

50 Years



McHenry Mansion: 40 years as Apartments

Newsletter

Feb 2023

The year 2023 marks the one-hundred fortieth anniversary of Modesto's first recognized landmark, the McHenry Mansion, at 906 Fifteenth Street. The story of the McHenry Family and their stewardship of this beloved home is one which local historians love to tell. However, there is an entirely less known rich history of the home which falls between the McHenry years, which ended in 1936, and the restoration of the home, beginning in 1976. It is the history of the forty years between the McHenry sale of the home and the City of Modesto acquisition, when the mansion was an apartment house, (1936-1976).



First, a brief McHenry Family history at the Mansion: Robert (1827-1890) and Matilda (1838-1896) McHenry built the house in 1883. Their son, Oramil (1861-1906), inherited the home. Oramil's second wife and widow, Mrs. Myrtie McHenry Langdon (1878-1959) had the longest tenure there of any other family member, occupying it from 1902 - 1919. Following Oramil's death, the mansion was deeded to her; her stepsons from Oramil's first marriage, Robert (1887-1946) and Albert (1888-1941); and her and Oramil's son Merl (1903-1994), on June 6, 1906.

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In 1920, the home was transformed into the Elmwood Sanitarium. Three years later, the public got to tour the then-called 'Langdon Apartments' and saw eleven studio apartments constructed each with their own bathroom and kitchenette. Sun porches were added, and the front porch was enclosed on both sides to accommodate a kitchen and bathroom for both front units. Oramil's children from his first marriage, Robert and Albert, following several legal disputes, signed away their ownership of the Mansion. Merl McHenry briefly envisioned operating the mansion as a nursing home. However, on October 29, 1936, Hyland "Hy" Gould (1887-1943) and his second wife, Hildagard (1897-1968), purchased 'The Langdon Apartments' from Mrs. McHenry Langdon's children: Merl McHenry, Lois Langdon Marr (1910-1973), and Lawton William Langdon (1913-1960), for \$20,000. Gould was a restaurateur who operated 'Gould's Restaurants' in Modesto and Oakdale.

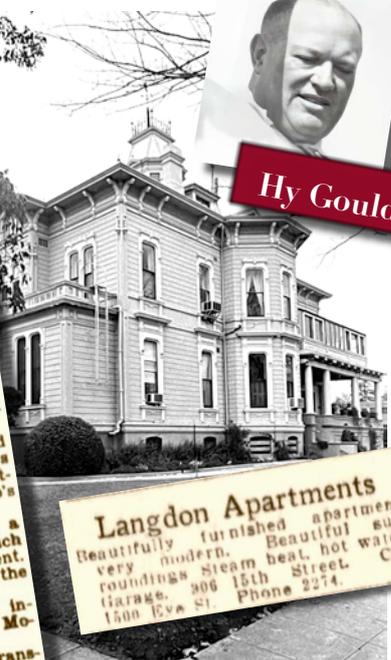


Hildagard Gould Entertains

From left to right are: Miss Myrtle Wootten and Mesdames Gould, George Hughson and Shoemaker.

The Gould's ownership of the home included adding three more units to the building (in the basement), and the conversion of the third floor into a penthouse apartment, where the couple personally lived; that made for a grand total of fourteen apartments. Society columns in *The Modesto Bee* in the late 1930s make several mentions of the lavish parties in the Gould Penthouse.

APARTMENTS ARE BOUGHT BY GOULD
Restaurant Owner Pays \$20,000 For Langdon Property
 H. H. Gould, Modesto restaurant owner, on Tuesday purchased the Langdon Apartments at Fifteenth and I Streets for a reported price of \$20,000.
 Gould bought the property, which includes the building and ten lots, from Merle McHenry, Lois Langdon Marr and Lawton William Langdon.
 The building formerly was the old McHenry home, but a few years ago was made into eleven apartments. It is one of Modesto's landmarks.
 Gould said he plans to build a bungalow court on property which is not occupied by the apartment. This, he said, would be done in the near future.
 "I cannot think of a better investment," said Gould, "than Modesto real estate."
 He was represented in the transaction by Realtor W. D. Toomes.



Hy Gould

Langdon Apartments
 Beautifully furnished apartment very modern. Beautiful surroundings. Steam heat, hot water garage. 306 15th Street. Call 1500 Eva St. Phone 2274.



Alice Boulton

Following Hy Gould's death in 1943, Hildagard Gould married Chicago attorney John D. Leonard (1898-1983), whom by the end of the decade shared the home's deed with his bride. John and Hildagard Leonard sold the Mansion to James (1889-1967) and Alice (1897-1993) Boulton on July 7, 1952.

Gould Apartment Building Is Sold

Sale of the Gould Apartments, Fifteenth and I Streets, for \$47,500, was announced today.
 The purchasers are Mr. and Mrs. James H. Boulton of Modesto, who plan to continue operating the 13 apartments in the three story building.
Leonards Are Sellers
 John Leonard and his wife, Gilda, are the sellers. She is vacationing in Carmel and soon will return to her home in the Philippines, where her husband is in business.
 Mrs. Leonard lived in Modesto a number of years ago.
Early Day Show Place
 The building was erected in the 1880s by the late Robert McHenry early Stanislaus County settler, and was occupied for years by his son, the late Ora McHenry, and his family. It was regarded as a show place at the time.
 Years later the home was remodeled into apartments and was purchased by the late H. H. (Hi) Gould, Modesto restaurant operator. Upon his death the property went to his widow, the present Mrs. Leonard.
 Some of the grounds comprising the original McHenry home-site were sold. The present site has a frontage of 100 feet on Fifteenth Street and 140 on I Street. Clyde O. Turner, Modesto realtor, negotiated the sale.



The Boulton Family

James Boulton III, grandson of James (Sr.) and Alice Boulton, enlightened us recently about the family's time at the mansion. Alice Boulton made a career of operating nursing homes in large older residences for much of her life. Prior to their purchase of the McHenry Mansion, the Boulton's operated a nursing facility on Tuolumne Boulevard in Modesto. While Alice owned and operated the Mansion as apartments, it was still called 'The Gould Apartments.' Alice Boulton found the constant climbing of the stairs in the home daunting, and sold the Mansion to Luther (1887-1975) and Edith "Vera" (1888-1963) Crabtree on April 28, 1954, for \$50,000.

James Boulton III did say some objects from the previous owners were kept by his family: the Gould photographs and a large decorative wooden wall mount with numerous cattle brands from the Gould family; these though were destroyed in a 1968 fire. Mr. Boulton was thrilled to donate a desk chair once owned by the McHenry Family in recent years, which is currently on display in the upstairs sitting room in the Mansion.



808 McHenry Avenue



204 Patricia Lane



The Gould cattle brand decor which lined the stairwell of the Mansion.

The Crabtree Sundial



Luther Crabtree owned the McHenry Mansion for twenty-one years. His step-granddaughter, Elaine Greydanus, a docent at the mansion, sat down with the MM&HS to give her insight and share artifacts from the Crabtree family. Robert Crabtree, grandson of Luther and Vera, also granted an interview to tell us about his family. Luther Crabtree was born in Missouri on December 3, 1887. He moved to California at age six with his parents and attended school in the Ceres area. Around the age of ten, his mother became ill with tuberculosis and moved back to Missouri to die at home. Luther moved back to Missouri to be raised by his grandparents and came back to Stanislaus County as a teenager as he had lots of relations in the Turpen, Hudelson, and Sawyer families, pioneers of this area. Luther was a true entrepreneur. He started out a farmhand and rose to own many properties. He married Edith Vera Webb on October 21, 1908, they had two sons Albin (1910-2011) and Derald (1913-1994). Though always a rancher, the family lived for many years at 740 McHenry Avenue, later 808 McHenry Avenue. The Crabtree's sold that house to Grace Covell so she could build the Sundial Lodge. Luther moved the house to where it stands now, behind the Sundial building at 204 Patricia Lane. In fact, the actual 'sundial' which sat by the pool at the lodge was left by the Crabtree Family.



The Crabtree Family



The family then moved to 1344 Magnolia Avenue at the corner of Orangeburg Avenue, on the side of the current Doctors Medical Center. After purchasing the mansion, Crabtree began construction on the Town House Lodge (today, the Best Western Town House Lodge), located behind the mansion at the corner of "I" and Sixteenth Streets. Albin Crabtree's father-in-law, Harvey Rebman (1884-1974), though retired, oversaw construction. Of note, Rebman also oversaw construction on the original North and South Halls at Modesto Junior College, as well as the Modesto Hotel. The Town House Lodge opened in October 1958, offering visitors of Modesto free television, air conditioning, and a heated pool, for the forty-four-unit motel appointed with modern Danish furnishings.

In 1960, Derald Crabtree and his wife Dorothy (1920-2018) moved from their home in Washington State to the Mansion so they could run the adjacent Town House Lodge. With them came Dorothy's children. Her eldest daughter, Elaine, spent her teenage years living in the Mansion's third-floor penthouse, apartment 12A, which the Gould Family had previously constructed. The top window on the third floor on the front of the Mansion was her and her sister's, Juni (1950-1987), shared bedroom. There were no closets in the penthouse bedrooms, so the girls had their own clothing racks in an adjacent attic annex.



Married 50 years, 1958

Elaine moved from the mansion when she married in 1965. One of her most cherished recollections was fondness for her grandmother Vera, a kindhearted woman adored by the entire family. Luther and the family were devastated when she passed away on August 21, 1963. The following year, Luther married Vera Vecherock (1913-1997). Luther always liked to joke he never had to change the checkbooks since both his wives were named Vera. Vecherock was sponsored by the Crabtree's when she and her family were displaced from their home in Latvia. She moved into the apartment house next to the mansion, currently the Visitor's Center, with her three daughters: Marina, Ilona, and Gita. Vera worked as a housekeeper and rent collector for the Crabtree Family.



Vera Vecherock Crabtree



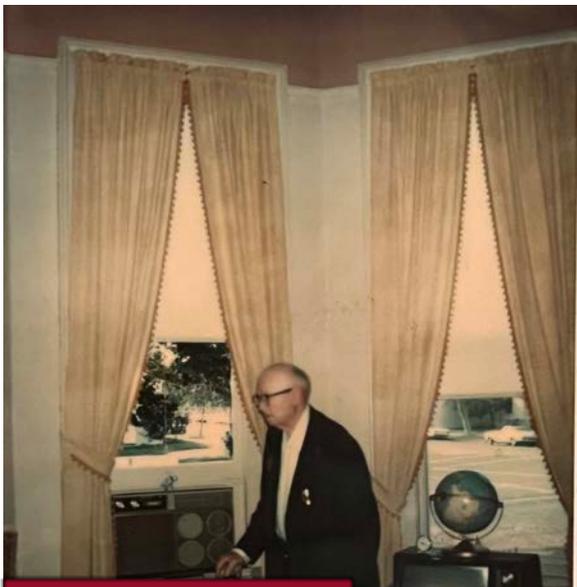
Juni, Elaine, & Dorothy



Left: Albin, Luther, Derald, Bill, and Bob Crabtree

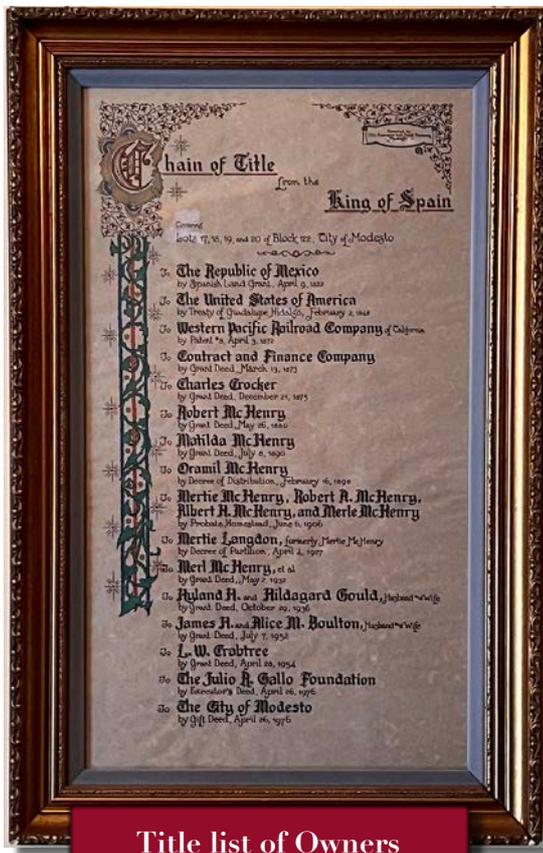


Luther Crabtree 1972



Luther Crabtree 1974

In the late Summer of 1972, the City of Modesto inspectors ordered Luther Crabtree to install specific safety provisions for the mansion, including fire escapes and sprinklers, or he could no longer have tenants. He had to make the difficult decision to evict his tenants and use the home as a family residence. It was that same year when Derald and Dorothy purchased the Town House Lodge from Luther. They continued to operate the motel for the next two decades. Luther Crabtree passed away August 1, 1975, at age 87. The following year the Mansion was sold to the Julio R. Gallo Foundation for \$150,000. Shortly after the purchase, it was gifted to the City of Modesto to begin a restoration process.



Title list of Owners

The McHenry Mansion is a beloved landmark for the people of Modesto. The story of the Gould, Boulton, and Crabtree ownership reminds us that several distinct families called the Mansion home, in addition to the many non-owner apartment tenants, and of course the namesake McHenry's.

By David Seymour



The Crabtree Years



*Information for this article came from Interviews with Elaine Greydanus, Robert Crabtree, and James Boulton III. Other information was taken from various *Modesto Bee* articles and Colleen Stanley Bare's *The McHenry Mansion: Modesto's Heritage* (1985). Photographs come from various *Modesto Bee* articles and personal photos from Elaine Greydanus and James Boulton III and used with their permission. Edited by Keith Highiet.

The Penthouse Apartment 12A

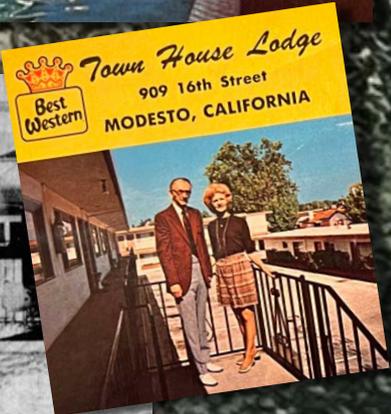
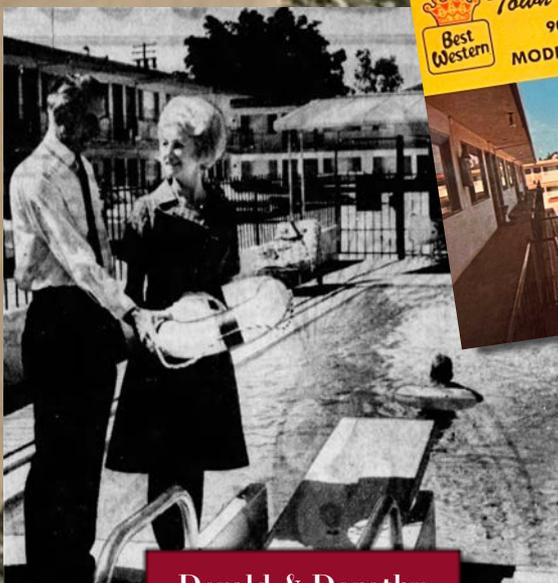
Luther and Vera, Elaine's Bedroom is on the left



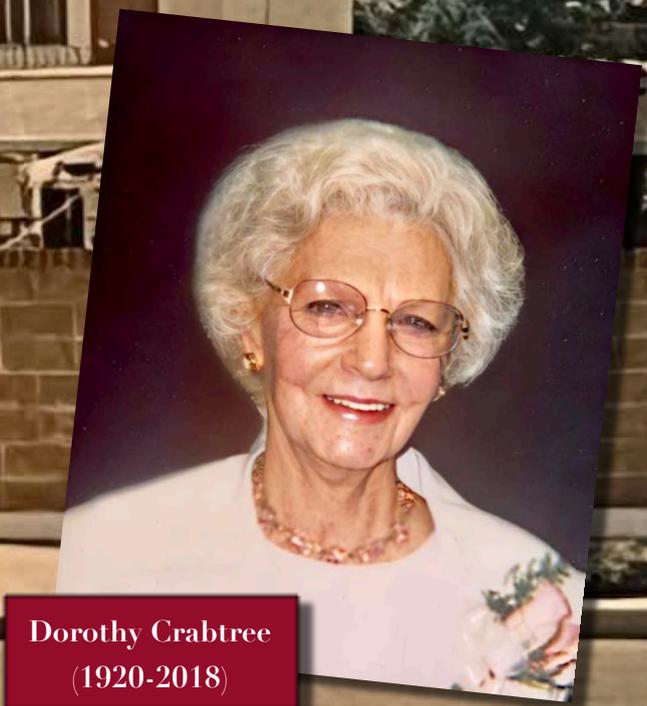
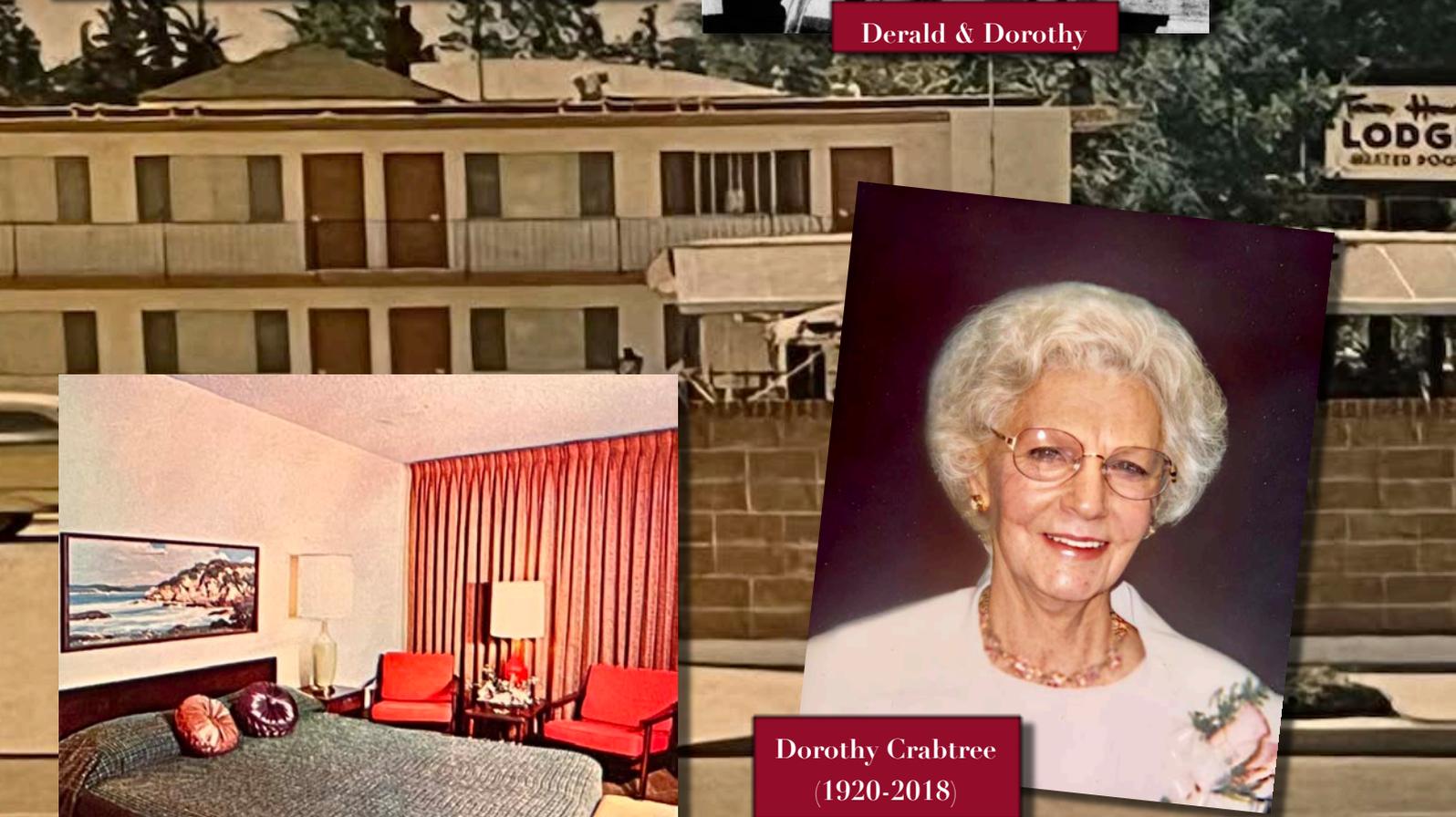
The Alfred Rodriguez Painting



The Town House



Derald & Dorothy



Dorothy Crabtree
(1920-2018)

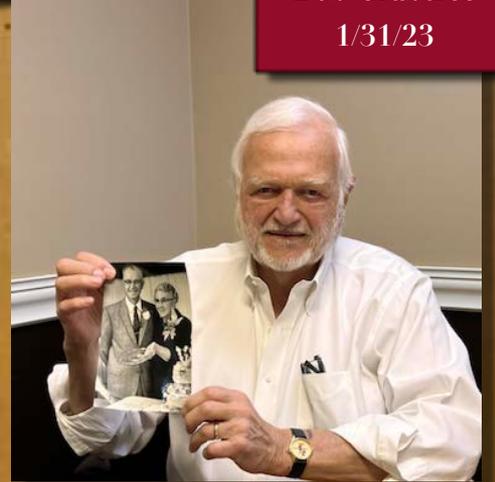
**A Mansion
Tour with
Elaine
Greydanus
1/29/23**



**A door with paint from
the apartment years.**



**Bob Crabtree
1/31/23**



**The McHenry chair
returned by James
Boulton III**

12A



**A chandelier which
belonged to Luther
Crabtree**



In Memoriam



Marcia Breon

Dec 7, 1937-Dec 14, 2022

We at the MM&HS would like to honor Marcia Breon. Marcia was part of our organization for many years and an active part of our acquisitions committee. Through her work at the County Tax Assessor's office, Marcia procured the safe in the basement of the McHenry Museum which was once used by Knights Ferry when it was the county seat and later used by Modesto, when the safe was to be destroyed, Marcia resurrected it and donated it to the museum. Marcia and her late husband Dell were active members of the Kettle Drum Antique Club and assisted the McHenry Museum with several Christmas displays over the years. We will miss you Marcia.

UPDATES

- The MM&HS Board of Directors met on January 24, 2023.
- We are planning our first fundraiser for the Spring, a fashion show, we will keep you updated as details develop.
- The Museum store is ready for Valentine's Day, please come by and check it out.
- The Mount Rainier Painting in the museum's main room has been sold and moved to the back parlor of the McHenry Mansion. Former Cultural Services Manager, Wayne Mathes has replaced the painting with a collection of the work of artist James Everett Stewart.
- We want to thank all our docents and volunteers as we move into the new year. We could not have our museum open without you.

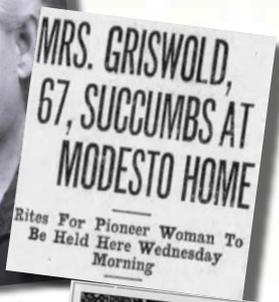


FEBRUARY 14, 1933

It Happened In Modesto then...

- On February 14, 1933, Modesto residents learned of the death of Modesto Pioneer Charlotte Gale Griswold, the first President of the Parent-Teacher Association in Modesto, she was 67 years old.
- On February 14, 1963, Joseph Magnin in McHenry Village offered a full Valentine's ensemble for a romantic evening for only \$26.00.
- On February 14, 1993, Modesto Business' like Hart Floral, then forty years old, now seventy, and See's Candy saw an influx of business for Valentine's Day as it fell on a three-day weekend.

90 Years Ago



60 Years Ago



30 Years Ago

