

DAILY

Independent Journal

Est. 1861

SERVING ALL OF MARIN COUNTY

94TH YEAR \$1.50 A MONTH BY CARRIER SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 1955 Glenwood 4-3020 5c PER COPY No. 296



FLAMES ENGULF "THE LODGE," taking at least eight lives and routing 22 others. (George Wiceler photo)

70 YEARS OLD

'Lodge' Was Landmark In History Of County

The flames which swept through "The Lodge" early this morning wiped out one of the county's landmarks and swept away some of the romantic and old world history of Marin.

Built some 70 years ago on the hillside leading to Wolfe Grade, the three-story frame mansion was constructed on the sprawling estate of the Lewis Gerstle family.

Long time residents of San Rafael recall that the house was occupied by Mrs. Gerstle's sister, Mrs. Sarah Sloss and Mrs. Sloss' husband, a judge on the state supreme court.

For many years, its high ceilinged dining and living rooms were the scene of lavish entertainment for society of Marin and the Bay Area.

Following the death of Mrs. Sloss in the 1920's, her family moved to San Francisco and used their Marin home for weekend and summer visits.

Just prior to World War II, the Sloss family turned the home over to the Trinity Lutheran Church on Fifth avenue, San Rafael, which operated it as a home for aged couples.

The building was sold shortly thereafter to Arnold Leonhard who remodeled the large rooms into

several small apartments. Its three floors and attic were remade into some 20 apartments having about 40 rooms, it was learned.

Leonhard also remodeled the former coach house of the estate into a home for his family.

"The Lodge" was then leased to Jerry and Gertrude Harrigan who were in charge of the building when the fire struck.

Builder Of 'Lodge' Notable Figure

EDITOR,
Independent-Journal:

It is unfortunate that you do not have in your files the history of some of San Rafael's colorful early settlers. This was evidenced by your recent article "Lodge Was Landmark" in which you referred to the fabulous pioneer who built the mansion in 1883, as Mrs. Sarah Sloss' husband, judge of the State Supreme Court. His name was Louis Sloss, but judge was not one of the many titles he held. (You confused him with his son, Judge M. C. Sloss, now living in S.F.) The land on which the Lodge was built was purchased by Louis Sloss from Anson Hotelling

in 1883. It was adjacent to, not on the Lewis Gerstle property, as the Independent had it. Mrs. Sloss and Mrs. Gerstle were sisters, and their husbands were partners in business since 1851.

The house which burned down was a monument to a farsighted pioneer. When he died there in 1902, an editorial in a San Francisco newspaper stated the following: "... he saw the wealth in the waste places of the earth and went forth to take some of it. Louis Sloss as a trader was always miles ahead of the frontier. He was a pioneer in California, Nevada, Arizona, Greenland, Siberia and Alaska. California mourns the loss of her best citizen, a big word that surely was proven in that no man will challenge its truth."

He emigrated to America in

1945 from Bavaria and settled in Kentucky, but did not find the opportunity he wanted in the well-settled slave state. In 1849 lured by the gold rush he set forth from Missouri with a Pioneer Train in the company of Dr. R. H. McDonald, and Mr. C. H. Swift, who later became the first mayor of Sacramento. When cholera broke out in the wagon train the three young men deserted it to finish out the journey by themselves on horseback. They took the trail which Route 40 now follows and at the Truckee River made a short detour to view the scene where the Donner Party had perished that winter. They arrived at Sutter's Fort, Calif., on Sept. 13, 1849.

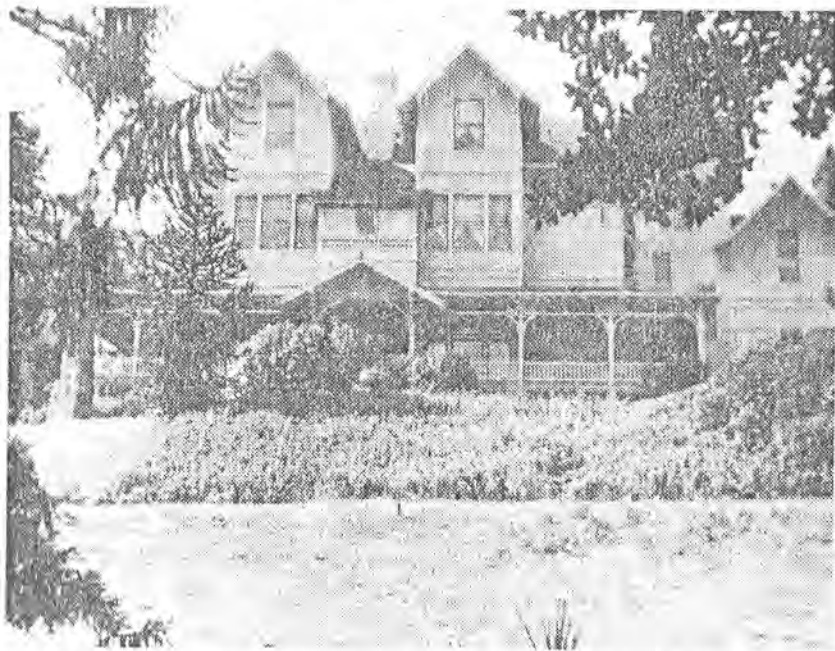
Louis Sloss traded in some of the flourishing mining towns for a time, but early in the fifties moved to Sacramento, and for 10 years engaged in the wholesale grocery business with Lewis Gerstle, who had also migrated from Bavaria. The great flood of 1861 caused them to move to S.F. where he opened a stock brokerage office. In 1866 he obtained a seat on the S.F. Stock & Exchange Board, and soon acquired a commanding position as a broker, especially in connection with the silver discoveries in Nevada. Leaving the Stock Exchange in 1873, the firm engaged in the wool, fur, hide and commission business, and he became one of the most extensive shippers in the port of S.F.

Louis Sloss was one of the founders and first president of the Alaska Commercial Co. His close friend, Lewis Gerstle became vice president. In 1869 he went to Washington and negotiated the lease from the government of the exclusive right for 20 years to conduct sealing operations on the Pribilof Islands. After the discovery of gold in Alaska the company developed into a great trading enterprise.

A kindly man, humble and whole hearted, he helped support almost every charity and philanthropy in S.F. He regarded the duties of citizenship as something sacred. He was interested in politics as a part of civic service and was treasurer of the Republican State Central Committee. He also held office as treasurer of the University of California from 1885 until his death and was 28th president of the Society of California Pioneers.

ANNE SAWYER

Townhouse project planned for Sloss Estate



'The Lodge,' former Sloss family mansion now being replaced by condos

The \$2.5 million Lodge Lane townhouse project in San Rafael is being built on the old Sloss Estate, not on the site of the Gerstle Estate, according to longtime residents of the area.

A photo caption in Friday's Independent-Journal incorrectly described the site.

The 1.1-acre development, which will have nine townhouses, is a portion of the land that Louis Sloss bought in 1883. It is east of the Gerstle property long known as Violet Hill. The entire Gerstle property has been a San Rafael city park since the 1930s.

Louis Sloss' wife, Sarah, was Hannah Gerstle's sister; the sisters lived during the summer as neighbors in San Rafael and in the winter lived near each other in San Francisco. Their husbands reportedly were business partners.

While the Gerstles built a series of houses on their property to hold their growing family, the Sloss family concentrated on a single, huge house that at one time had 36 bedrooms and 16 bathrooms.

In the 1930s, the Sloss property was

used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church as "The Lodge," a retirement home managed by the late Arnold Leonhard Sr. and his wife, Anna. She now lives on Grove Street in what originally was the Sloss family's carriage house.

The church sold the former Sloss property to the Leonhards during World War II, and The Lodge became a temporary home for scores of Air Corps families.

In recent years, Leonhard tried but failed to win city approval for a series of proposals for apartment and condominium projects on the land, according to his son, Louis. The father finally sold the 1.1-acre portion that now is being developed by the Four M Partnership.

The confusion over the history of the development arose from research done by a public relations consultant for the developers, who said both a title company and a member of the Gerstle family had identified the parcel as once belonging to the Gerstles rather than the Slosses, who were related to the Gerstles by marriage.



Townhouses for Gerstle Estate hilltop

Where the spacious home first known as "Violet Terrace" stood 100 years ago (below) earthmoving equipment now is preparing the long-vacant site for nine townhouses that will be offered in the \$225,000 to \$250,000 bracket, with a swimming pool and family recreation area. The 1.1-acre development adjoins Gerstle Park in San Rafael, on the site of the original house that Lewis Gerstle bought in 1881 as a summer home. Palm

trees the Gerstle family planted are preserved as part of the landscaping. The two-story townhouses off Lodge Lane are being developed by the Four M. Partnership, Matt Masson and Robert C. McGowan of Marin and two Baltimore businessmen, John Morrison and Joseph Martin. Robert E. Ecklund of Novato is architect for the project, which is expected to be completed in six months.



Council Faces Alcohol Rec

Memories Of Other Infernos

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\$2.75 A MONTH BY CARRIER

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SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA, MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1974

The spectacular blaze which destroyed the old Courthouse in San Rafael last night brought back memories of other disastrous fires in Marin's history.

In 1928 the historic 400-room Hotel Rafael was destroyed by a fire that routed 150 guests. The fire, which broke out in a fifth floor room and quickly shot into the attic destroyed the hotel within two hours. It was located on what is now Belle Avenue in the Dominican area of San Rafael.

One year later, a multimillion-dollar Mill Valley fire destroyed about 124 homes and burned 900 acres of land on the Tamalpais slopes on the afternoon of July 2, 1929. The cause was never determined. All of Marin's fire equipment as well as San Francisco firemen, soldiers and hundreds of volunteers fought the blaze for two and a half days.

Eight persons were killed and eight injured when flames destroyed the Lodge, a boarding house at San Rafael Avenue and Grove Street in San Rafael in the early morning of March 9, 1955.

On the 29th anniversary of the Hotel Rafael fire, wind-fanned flames leveled a San Rafael city block on the night of July 29, 1957. Destroyed were 17 businesses and one residence on Fourth Street between D and E streets. For a while it was feared that the entire city might be lost. Damage was estimated at \$2 million.

The block-long two-story commercial building owned by the late Joseph B. Rice at 430 Francisco Boulevard in San Rafael was leveled by flames in the early evening of Aug. 26, 1960. Several businesses including a hardware firm were a total loss and traffic on Highway 101 was held up for hours.

On July 20, 1961, two Santa Venetia boys set fire to Puerto Suello Tunnel north of San Rafael, starting a conflagration that cost the life of a fireman and did enormous amounts of damage.

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Rear of Glass cottage

NEIGHBORHOOD TARGET — A proposal that this 15-room, 12-bath rooming house at 34 Grove Street be used for treatment of alcoholics has sparked protests from neighbors. The proposal has drawn support from

local alcoholic organizations and San Rafael planning staff. Fate of the structure — owned by Arnold Leonhard of San Rafael — will be decided by the city council at 8 p.m. today in city hall.

California Mourns Her Best Citizen



NOBLE, a kindly and gentle soul was called from earth when Louis Sloss passed away. The joy of his family, the pride of his race, the honor of his city, the well-beloved, the highest, purest, ablest, best type of man; yet withal a soft and winning man was Louis Sloss. He forgave those that trespassed against him and did good to those that spitefully used him. His charity was as broad as his toleration, which was universal; his thoughtful kindness was like a mother's love. As brave a man as ever lived, there was no trace of bitterness in his character, but, oh, how scornful he could be of cowardice, oppression and meanness.

Louis Sloss was a shrewd, far-sighted and courageous merchant, able and willing to match his skill in commerce with any captain of industry and likely to be victor in the conflict, yet all men honored him and spoke well of him. Let the young man who is anxious to acquire great wealth ponder on the secret of Louis Sloss' life—the making of himself richer without making others poorer.

He envied the possessions of no man; he saw the wealth in the waste places of the earth and went forth to take some of it. Louis Sloss as a trader was always miles ahead of the frontier. He was a pioneer in California, Nevada, Arizona, Greenland, Siberia and Alaska, and, better than William Penn, he traded with Indians without cheating them. When he made the venturesome fur contract for the seal islands and found what was thought to be a foolish risk was a splendid investment, he allowed his friends to share in his good fortune. He took care to see that the Aleuts on the islands got their full share, and more. He built them schools, hospitals and churches of the faith that they had got from the Russians, and made them happy and contented. When he found that lack of protection to seal life was thinning out the herds, he did all in his power and spent much money to help enforce America's claims against British pelagic sealing, despite the fact that the seal concession was at that time and would be for twenty years in the hands of trade rivals who had secured the lease by bidding for it more than Louis Sloss thought it was worth. When asked why he helped a rival he said, "Oh, I'm an American, too."

Louis Sloss was a brave man, brave even about money that makes nearly all merchants cowards. When the agent of the Central Pacific threatened to extort an unjust freight rate from him, Louis Sloss put the fellow out of his office, chartered a steamer and sent his skins to London by way of Magellan's straits. It cost much in money and enmity to do that thing, but he thought it his duty as a man to resent corporation tyranny, and he did his duty as he saw it.

One instance of his great charity and his way of doing it may be given. An old couple living on a small farm in the mountains were threatened with dispossession because they were unable to pay off the mortgage. The wife wrote a letter to a man in San Francisco, asking him to try and get some one to lend the money on the security of the farm. She told of her own hard life, how she had toiled early and late, how her husband had worked, of successive bad crops and the awful almshouse staring them in the face. The letter was taken to Louis Sloss, with the request that he ask one of the banks in which he was interested to grant the loan. His eyes were moist when he finished. Going to a drawer, he took out the needed sum in gold, saying: "If you find the case as stated, pay off the mortgage and burn it up. If they ever get rich they can pay me back, but I think they will feel better with no incumbrance on the little place."

The lesson of Louis Sloss' life is so plain that all can read it. We sincerely trust that it will influence the lives of all the young men of California. His life shows that one may accumulate wealth without being cowardly, mean or avaricious. One may get rich and yet be honored and loved by all his neighbors. If Louis Sloss had been in great haste to make money, and to get it had done mean things in his early life, his declining years would not have been blessed with the happiness and serenity that are God's greatest and best gifts to man.

California mourns the loss of her best citizen—a big word that, but we venture to say that no man will challenge its truth.

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