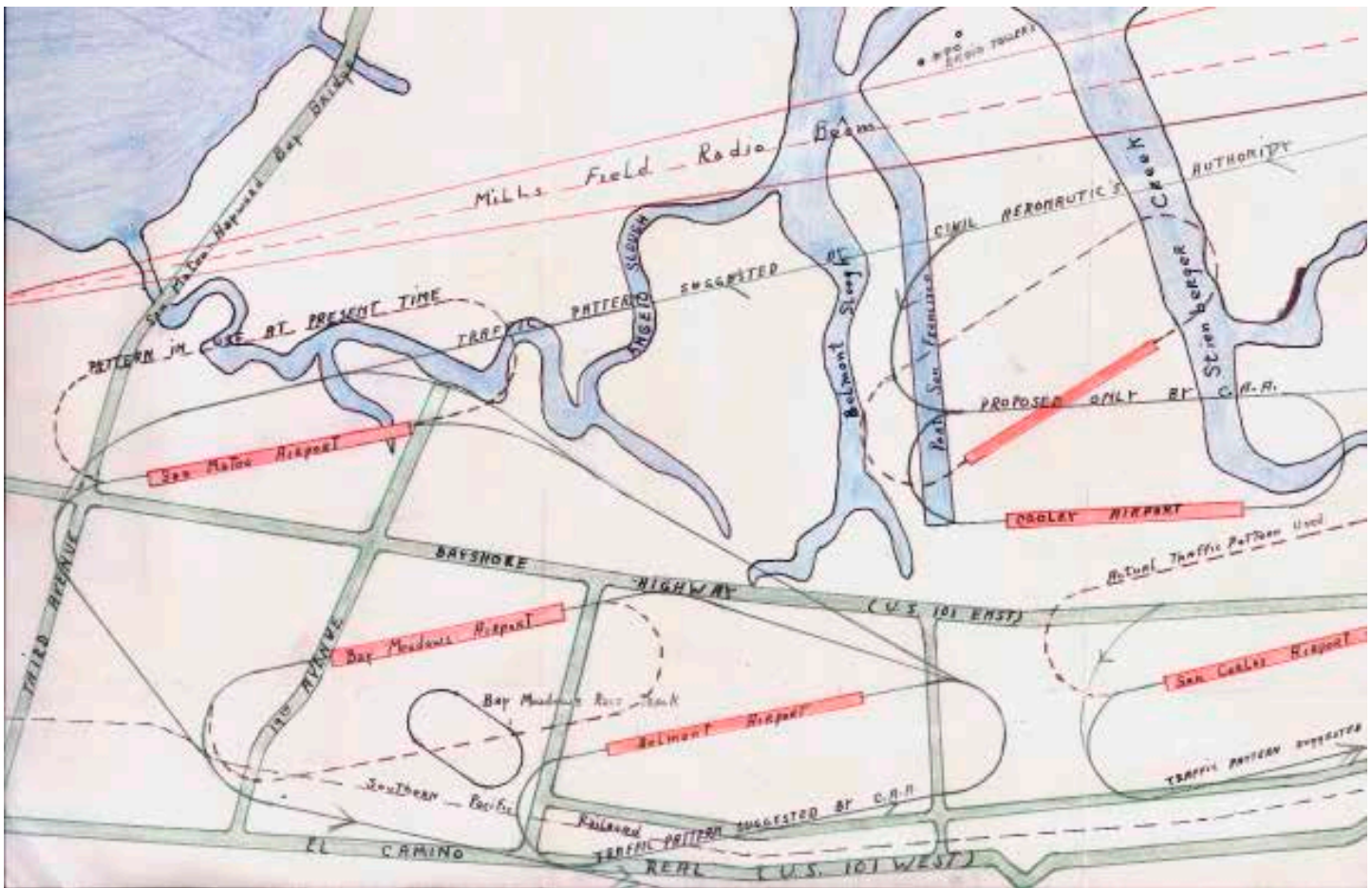
Harry S. White of the Palo Alto Airport said that the County's plan for a small airport south of Redwood City was out of the question as Leslie Salt Company had just invested \$350,000 in the only land suitable for the project. "Any airport expansion between Redwood City and Palo Alto would have to be coordinated with our airport," otherwise he said his airport was neither concerned nor involved in the present plan.<sup>39</sup>

The next meeting of the County Planning Commission will be held June 7, and that time further discussion will take place with possibility that a decision will be

### Editor's Note

Jack Dowling finished his paper in May 1946. The "Battle of the Airports" controversy continued for many years with airports planned and discontinued at various locations.

The San Carlos Airport was constructed at its current location in 1948. The County purchased it in 1964. It is home to approximately 500 aircraft and 25 aviation-related businesses. Self-funded through user and business fees, the San Carlos Airport provides a variety of emergency and response functions including Medivac flights and law enforcement patrols.



Traffic patterns as laid down by the CAA at a meeting on May 3, 1946. From Dowling's student monograph.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 5, 1945.
- <sup>2</sup> 1945-1946 *San Francisco Public Utilities Report*, p. 344.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 4, 1946.
- <sup>6</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, August 2, 1944.
- <sup>7</sup> *San Carlos Enquirer*, August 3, 1945.
- <sup>8</sup> *San Mateo Times*, July 15, 1945.
- <sup>9</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, March 15, 1946.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 10, 1946.
- <sup>12</sup> *Peninsula Community Book*, p. 188.
- <sup>13</sup> *Peninsula Community Book*, p. 189 and *Burlingame Advance*, April 17, 1946.
- <sup>14</sup> *San Mateo Times*, January 27, 1945.
- <sup>15</sup> *San Mateo Times*, February 8, 1945.
- <sup>16</sup> *San Mateo Times*, February 9, 1945.
- <sup>17</sup> *San Mateo Times*, February 14, 1945.
- <sup>18</sup> *San Mateo Times*, February 16, 1945.
- <sup>19</sup> *San Mateo Times*, February 24, 1945.

- <sup>20</sup> *San Mateo Times*, July 15, 1946.
- <sup>21</sup> *San Carlos Enquirer*, August 3, 1945.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, September 27, 1945.
- <sup>24</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, March 15, 1946.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 9, 1946.
- <sup>28</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, March 22, 1946.
- <sup>29</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, March 23, 1946.
- <sup>30</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, March 26, 1946.
- <sup>31</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 9, 1946.
- <sup>32</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 10, 1946.
- <sup>33</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 16, 1946.
- <sup>34</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 17, 1945.
- <sup>35</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 17, 1946.
- <sup>36</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, April 19, 1946.
- <sup>37</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, May 2, 1946.
- <sup>38</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, May 18, 1946.
- <sup>39</sup> *Burlingame Advance*, May 20, 1946.



# Lathrop House was also a Home

by Jim Clifford



San Francisco photographer O.V. Lange's image of the "Connor House" shows the Lathrop House in its original location.

Like the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, Redwood City's historic Lathrop House gets pushed around a lot, literally. Unlike Dangerfield, who got "no respect," Lathrop House gets plenty of respect. Scores of docents and volunteers care lovingly for the house that was built in 1863 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Lathrop House is a fine example of the Gothic Revival architecture that was so popular during Victorian times. With trademark gables influenced by the great cathedrals of Europe, the style culminated in the frivolity of the Steamboat Gothic construction inspired by the

filigree smokestacks of Mississippi River steamboats.

In the spring of 2019, the historic house is slated to be moved to the rear parking lot of the San Mateo County History Museum in Courthouse Square. The new site will be just a few yards from its present location on Hamilton Street where it faces the County Government Center. The move, which will make way for a new government building, will be Lathrop house's third relocation.

The home was built in 1863 on one of the lots where the Fox Theatre now stands on Broadway. It was moved to the rear of that block and replaced by the



Benjamin Lathrop and child, c. 1870.



Virginia and Fannie Lathrop. Courtesy of the Redwood City Heritage Association.

Central Grammar School that opened in 1895. The next move came in 1905 when the building was taken to Hamilton Street by a new owner, Sheriff Joel Mansfield.

An eye-witness account of the 1905 change of venue was provided by Joe Dimock, Manfield's nephew who was just a boy when the home of 11 rooms, plus kitchen and servants' quarters, was cut in half, placed on rollers drawn by just one horse and hauled to Hamilton where it was rejoined.

"It took, I think, about a week for the actual moving," Dimock told *Redwood City Tribune* columnist Otto Talent in an interview in 1971.

The house bears the name of Benjamin Lathrop, the original owner and San Mateo County's first clerk and recorder. Lathrop was re-elected and served as clerk, assessor and recorder until 1864 when he was elected to the Board of Supervisors and served as board chairman.

"Benjamin Lathrop's name can be seen on all sorts of historic documents, from court records and property report records to documents related to stray animals," wrote local historian John Edmonds.<sup>1</sup>

Lathrop's Peninsula business activities grew, and

he eventually moved to San Francisco to be near the center of financial activity. Lathrop became a charter member of the New York Stock Exchange as well as a director of Southern Pacific Railroad.

Another famous owner of the home was Civil War General Patrick E. Connor, who bought the house in 1870. Connor held on to the house until 1894 when it was bought by the school district, which sold it to Mansfield.

Dimock remembered how the empty house "stood for quite some time somewhere in back of the old grammar school" where it became a "public nuisance." There was even some talk of the fire department burning it in a practice drill.

Dimock said the building should be known as "Mansfield Mansion" because the sheriff saved the house from being torn down.

### **A House is Not a Home**

When the subject is historic houses, it is easy to forget that houses were also homes with families living inside. Volunteer docents at the Hamilton site made sure visitors knew the difference. They related the

histories of the families as they escort visitors through rooms filled with furniture from the periods when the house was lived in.

The items included those used by the Connor family, especially daughter Kate who recounted her time in Lathrop House in her memoirs published in 1931. The Connor family piano and Kate's bedroom furniture are among the items on display.

In her writings, Kate Connor referred to the residence as a "seven gabled" house and recalled falling into a waterway near the house when she was 14. The highlight of her stay in Redwood City was her wedding in 1884 to 29-year-old Bartley Patrick Oliver. Newspapers treated the ceremony as though the 20-year-old bride was royalty, noting that the church filled up "as fast as possible" because Kate Connor was "a great friend of all who knew her."<sup>2</sup>

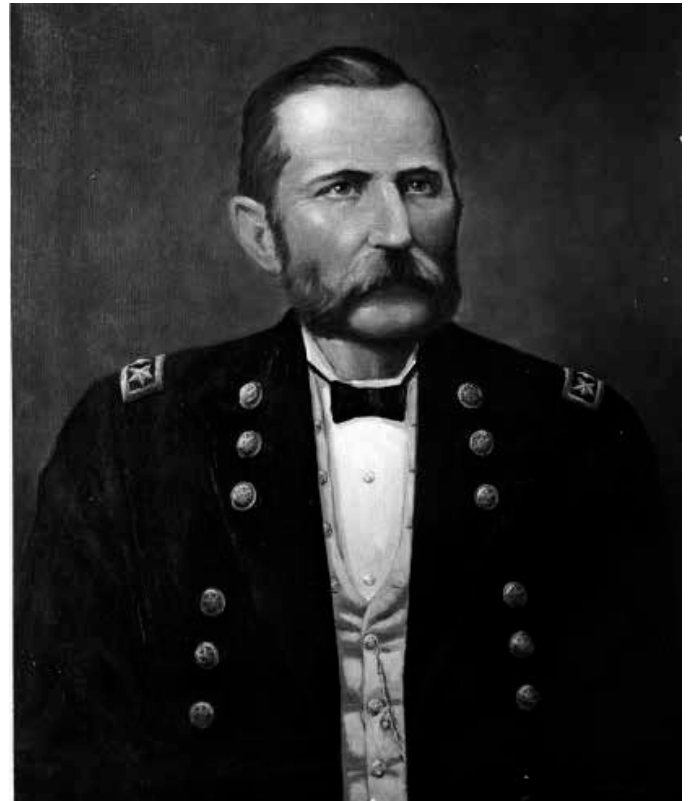
School children were given the day off and "packed the rear" of Mount Carmel church. Guests came "by the trainload from San Francisco," Kate wrote in her memoirs. "A church wedding was a rare event in the little village." According to the 1880 census, Redwood City had a population of 1,383.

A 1928 newspaper feature article about the Lathrop "mansion" made more of the Connor connection than Lathrop or Mansfield.<sup>3</sup>

The home was "Redwood City's most imposing residence – this house of many gables with its well-kept grounds, its flowers and fruit and shade trees, a place of beauty and comfort, with all that wealth could provide." The writer concluded by saying "the doors of the Connor home were always open "to all with a welcome that was genuine and generous."

The Connors lived in Redwood City "many years," Kate wrote. She doesn't say how exactly how many, but she does report that her brother, Hillary, was born during the years in Redwood City.

Kate wrote much more about her mother, Johanna, than her famous father, who marched her down the aisle at her wedding, but was away much of the time because he had "too many irons in the fire." The



Brevet Major General Patrick Edward Connor by Otto Moilan.

general developed businesses in Utah where he named both a railroad engine and a steamboat after his daughter.

While he gets scant notice locally, Connor's exploits are noted in such books as *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *Men to Match My Mountains* and *American Military History*, a thick volume published by the Army. His role in the Battle of Bear River in Idaho in 1863 is extremely controversial. When the smoke cleared 21 soldiers and 250 Shoshone were dead, including 90 women and children of the tribe, according to the memorial marker at the battle site.<sup>4</sup>

### The First Move

The Connor ownership ended in 1894 and the house endured its first move. The school district bought the mansion, moved it back, and replaced it with the Central Elementary School. The house, now located near the very active north branch of Redwood Creek, survived





Alice and Joel Mansfield. Courtesy of the Redwood City Heritage Association.

a period of neglect until it was bought by Mansfield in May of 1905. Actually, it was purchased by Alice Mansfield, Joel's wife. Interestingly, the property on which Lathrop House would be built was purchased by Lathrop's wife, Mary. In fact, she bought an entire block of lots comprising seven acres from the Arguello family of land grant fame.

The Mansfields moved in eight years after Joel Mansfield, then a deputy sheriff, took part in one of most shocking incidents in San Mateo County history – the slaying of Sheriff William McEvoy. Mansfield was wounded in the October 28, 1897, gunfight.

McEvoy was shot to death by Thomas Flannely, a man who just hours before had killed his own father in a dispute over business. According to the account in the *San Mateo County Times-Gazette*, McEvoy rushed to the Flannely ranch where he found the younger Flannely hiding behind a locked bedroom door.

"If you attempt to enter this room I'll fill you with lead," the killer yelled through the door. "Come in if you dare."<sup>5</sup>

When Undersheriff Mansfield arrived, McEvoy chopped through the door with an axe and was met

with a bullet that hit him in the wrist and went up his arm and came out at the elbow. He died two days later.

Mansfield was nicked by the bullet that hit the sheriff, but he managed to overpower the gunman and take him to jail where crowds gathered. Fearful that a lynch mob would result, Mansfield diverted the crowd with a fake fire alarm. He then left with Flannely through the back door and took off for San Jose.

Flannely was hanged in San Quentin in 1900.

"The shooting was at short range, and owing to the smoke of the firearms the combatants could not see each other," the *Times-Gazette* reported.

Mansfield's wound was not his first. He was wounded three times in the Civil War while a member of the Union Army. He served out McEvoy's term and was elected sheriff, holding that office until 1914, with the exception of one term between 1906 and 1910. He died in 1916 and is buried in Redwood City's Union Cemetery.

During his tenure, Mansfield took part in many sensational cases, including what must have been one of the last train robberies in the area, an event chronicled in the pages of the *Redwood City Democrat*. A masked bandit armed with a pistol escaped after holding up the mail car of a train in Burlingame and escaped, never to be captured.

Mansfield also garnered headlines when he captured a man wanted for killing a detective in the Santa Cruz area. Mansfield and another officer spotted the suspect sitting under a tree near Palo Alto. Mansfield pinned the man's arm while his companion frisked him, finding a pistol and a pocket full of ammunition.<sup>6</sup>

Lathrop, Connor and Mansfield were the more famous names connected with the house, but other people lived there as well. Historian John Edmonds, has done a virtual DNA search on ownership.<sup>7</sup>

Five years after living in the house, the Lathrops sold it at auction to Thomas Hyatt, a San Francisco attorney who sold it a year later to James Damon, a San Francisco real estate tycoon. Damon sold the house to the Connors. The general owned the house until 1894

but in 1889 he leased it to General John Sheehan, a close friend, before leasing it again to Virginia Lord who turned it in to a boarding house.

In 1894, Connor sold the house to the school district which sold it to Mansfield, who died in bed in the house he loved.

According to Edmonds, the house became a boarding house again and stayed that way until 1925 when it became the property of the San Mateo County Title Company. In the 1940s the house was converted into apartments and remained as such until 1968 when the title company deeded it to the County of San Mateo along with a gift of \$38,000 to be used for renovation work. For many years, the Redwood City Heritage Association operated the house for the County.

With the move of the Lathrop House to the museum block, the San Mateo County Historical Association has contracted with the County to operate the site. In cooperation with the Redwood City Heritage Association, the building will be open to the public twice a week. The Historical Association will also be installing a Redwood City History Gallery with changing exhibits exploring the city's past.

### James O. Clifford, Sr.

James O. Clifford, Sr., spent forty years in journalism--a career divided between United Press International and the Associated Press. His honors include the UPI Broadcast Excellence Award and the San Francisco Press Club's feature story award. Since retiring in 2000, Clifford's byline has appeared in *La Peninsula*, *The San Mateo Daily Journal*, *Climate* magazine, *Spectrum* and the *Journal of Local History*. He is the author of "Philip's Code: No News is Good News - to a Killer." Raised and educated in San Francisco, Jim and his family have lived in Redwood City nearly 50 years.

<sup>1</sup> John Edmonds, "The Historic Lathrop House," *The Journal of Local History*, Fall 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Clifford, "Kate's Royal Wedding," *The Journal of Local History*, Summer, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Redwood City Standard*, 1928.

<sup>4</sup> Brigham Madsen, *Glory Hunter*, 1990, University of Utah Press.

<sup>5</sup> John Edmonds, *Cops, Courts, Jails and Judges*, 2007, Star Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Edmonds, *The Journal of Local History*, Fall 2008.



Artist rendering depicting the Lathrop House after it is moved. Courtesy Project Development Unit, County of San Mateo.

# Upcoming Historical Association Projects



**A** Renovations to *Land of Opportunity: The Immigrant Experience in San Mateo County* at the San Mateo County History Museum will include new graphic panels, improved interactives and additional artifacts on exhibit. Additionally, the story of migration will be added to the exhibit emphasizing the experience of African Americans in their Great Migration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Anticipated completion date June 2019. Image: Rap singer Warren Shelby at Juneteenth celebration in East Palo Alto, 1991. Photo by Tom Fink.

**B** The Sanchez Adobe Interpretive Center will explore the history of the site including the Ohlone village of Pruristac, the Spanish mission farm of *San Pedro y San Pablo* and Mexican *rancho* of Don Francisco Sanchez. Anticipated completion date September 2019. Image: Rumsien Ohlone Linda Yamane created the feather cape for the exhibit.

**C** The entrepreneurs exhibit at the San Mateo County History Museum will be completely redone with a new emphasis on innovators in the county. New stories in the exhibit will include Paul Cook's innovations at Raychem in radiation chemistry. A digital timeline will allow visitors to explore stories of innovators in the county. Staff will be able to update the digital timeline on an ongoing basis. Anticipated completion date February 2020. Image: Concept drawing by Group Delphi.

**D** The creation of a natural history gallery will allow the Historical Association to interpret the prehistoric evolution of the Peninsula. On exhibit will be a life-size plaster cast of a *paleoparadoxia*, a 14 million-year-old marine mammal found in Menlo Park during the construction of the Stanford Linear Accelerator. Anticipated completion date 2021. Image: Concept drawing by Group Delphi.





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## San Mateo County Historical Association



*San Mateo County History Museum, Redwood City*



*Sanchez Adobe, Pacifica*



*Woodside Store, Woodside*

## Dr. Stanger Legacy Society



Dr. Stanger at Millbrae excavation site, 1944.

Dr. Frank Stanger was the first executive director of the San Mateo County Historical Association. Among his accomplishments, he opened the organization's first museum and started publishing *La Peninsula*.

Some of our thoughtful supporters have joined the Dr. Stanger Legacy Society by including the Association in their wills or trusts. Their gifts, and yours should you choose to join them, help us preserve and interpret the history of San Mateo County.

Members of the Dr. Stanger Legacy Society receive invitations to annual events. For more information, please contact Kaia Eakin at 650.299.0104.



San Mateo County  
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