



Paul Azevedo

# The Reactor

## Earthquakes, Anniversaries

Anniversaries are swirling around us this mid-April day. Seventy-nine years ago tomorrow the great earthquake forever seared itself into the memories of San Franciscans, not to mention Santa Rosans, San Mateans, Palo Altans, and assorted other Californians.

Fifty-three years ago yesterday, April 16, 1932, the Sharp Park Golf Course, a San Francisco institution that is an important part of Pacifica, opened for business. These two events are related. In fact, without the San Francisco earthquake and resulting fires, Sharp Park Golf Course might never have been built.

It all started when a lawyer and a 49er married a vain lady of Irish-Canadian descent. The lawyer, George Frederick Sharp, made his pile not in the gold fields, but in the courts and the sand dunes of San Francisco. Forty-nine and a half years before Sharp Park Golf Course opened its gates to an eager public, Sharp dropped dead in court while arguing a case. His widow was 73 years old when she died in 1905. She had an estate of about \$300,000 from her husband's property investments. That's respectable today, but in 1985 dollars she was a millionaire.

She had no children, and no relatives she got along with, at least none she wanted to leave any money.

1905: Honora Sharp died. Her will left her fortune to Adolph Spreckels and her elderly attorney Reuben Lloyd. They understood that she wanted them to have a memorial gate built at the entrance to Golden Gate Park.

1906: The earthquake destroyed much of the property that formed the estate.

1907-1911: Lawsuits dragged on. The cousins ignored by Honora Sharp contested her will.

1912: The decision was made that the Park Gate would not be built. A taxpayer's suit seems to have been the reason. The lawsuits also had drained the estate. All that was left was \$80,000 and the Sharp Ranch on the San Mateo Coast, in an area that had become known as Brighton Beach after the death of Mrs. Sharp.

It was decided that the ranch (and the money) would become a part of San Francisco's network of parklands.

1917: The final hurdles completed, Samuel Murphey, her executor and the successor legatee to Reuben Lloyd, turned over his share of the property to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Dept.

1928: The decision was made to use the Sharp Ranch as a golf course. Architects were hired, work begun.

1931: The golf course neared completion, except for the clubhouse.

1932: The golf course opened to great acclaim. It was compared to St. Andrew's in Scotland. Like St. Andrew's, it is a true links course, that is, a golf course on the edge of the sea.

Without the earthquake to delay the courts, lower the values and destroy the records Sharp Park Golf Course might be a subdivision of tract homes and George and Honora Sharp forgotten here.