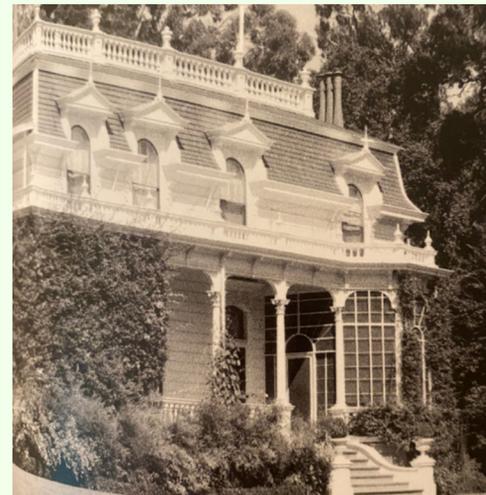


ATHERTON'S ICONS

Celebrating Atherton's 100th Birthday

Elmwood Farm – The Beginnings of the Holbrook Palmer Gift

Olive Holbrook, a San Francisco socialite, recounts the “all-day trip” each spring to travel the 35 miles to Elmwood, the family’s 22-acre farm in Fair Oaks. Her father, Charles B. Holbrook, had purchased the property in 1881 for \$10,000 in gold coin. An elegant Victorian house furnished like a French chateau was ready for his wife and four children to move into (pictured to the right). Charles immediately began planting 17 acres of hay, 1 acre fruit trees, ½ acre vegetable and berries, 3 acres for lawns, tennis court, flower gardens and ½ acre for elm trees, the state tree of his native New Hampshire.



Olive married Silas Palmer on June 3, 1903, at Elmwood. A special train brought 250 guests from San Francisco for the wedding gala. Following in his father-in-law’s footsteps, Silas was a successful businessman also. His construction firm, known as Palmer & Holland or Palmer & McBryde, built railroads throughout northern California, the old Kezar Stadium at Golden Gate Park, and installed the first gas lines in San Francisco. In just four months’ time in 1921, he built the original Stanford Stadium, which was continually used for sporting events until 2006 when it was torn down and rebuilt.



Silas and Olive Holbrook Palmer never had children of their own, but they continued using Elmwood as their summer home, expanding the farm with cows, sheep, and hogs, providing enough winter food for their home in San Francisco.

In 1953, Silas and Olive celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Elmwood (pictured left) Guests were astounded that the interior of the grand home had never changed. The same draperies, rugs, wallpaper, and even light fixtures (although assumed to have been electrified) from the 1880s remained, as seen in photo on the right.



Olive with her horse, Nellie, in 1891

Olive died in 1958, and the house burned to the ground a few months later. The property had already been gifted to the Town, so Silas, feeling his civic duty, quickly rebuilt a one-story house over the old wine cellar on the original foundation.

Olive’s will stipulated that Elmwood be gifted to the Town of Atherton upon Silas’ death. Silas died in 1963, and in 1964 the Town officially accepted the property and made it a park.

Source: Under the Oaks by Pamela Gullard & Nancy Lund and the Atherton Heritage Association

The Town had not had a park since its incorporation in 1923, and to this day Holbrook Palmer Park is the only park in the entire Town of Atherton. It is a public park, open for all people to come and enjoy the walking paths, the children’s playground, the tennis courts, and the large expanses of green lawns. It is Atherton’s jewel. **Thank you, Olive and Silas!**



Save the date! Atherton's Centennial Celebration will be on September 24, 2023 at Town Center.