

## Nuggets from the Past

By Norman McLeod

### General store building was part of an adventurous life

We in Foresthill are familiar with the old general store building on the northeast corner of Main and Soap streets, the red brick structure that has been vacant so long and which recently was patched up by its out-of-town owner and placed on the market for sale.

This building is undoubtedly the oldest in our town, having been erected in 1857 by Hardy & Kennedy. That it is standing today is perhaps due to its fireproof construction, with iron doors.

In 1863, this building with its flourishing mercantile business was purchased from S.S. Kennedy by John George Garrison, who became a prominent figure in Foresthill until his retirement, after which he moved away.

J.G. Garrison was born on March 15, 1831, in Cumberland County, Maine. When he was the tender age of 3, Garrison's mother died, and his father passed on shortly thereafter. Orphaned at age 14, he began his life's adventure by becoming a sailor, a crew member of the brig Rebecca C. Fisher, which was engaged in the West Indies trade.

Garrison sailed the "briny deep" until 1850, when the excitement of the California gold rush called him. From Baltimore, Maryland, he found passage on the sailing ship Powhatan that cruised via Cape Horn to San Francisco, a voyage lasting 175 days. He landed in that bustling city on Nov. 15 and remained there for about four months.

Early in 1851, he journeyed to Drytown in Amador County to try his hand at mining, but, becoming discouraged after only a few weeks, he returned to San Francisco. Next, he tried his luck in the vicinity of Auburn. Unsuccessful here, he moved to Coloma that fall for a short stay, then followed his star to Trinity County, where he mined actively for about nine months.

Discouraged again, he returned to Placer County, where he tried mining until 1855. That year he abandoned the gold fields and engaged in the butchering and meat business at Volcanoville, El Dorado County, and in 1856 he joined Hardy & Kennedy in the mercantile business at Gray Eagle, also in El Dorado County.

In 1857, he moved to Horseshoe Bar in Placer County, where he established a mercantile business that was successful until the great flood of January 1862 swept down the Middle Fork, washing away his building and with it his business. Garrison himself barely escaped drowning by smashing a hole through the roof of his store.

What began as a disaster ended in a fabulous stroke of luck, when a mud slide on his property uncovered vast pockets of gold. He mined these deposits until hydraulic mining was outlawed in 1884, averaging \$1,000 a day.

In 1863, he moved to Foresthill where he bought the aforementioned general store to return to his first love, general merchandising. His business grew to become one of the largest in the county. He was also the town's Wells Fargo agent.

Garrison married Miss Alice M. Humphrey, a native of Wisconsin, in 1864. He was 33. This union bore five children, three sons and two daughters. Garrison was a

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Mr. J. G. GARRISON.



Mrs. J. G. GARRISON.

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voracious reader and was self-educated. He insisted that his children be educated.

His first home, costing \$10,000, on the site of today's Placer County Water Agency office on Harrison Street, was destroyed by fire in 1879. On the same site he erected a more palatial mansion in 1882, at a cost of \$14,000 (a small fortune in that era.) This two-story, gabled home with its fancy gazebo for years was the town's showplace. A noteworthy item was the state's first telephone system that was made of two cans connected by a wire, extending from the Garrison home to the store. At one time this phone system was exhibited at the state Capitol.

When Garrison retired, he and his wife moved to Piedmont in the Bay Area, where he died. His son, Ernest, took over the family business, and he and his wife moved into the big home. Ernest passed away in 1930.

The business was then sold to Dorothy Tripp. Ernest's widow continued to live in the mansion until 1945, when it was sold to a Los Angeles family that used it only as a summer place.

The Garrison home stood actually behind what today is the PCWA office. In

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front of this office is a large stump, all that remains from a tree planted by J.G. Garrison when his first son was born.

One of Mr. Garrison's unfulfilled ambitions was the building of a railroad on the Foresthill Divide.

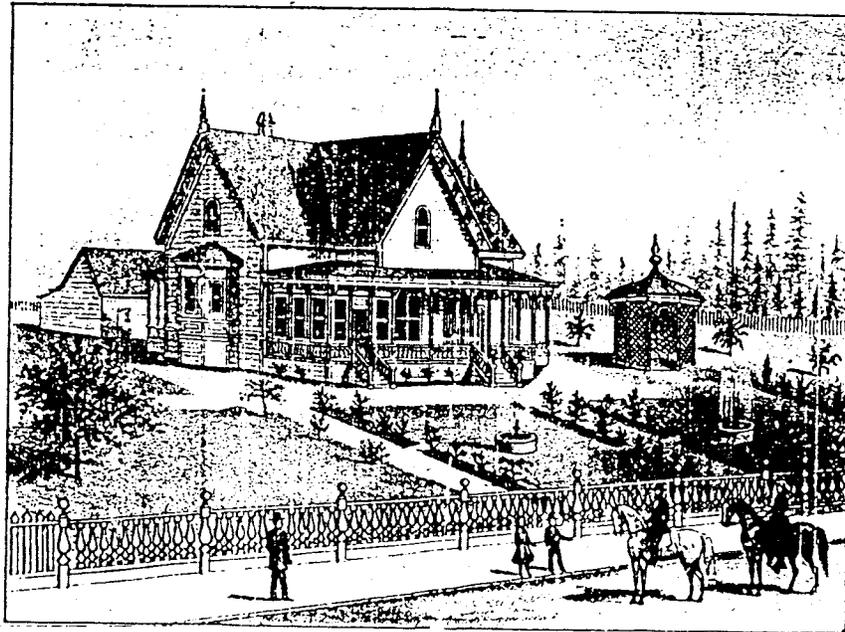
In July 1963, the then-owner of the Garrison home, Mrs. Hiatt, sold her property to Placer County. Prior to the home's demolition, furniture, fixtures and other items were sold off at auction, including the handsome gazebo which still stands on private property in town. Vicki Haskins, a local real estate agent, attempted in 1989 to preserve this gazebo by removing and transferring it to Botts Memorial Park at an estimated renovation cost of \$2,000, but interest lagged.

She also believed the name Harrison Street originally was a clerk's error and that it today should be Garrison Street. Her attempt to have the county change the street's name proved futile.

As a child, Vicki lived across the street from the Garrison residence and recalls its beautiful and luxurious interior, with impressive mirrors, chandeliers, velvet drapes and a grand staircase sweeping up to its second floor.

Some current Foresthill residents have expressed keen disappointment that the Garrison mansion was torn down to be replaced by a business office. They are of the opinion it might have been put to good use as a museum, similar to the Bernhard House in Auburn.

J.G. Garrison died on Sept. 15, 1908. He was 77.



RESIDENCE OF J. G. GARRISON, FOREST HILL, PLACER COUNTY, CAL.