

Fashion: Classic clothes with staying power. Section 2

• LES SPRING, business manager at Woodside School, is closing the books on 26 years in the elementary school district.

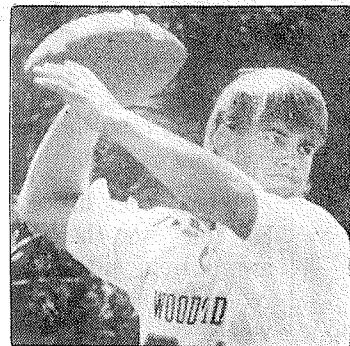
12

• TALLY HO Horse Show in Atherton on Saturday will include two special exhibitions—a Miniature Horse Futurity and Andalusian stallions.

17

• LOCAL high schools opened their football seasons this past weekend with the kind of optimism that only the pre-season can breed.

27



• TWO SCHOOL foundations—Las Lomitas and Menlo Park-Atherton—are planning big fund-raisers Sept. 23-24.

52

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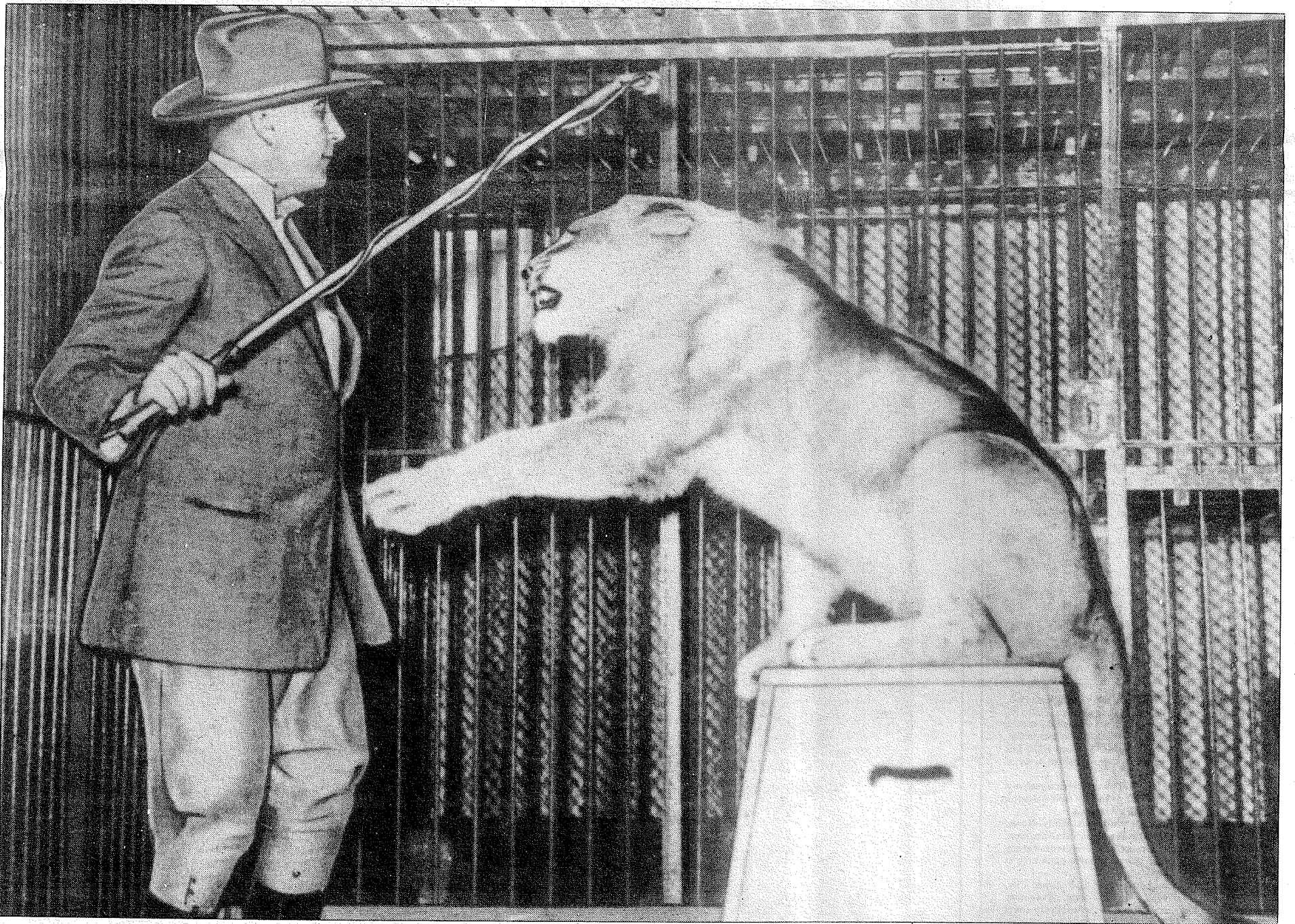


Vol. XXIII, No. 37 September 13, 1989

For 23 years the independent hometown paper for Woodside, Portola Valley and Atherton

Phone: 328-1600

Estate sale recalls eccentric philanthropist



GEORGE WHITTELL AND FRIEND were celebrities in Woodside more than 50 years ago. Now the 50-acre estate of the reclusive millionaire is up for sale after 20 years of litigation. An auction of furnishings and art will be held Sunday, Sept. 24. The property and buildings are for sale separately, either for subdivision or for a private estate. Heir to a Gold Rush fortune, Mr. Whittell also owned property in San Francisco and 40,000 acres on the east

shore of Lake Tahoe with 17 miles of shoreline. His love for his African animals—including three cheetahs, an elephant, and a zebra—led him to will the bulk of his estate to animal protection organizations. He was also known locally for his collection of Dusenbergs, an opulent Moorish theater with a spectacular Roman-style lounge below, an abiding interest in firemen, and a fascination with old movies and machinery. For more, see Page 9.

Estate sale recalls eccentric philanthropist

BY MARION SOFTKY

Woodside old-timers recall lions roaring and zebras grazing in the pasture of George and Elia Whittell's estate.

Such memories feed the legends surrounding the reclusive millionaire whose love of animals has benefited conservation and animal groups to the tune of more than \$40 million.

Now the final part of the estate, the home and 50 acres in Woodside, are on the block. They have been held in trust for Mrs. Whittell, who died in 1977, and Ruth Casey, who was Mr. Whittell's long-time nurse.

Putnam Livermore of Chickering and Gregory in San Francisco is presiding over the liquidation.

The remaining furnishings and art will be sold at auction Sunday, Sept. 24, by the Montgomery Gallery of San Francisco.

The estate is also on the market for undisclosed millions of dollars. According to Kenneth Ashcraft, who was Mr. Whittell's accountant for 25 years and the executor of his estate, the 50-acre estate was appraised at \$675,000, 20 years ago.

The real estate brochure calls it "one of the last of the baronial estates." It could be "retained as a single estate or developed into an exclusive cluster of multi-acre estates," it says.

Mr. Livermore comments, "More people want it to be a private estate than to be subdivided."

Mr. Livermore, who represented the national Audubon Society and Defenders of Wildlife in the earlier lawsuits, wants people to appreciate Mr. Whittell. "He was more than a character who went around with a cheetah in his car and kept six mynah birds. He gave \$40 million to charity," he said. "He has done a lot for the whole country."

Besides his African animals, the legends include his Dusenbergs collection, his fascination with technology and

Mr. Whittell's abiding love of animals came from an African safari he never took. "He spent more time with animals than people."

movies, the opulent Moorish theater with Pompeian baths underneath, his interest in firefighters, his yacht and airplane, and his 250-foot antenna — which created "a tremendous uproar in Woodside" when it was built, according to neighbor Jean Law.

Heir to a Gold Rush fortune, George Whittell owned lucrative property in San Francisco and most of the east shore of Lake Tahoe. The 40,000 acres and 17 miles of shoreline included what is now Incline Village plus thousands of acres that are now national forest.

"He inherited money, and everything he touched turned into money," says former Woodside Fire Chief John Volpiano, who was one of his few close friends during the 40 years he made his primary home in Woodside.



GEORGE WHITTELL'S Woodside estate will finally be sold 20 years after his death.

The fame that tracked him during his life grew after his death in 1969, which has been followed by 20 years of lawsuits. His will left the bulk of his estate to various wildlife organizations — the Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife and humane societies. Since these organizations were not tightly defined in legal language, swarms of attorneys from all over the world converged on the courthouse in Redwood City to get a piece of the pie for their animal organizations.

"There were so many lawyers the judge had to put letters on them like football players," said neighbor and friend Dorothy Hill of Woodside.

A COLORFUL LIFE

"He used to go into the cage and wrestle with the lion," recalls Mr. Volpiano. "I sat by and wished to God I hadn't been there a couple of times."

Later the lion, who was young when Mr. Whittell first got him, got too big and too rough and had to be shipped off to a zoo.

Conversations with the few people who knew Mr. Whittell well reveal a man of driving energy and broad interests, who was also very kind but didn't enjoy strangers.

"It was kind of a lonely household," says Miss Hill, who sometimes was the only guest on New Year's. "He was very polite and very sweet, but he didn't want to see a lot of people, just his friends."

It was Mr. Whittell's parents who bought the property in Woodside in 1910 and built the two-story colonial mansion in 1912.

Young George made a name for himself in France during World War I by flying with the Lafayette Escadrille, the group of American pilots who fought with the French before the United States joined the war. One of his colleagues was the legendary Eddie Rickenbacker. Later he owned and flew his own DC-3.

In France he also met his wife of 49 years, the beautiful Elia Pascal. They were married in 1920 and moved to Woodside in the '30s after his mother died.

Young John Volpiano met the Whittells in the 1920s when they shared an enthusiasm for bees. He became a close

friend, at least in part because of Mr. Whittell's fascination with fires and firemen.

Mr. Volpiano remembers Mr. Whittell used to call, sometimes in the middle of the night. "He'd say, 'Come over. I have a fire I want you to check out.' I knew he wanted to have a drink."

In 1932 Chief Volpiano and Chief Thomas Cuff of the Menlo Park Fire District attended a spectacular party at the Whittell estate. Fire chiefs and fire marshals from the whole West Coast assembled in honor of Mr. Whittell's great friend the state fire marshal, J. Stevens, whose two sons were playing football for Stanford and USC that year.

One of his six Dusenbergs, a convertible, sported state fire insignia and a red light, recalls former Woodside fire chief Stan Larson. That and many of his other car collection eventually went to Bill Harrah, another good friend of Mr. Whittell's. They are on display at the Harrah auto museum in Sparks, Nevada.

Mr. Whittell was interested in anything mechanical and in early movies. These interests combined in a contraption whereby a full scale motion picture projector rose out of the basement to project the latest movies on a screen that descended from the living room ceiling in front of the fireplace.

Mr. Whittell also built a Moorish theater fully equipped with stage, modern sound and projection equipment, and a large pipe organ. Below as a tavern-like room with fireplace which opened onto a Pompeian court, complete with Roman columns and fountain. These have been badly damaged by flooding and vandals.

He was very much taken with show business and had a number of friends in Hollywood, Mr. Ashcraft says. One was Wiley Post, the famous pilot and writer who was killed in an Alaskan plane crash with actor Will Rogers.

Even with all their state of the art equipment, the Whittells did not entertain very much, Miss Hill recalls. Mr. Whittell

spent a lot of time at Tahoe, and Mrs. Whittell was often lonely.

Mr. Whittell bought his 40,000 Tahoe acres for less than \$2 million, Mr. Ashcraft notes. He built the massive Thunderbird Lodge near the shore, and his aluminum yacht, the "Elia," was a familiar sight on the lake.

Mr. Volpiano remembers the little harbor and tunnel where the "Elia" was anchored. The tunnel, carved out of solid granite, led from the harbor to the house, he says.

ANIMAL LOVER

Mr. Whittell's abiding love for animals came from an African safari he never took. It was in the '30s and Mr. Whittell was sick and couldn't go, Mr. Ashcraft reports, so he sent his wife without him.

Mrs. Whittell went up the Congo and down the Nile with native carriers. She acquired live animals along the way, which were shipped across France and

(Continued on next page)

Whittell auction

Paintings and furnishings from the estate of the late George and Elia Whittell will be auctioned off Sunday, Sept. 24, at noon at the estate at 179 Kings Mountain Road in Woodside.

Items to be auctioned will be on view Friday, Sept. 22, and Saturday, Sept. 23, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The auction is being held by the Montgomery Gallery of San Francisco with Peter M. Fairbanks as auctioneer.

For information on the auction call Louisa La Farge at 788-8300. For information on the 50-acre estate call Harry Hunt, Realty Advisor at 461-4558.



ELIA WHITTELL, the French wife of George Whittell for 49 years, brought back from an African safari the animals that inspired her husband. The cheetah was well-known in the area as a passenger in Mr. Whittell's Dusenbergs.

Woodsider gave \$40 million to wildlife conservation

(Continued from previous page)

through the Panama Canal to San Francisco.

If Mr. Whittell was not outgoing before the animals came, he was less so later. "He was not sociable after the animals came," says Miss Hill. "He spent more time with the animals than people."

One of his favorites was the young elephant. "That elephant was a pal of his," says Mr. Volpiano. He even brought it up to Tahoe.

Miss Hill remembers Sunday mornings when the elephant performed circus tricks on the lawn in front of the house.

Unfortunately the elephant eventually died. Miss Hill says Mr. Whittell got rid of his wild animals early in World War II when rationing threatened

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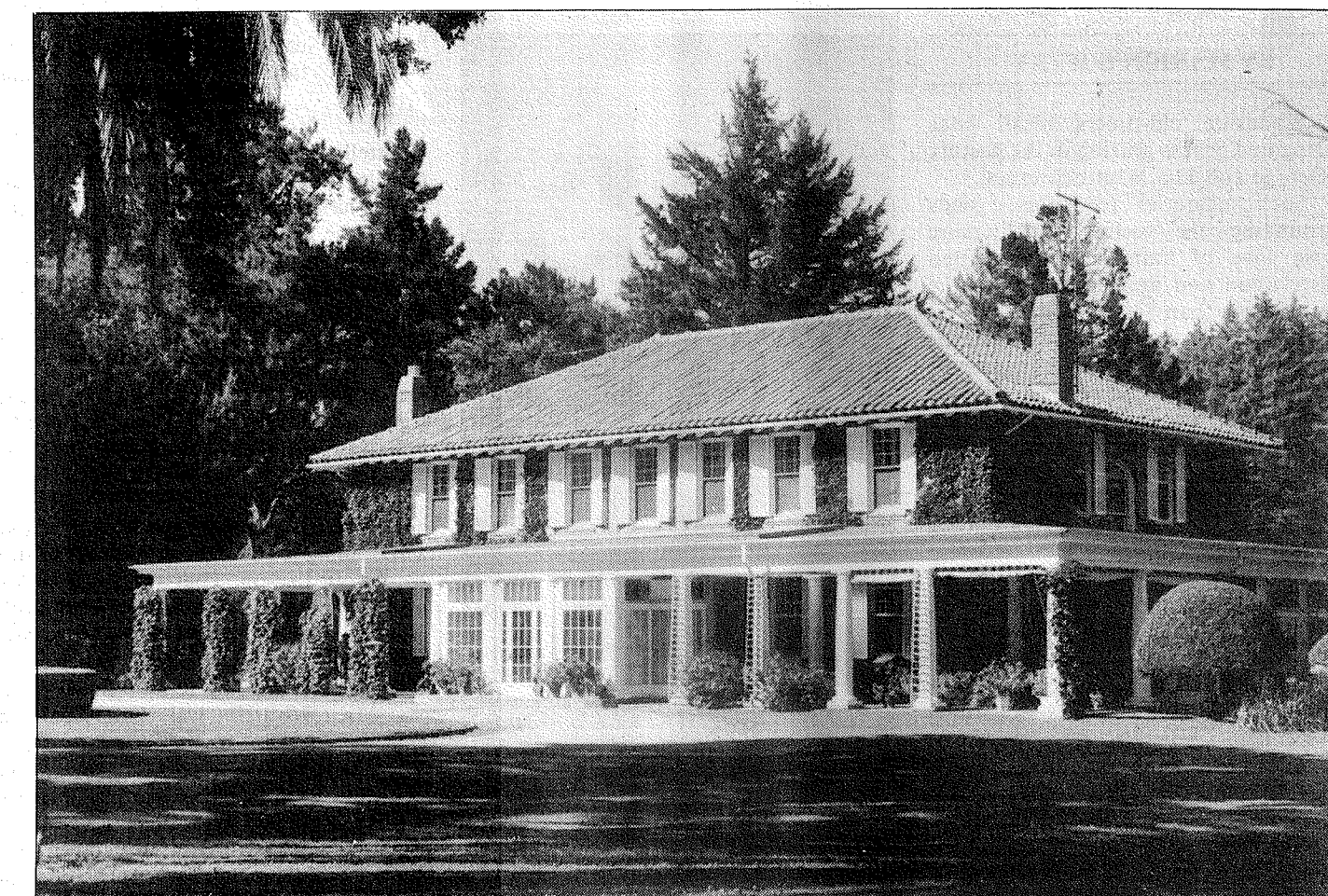
touched turned to

money"

their food supply. The lion went to the San Francisco Zoo where it later died.

During his last years Mr. Whittell was increasingly reclusive. In 1955 he fell and broke his leg moving a mynah bird on a perch.

Ruth Casey came to nurse him when he came home from the hospital. She



TWO-STORY COLONIAL MANSION first occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George Whittell Sr. is also for sale along with the 50-acre estate. Friends of George and Elia Whittell remember when the elephant used to perform circus tricks on the front lawn on Sunday mornings.

stayed with him for the rest of his life when he was bound to a wheelchair. "He was the best friend I ever had," she says.

Even during those days the Whittells kept animals, eight mynah birds and some dogs.

Perhaps Mrs. Casey and her three daughters made up in part for the family Mr. Whittell never had. They used to have parties and Christmas together, she says, and he gave the girls a canoe to paddle at Tahoe. "It was family," she says. "It was

busy; it was good; it was never dull."

To the very end of his life Mr. Whittell was interested in technology. "He always had a project," she says. "There were TV cameras and monitors and robots on the back porch. They were both way ahead of their time."

Mr. Whittell also kept his love of fine cars. Neighbor Ward Law, who worked at Towne Ford, remembers he bought one of the original Thunderbirds. "He would buy one car each year that was very special," Mr. Law says. "He'd call up and say, 'Send

it out.'"

Before his death, if not after, Mr. Whittell's success with money was legendary. "He was the only person in Woodside not cleaned out by the Depression," says Miss Hill.

The organizations and people who survived Mr. Whittell may have been hurt by seemingly endless litigation. Even so, Mr. Ashcraft estimates, the animals—both wild and domestic—he loved will ultimately benefit by more than \$50 million.



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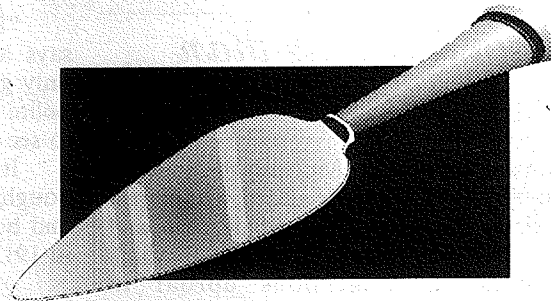
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