

The Reactor

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History of a Golf Course

Ever wondered why there's a golf course so handy, right in the middle of town? It all started in New York, in 1827. That's where George Frederick Sharp was born. He grew up, studied law, then heard the biggest news of his life. "There's gold in California." He was young, perhaps 21, but he didn't hesitate. He grabbed the first boat, which made a pit stop in Hawaii, arriving in San Francisco Aug. 1, 1849.

If Sharp tried gold panning, it was brief. He struck it rich mining the law books and the sand lots of San Francisco. George married an Irish lady named Honora. They lived in the best hotels the rest of their lives. George's life ended in a dramatic fashion in the fall of 1882, when he was 55. He had been in Stockton, having forgotten a date in court in San Francisco. He came rushing into court, just a bit late, dragging his client behind him, probably puffing and out of breath, and dropped dead. It made the front page of the Chronicle, as well as the New York Times.

Happily for Honora, George had left her well-fixed, including quite a few lots near what had become Golden Gate Park. Their price had gone up smartly. He also left her a 410-acre ranch on the San Mateo County coast which he had picked up in the mid 1870s, perhaps in return for legal advice to some member of the Sanchez family. Honora, who was about five years younger than George, lived another 23 years. She briefly attempted marriage again in her late 60s, but evidently decided Judge Pierce was a bounder, and the marriage did not get past the honeymoon.

In her will the name Pierce did not come up, but she let it be known that she wanted to honor George through a memorial gate at the entrance to Golden Gate Park. Because of a legal technicality she could not do it directly. Instead she left the money to a couple of millionaire park commissioners who she trusted would see to it.

She died in 1905, the 1906 earthquake bounced in about 14 months later, and Honora's cousins in New England and Quebec bounced her will around trying to shake out some money for themselves, since they had been quite forgotten in the matter. Somewhere along the way, the park gate was also forgotten, and it was decided the San Mateo County ranch would make fine parkland, what with that nice warm swimming hole (Laguna Salada) and all. The transfer of the land was finally completed in the summer of 1917, when the executor of the estate, Samuel Murphey, signed over his half "for park and recreation purposes only."

Twelve years later, in 1929, the decision was finally made to install a golf course, which opened in the depression days of 1932, 57 years ago and 27 years after Honora's death. The tiny communities of Brighton and Salada Beach, just north of the new golf course, decided to combine forces a few years later, and changed their names to Sharp Park.

11-1-89