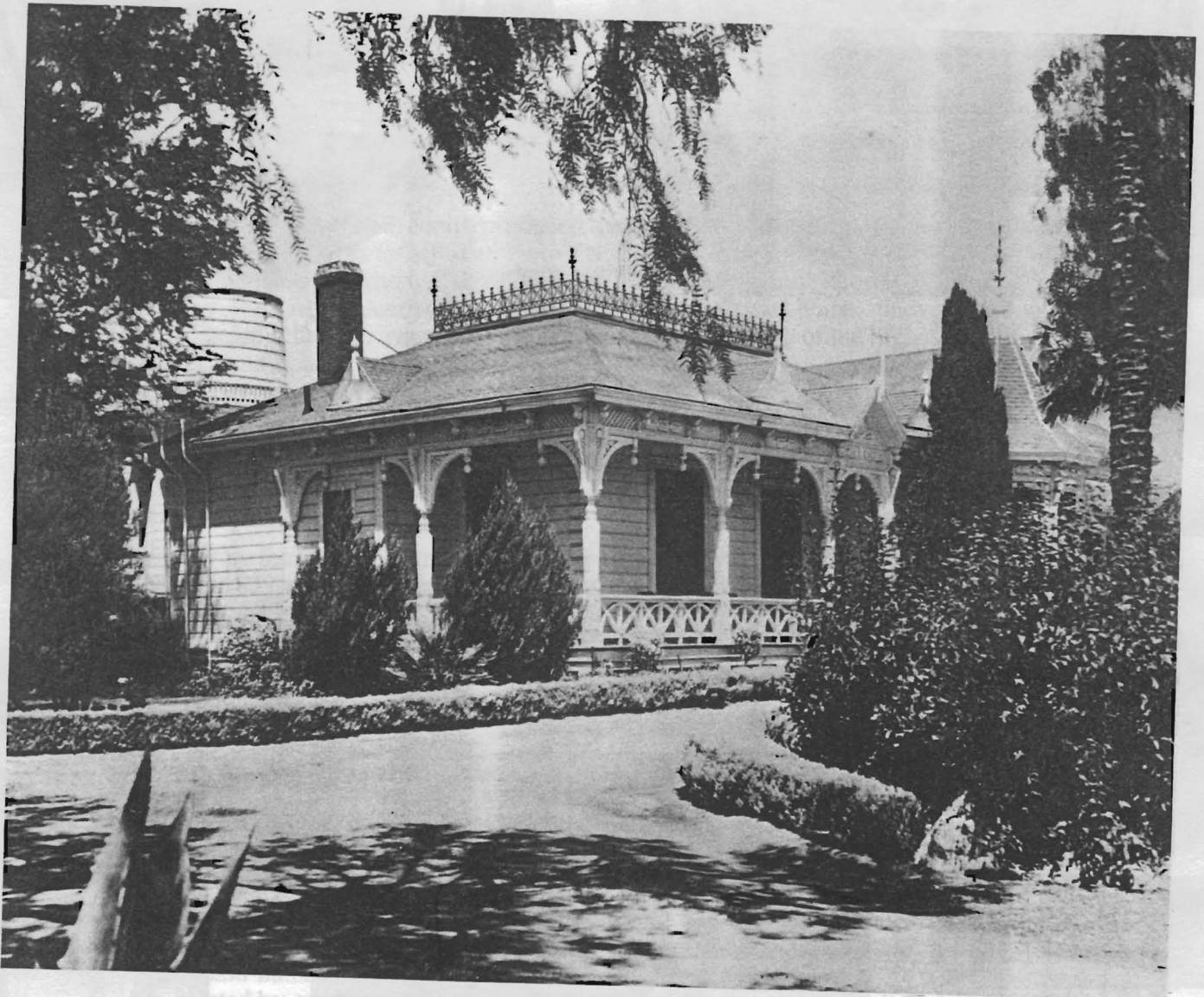




LIVERMORE HERITAGE GUILD

Chapters of Livermore History
The Ravenswood Story



RAVENSWOOD ESTATE, "THE COTTAGE," BUILT IN 1885

SECOND EDITION PUBLISHED BY THE LIVERMORE HERITAGE GUILD SEPTEMBER 1996



MR. and MRS. CHRISTOPHER A. BUCKLEY



AUNT NELL



DRAWING ROOM, 1896



CHRIS BUCKLEY, Jr.

THE RAVENSWOOD STORY

The Livermore Valley participated in the boom in wine production of the 1880s when it was the fashion for gentlemen to have a country estate where they could grow and mature their own vintages.

The benign climate of the Livermore Valley tempted quite a number of men to establish country homes here as retreats from the City. They could travel to Livermore easily and comfortably by train and they could have their buggies or tally-ho's ready at the station to carry them to their houses.

In a panoramic map of Livermore and its surrounding valley published in 1889, it can be seen that practically the whole of the land south of the town and as far as can be seen to east and west, was occupied by vineyards.

Along the Arroyo Road that leads south from town there were several notable estates. The Cresta Blanca winery developed by Charles A. Wetmore that won the highest prize at the Paris Exposition in 1889 was one. Across the road was the Olivina estate where Julius Paul Smith produced the wine and olive oil that he sold from coast to coast. Olivina had an office in New York. Julius Paul Smith was celebrated as one of the Smith Brothers who had developed the Twenty Mule Team Borax business in Death Valley. West of the Arroyo Road vineyards was the elegant home, vineyard and winery of Alexander Duvall, a native of France who had everything of the highest quality in his winery and house.

Closer to town was where the San Francisco politician Christopher A. Buckley bought a hundred acres of gently rolling farmland in 1885. Here he planted vines and orchards and flowers.

According to local newspapers, by the 1890s, Buckley was shipping wine and brandy by the carload from the Livermore depot. A pencil drawing of the estate made in March 1899 shows the chimney of the distillery and the many other buildings on the property including the large house that was built in 1891.

In 1896 the Livermore Herald published a special, glossy-paper edition that included a full-page feature article about Mr. Buckley and Ravenswood. He was asked the reason for the name and he answered that when the first house was nearing completion the builder insisted that there should be a christening and that Mr. Buckley should try to think of the most beautiful place he had ever seen. This turned out to be a childhood recollection of a beautiful spot on Long Island called Ravenswood. So Ravenswood it was.

The reference to the first house makes it seem clear that the smaller of the two houses, called the cottage, was built as early as 1885 and that the family lived in it when they were in Livermore. The cottage contains two bedrooms with a fine dressing room and bathroom between them and, across the central hallway, two sitting rooms connected by an archway that could be closed with sliding doors. It had (and has) no kitchen but there was a covered passageway at the back that led to the tank house where the Chinese cook presided over the cooking. The Livermore Herald of June 18, 1885, reported that Chris Buckley was just completing a large new two-story, rustic-finished

stable on his recently purchased South Avenue ranch, and that the foundation of the tank house was being laid. The stable and carriage house contained living quarters upstairs for the coachman and other workers.

The big house, built in 1891, was much larger than the cottage. It contained only three main rooms however: the drawing room and dining room, which were the full width of the building, then a long, narrow pantry and a big kitchen. In the northwest corner was a private apartment for Mr. and Mrs. Buckley consisting of a bedroom, bathroom and dressing closet. The cost of this house was \$8000. Downstairs in the basement was a billiard room, connected to the kitchen by a dumb-waiter. Aunt Nell, Mrs. Buckley's sister, was installed as a housekeeper in the cottage. She took care of young Chris Buckley and also of a young daughter of one of Mr. Buckley's associates named Nell Langdon. Nell eventually married George Bistorious, the son of a Livermore merchant.

The children attended school in Livermore. They must have been given a ride when they were in kindergarten, but later Nell had her own donkey to ride and Chris Jr. had a Shetland pony and a pony-cart that he drove at a fast pace.

When the Livermore Herald interviewed the Buckleys in 1896, Chris Jr. was a toddler playing with his toy wheelbarrow in the garden. A photo was taken of him and of one of the elegant, lavishly furnished drawing room. We can see through to the dining room where young Chris's high-chair is drawn up to the table.

Mr. Buckley is reported to have said that he would have given a hundred thousand dollars just to look for one minute at his boy. Buckley was blind.

Two years later the Livermore Echo reported that young Chris was in an entertainment at the Farmer's Union Theater on Livermore Avenue, given by Ruby Hunter's kindergarten class. He made a speech during the program and he played the part of Little Boy Blue in a play. In 1899 he was George Washington in the Fourth of July parade in Livermore.

There was always a lot of company at Ravenswood. For example, it was noted in the Echo that the prizefighter Tom Sharkey was one of the guests in 1899. (Sharkey might have trained at Ravenswood with A. Greggains, a friend of Buckley's.) Guests from San Francisco would be met at the depot with the tally-ho and taken back to the depot for the evening train.

The year before, it was claimed by some that Buckley staged a fake holdup on the Arroyo Road to gain publicity for an election. The Echo had this to say about it: "A YELLOW SENSATION SPOILED Investigation proved pretty conclusively that the alleged hold-up on the Arroyo Road last Thursday evening on the road leading to the Arroyo Valle was simply a collision between a man on foot probably drunk and a rapidly moving horse and cart. One was an Olivina rig and the other was a horse and cart belonging to C.A. Buckley. The pedestrian was run over and fired a couple of revolver shots. No damage was done."

It is assumed that Mr. A.B. Henderson, the editor of the San Francisco Examiner whose country estate was above and to the west of the Buckley place, took an interest in the goings on. In the San Francisco Chronicle of March 12, 1896, it says that A.B. Henderson was suing Buckley for libel.

During the years when young Chris was in school in Livermore (The family moved back to Livermore after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, and Chris was graduated from Livermore High School in 1910.) the family was very much a part of the social life of Livermore. Many parties were given at Ravenswood for young Chris and his classmates and friends. Some of his classmates were Henrietta Wagoner, Maitland Henry, Bernice Bernal and Bess Monahan who later became Mrs. Ernest Wenthe.

There was a club called the Underground Athletic League that met in the basement of the Knox house on South L Street. Chris belonged to the club and it was considered quite exclusive. But a Livermore resident once remarked that his uncle belonged to the club and his uncle was the black-sheep of the family!

The Buckleys were great friends of the Raboli families and they were in the habit of visiting each other's homes to have dinner. The Rabolis had vineyards and a winery and the men collaborated with each other in their businesses.

In 1901 a purebred St. Bernard dog arrived at the depot for C.A. Buckley. There is an earlier photo of young Chris with a dog; so the family must always have kept pets on the estate.

When a new St. Michael's Church was built in 1918, to replace the one on East First Street that had burned, Mrs. Buckley donated one of the stained glass windows for it. In September of that year Mrs. Buckley was ill in San Francisco. Her sister Nellie Hurley, on a hasty visit to Livermore reported that Mrs. Buckley was slowly but steadily recovering from two serious operations.

During 1918 there was a Liberty Bond Drive of eleven days when Livermore went over its quota. The paper reports that there were, among many other subscriptions, two of \$1000 and one from C.A. Buckley of \$8000.

Mr. Bruno Canziani of Livermore remembers coming here in 1918 during the flu epidemic when everyone was required to wear a mask. Bruno's father worked for Mr. Buckley and they lived on the estate. I asked Bruno if anyone in his family died of the flu and he said that his aunt did. Bruno cried bitterly when he saw her in her coffin (which was, of course, in the house since there were no funeral parlors then).

By this time, Bruno says, the Buckleys were no longer making wine. The grapes they grew were taken to the Raboli winery on Second Street.

At this time the Buckleys lived mostly in San Francisco and they employed the young bachelor Joseph Concannon as their caretaker. When Joseph married Nina Ferarrio they chose to have their wedding reception at the beautiful Ravenswood house.

Christopher Buckley Sr. died in 1922 in San Francisco, leaving an estate of over a million dollars. It was the Concannons who suggested to Chris Buckley Jr. that he should sell Ravenswood to the Redemptorist Fathers to use as a retreat. The Fathers took over the estate in 1931 and re-named it Villa San Clemente.

The Fathers lived in the house quietly and unobstrusively until suburban expansion pressed on the boundaries of their land, when they sold the property to Masud Mehran, a developer. Many people in Livermore tried to persuade the community to preserve the

estate with the result that much of it was deeded to the City of Livermore for the park dedication required of tract developers.

Two families lived in the big house after the Fathers moved out, the William Thompsons and then the Gerald St. Leger-Barters. This helped to preserve the buildings until, by means of a grant from a State Bond Act, the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District restored the main house and the tank house. The tank house was made into a charming apartment for a caretaker. The big house is used for public and private functions.

Christopher Buckley Jr. and his wife Estelle now live in Pebble Beach. They have shown great interest in completing the restoration of the estate.

This manuscript was prepared with the help of Virginia Raboli, William A. Bullough, Ernest Wente, S.T. Perkins, Bruno Canziani, Theresa Thompson, Gatzmer Wagoner, James Concannon and Ralph Newton. We are indebted to them and wish to thank them.

Photo credits:

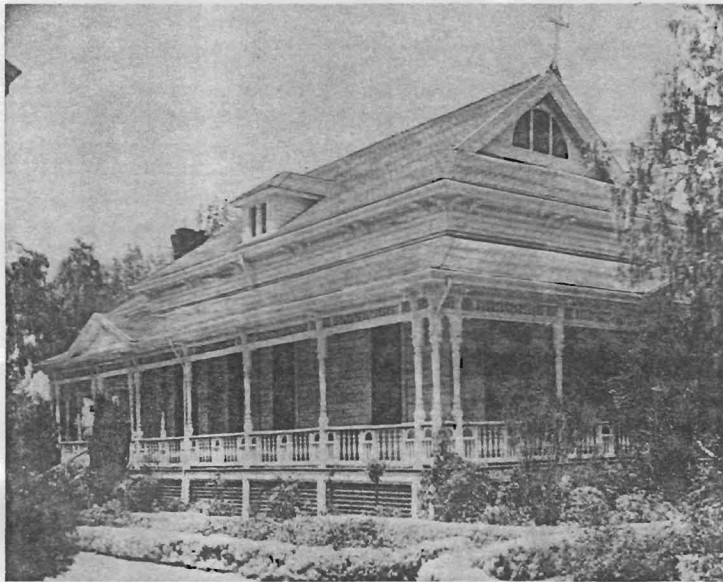
Cover photo: the Cottage, courtesy of the Concannon family. Inside front cover: portraits of Mr. & Mrs. Buckley and one of Aunt Nell with Chris. Jr., from the Buckley family and the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District; one of the drawing-room, Ravenswood and one of Chris. Jr., from the Livermore Herald, Jan. 25, 1896.

Inside back cover: old pencil drawing of Ravenswood, Theresa Thompson; old photo of big house, Concannon family; photo of Ravenswood tally-ho, from Alameda County Illustrated, Oakland Tribune, 1898, & Louis L. Stein, Jr

Back cover: two photos of the Concannon-Ferrario wedding, from the Concannon family.



"Ravenswood."
March 29, 1877.



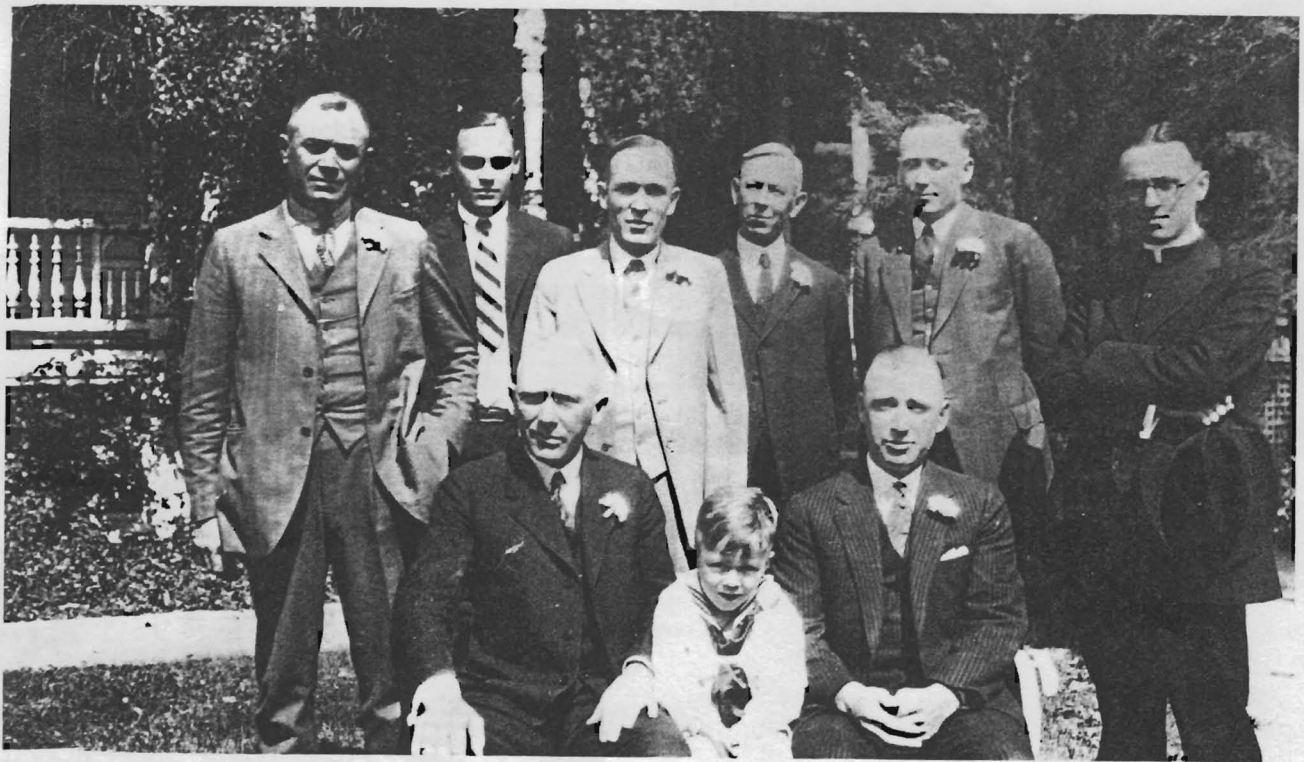
*BIG HOUSE and GARDEN WHEN IT BELONGED
TO THE REDEMPTIONIST FATHERS*



BUCKLEY TALLY-HO IN 1898



"NINA FERRARIO'S WEDDING AT RAVENSWOOD, 'NINA and EVA'"



"CARL, RAY, JOE, PAUL (Dolan) Sr., PAUL Jr., TOM (Knox), THOMAS, BOB, FATHER MILLS"