

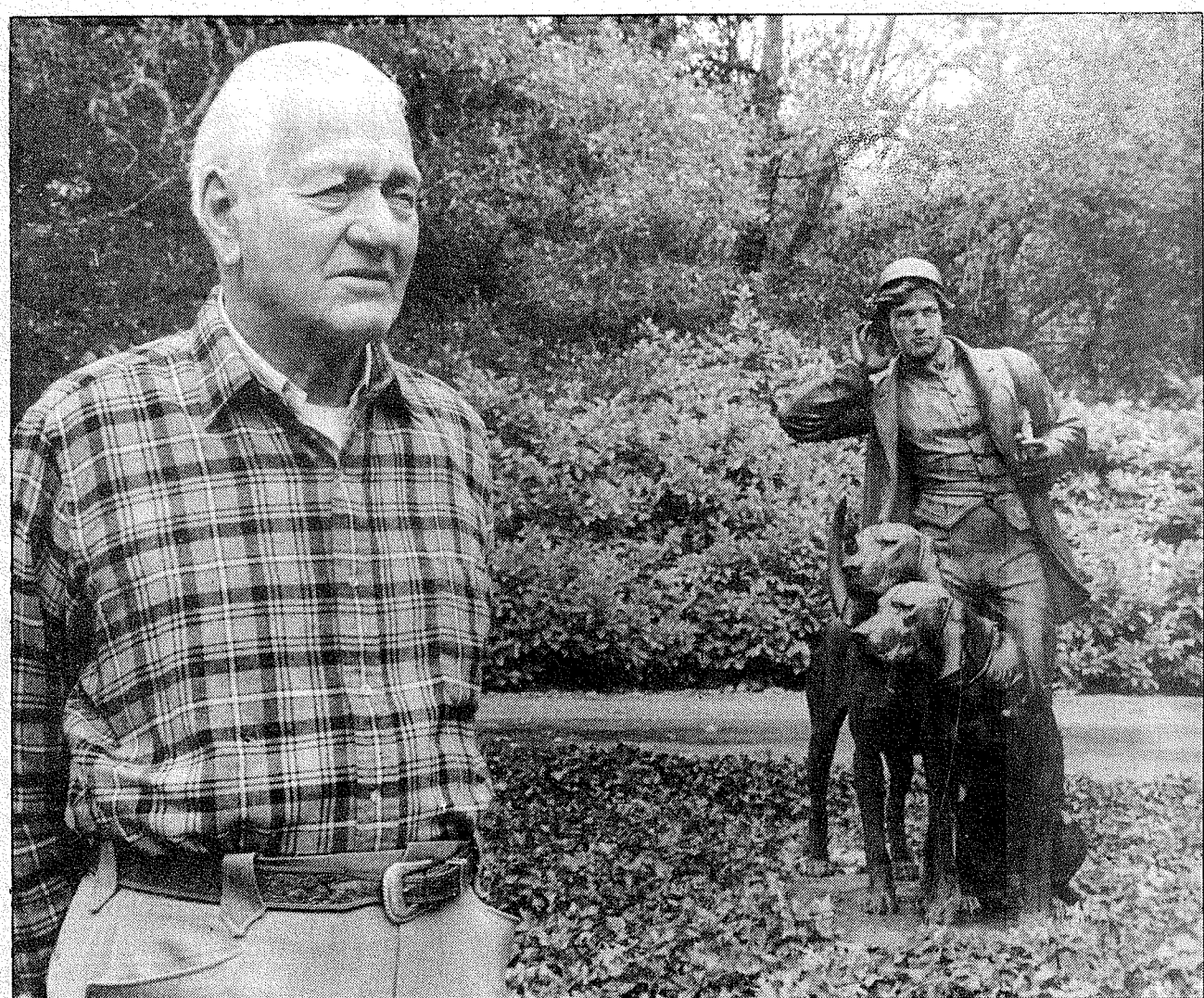
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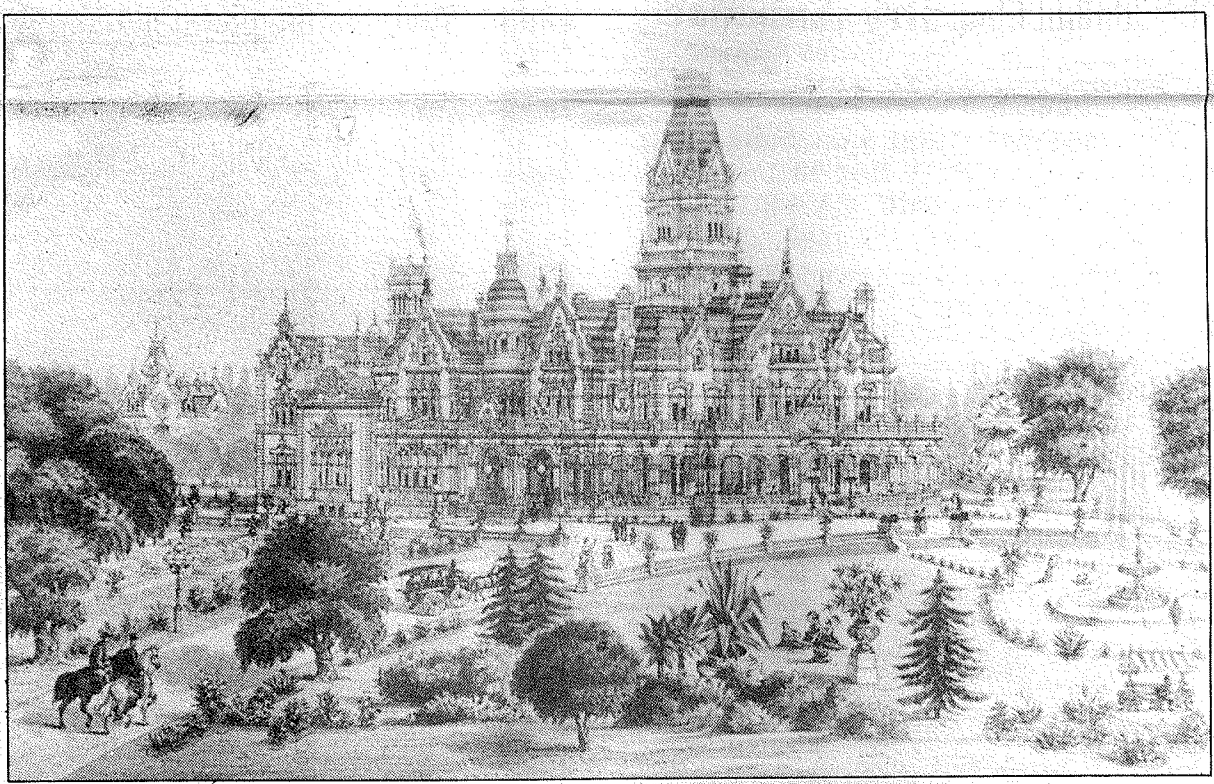
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Linden
Towers
was
his
home

JAMES FLOOD of Woodside, grandson of the silver king, poses here with an Italian statue of a hunter and two dogs which used to grace the lawns around Linden Towers. Mr. Flood grew up in "Flood's Wedding Cake" until it was torn down in 1936. Photo by Carol Ivie.

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New town attorney

Woodside picks Half Moon Bay
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Linden Towers and Big

BY MARION SOFTKY

They used to call it "Flood's wedding cake"—the astounding edifice of turrets, towers and gingerbread

which expressed the extravagant spirit of a bygone age when silver was king and the kings of silver lorded it over the world.

"There were 42 bedrooms. I think there were something like 60 rooms altogether. It had a 150-foot

tower and 18-foot ceilings," recalls James Flood of Woodside, who grew up in Linden Towers.

The fabled mansion was built by his grandfather, James Clair Flood, the silver king and bonanza millionaire who parlayed the greatest silver strike in the Comstock Lode into several fortunes. Now all that is left are bits of wall, some fountains and urns and light fixtures scattered among the affluent homes and gardens of Lindenwood in Atherton.

Beyond his personal memories Mr. Flood carries

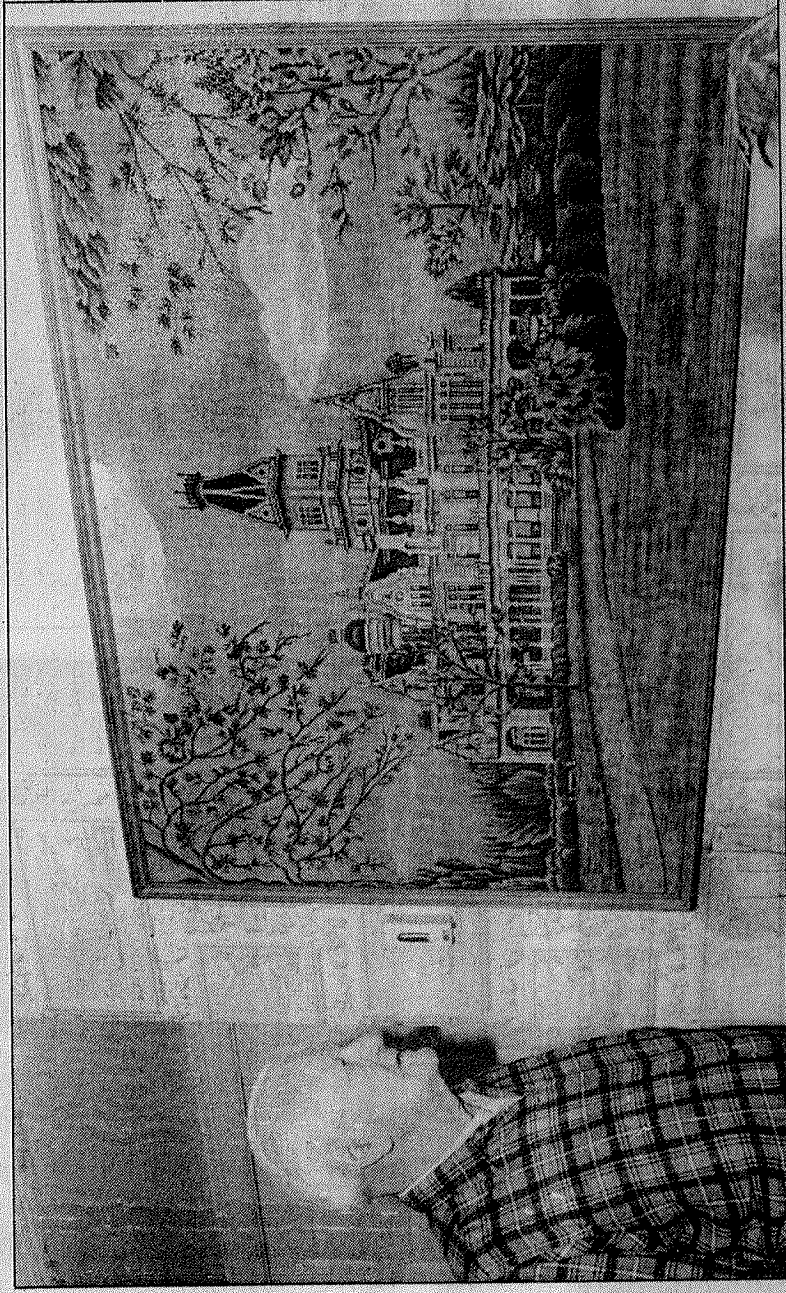
'My father used to spend winters down there as a boy around 1880,' recounts Mr. Flood. 'He'd go duck shooting, and he'd supply the whole village of Menlo.'

with him the family memory of the famous grandfather he never knew and the early days of what was designed to be the finest house in the West.

In the cozy study of his Woodside estate, Mr. Flood tells the story of his family, starting with his grandfather's spectacular rise to possibly the richest man in the West.

Son of Irish immigrants in New York, James Clair sailed around Cape Horn to California in 1849 as one of the horde of adventurous young men who sought their fortunes in the goldfields.

By the 1860s he and another Irishman, William O'Brien, had opened a bar as a sure-fire way to make money during both good times and bad. The Auction



THIS LINDEN TOWERS was done in needlepoint by James Clair Flood to show off his bonanza by James Flood's mother. Mr. Flood grew up in the flamboyant mansion built by his grandfather, silver

Bonanza are family memories

Lunch, conveniently located next to the San Francisco Mining Exchange, became a popular place for brokers and speculators to confide in the friendly barkeepers.

By 1868 Flood and O'Brien had done well enough to sell the Auction Lunch and become professional stockbrokers. It was then that they met James Mackay and William Fair, shrewd mining professionals from Virginia City who had the idea there was more silver out there and where it might be found.

James Clair Flood master-minded the skillful stock purchases resulting in the takeover of key mines. He and his partners bought up stock at depressed prices and soon gained control of major mines on the Comstock Lode.

Then in 1874 Mackay and Fair struck the so-called "Big Bonanza"—a strike so rich it upset the currency of the world and caused the Kaiser to go off the silver standard. As miners dug veins of rich silver ore 50 feet and more thick, the mines of the new "silver kings" produced hundreds of millions of dollars—1870 dollars—over the next years. Through skillful stock manipulations and shrewd business practices James Flood turned those millions into even more millions. At one time he was reputed to be the richest man in California.

Flood was far more than a takeover artist, his grandson emphasizes. He and his partners also carried

out what is now called vertical integration, says his grandson. To the fury of many, he bought up major suppliers to the mines. "They owned the water company and the lumber company so people couldn't hold them up—everything but the railroad," Mr. Flood said.

WORLD CLASS WEALTH

While Mackay and Fair ran the mines in Virginia City, and O'Brien kept up with friends from his saloon days, Flood set out to make his mark. On top of Nob Hill he built a mansion of Connecticut brownstone, shipped around Cape Horn, to match the mansions on Fifth Avenue in New York. That mansion, gutted by fire after the 1906 earthquake, is now the Pacific Union Club.

He also bought several hundred acres in the village of Menlo where he planned a magnificent country estate. Special architects, Italian painters imported to paint frescoes on the ceilings, carved paneling in exotic woods, marble mantelpieces and stained glass windows—no expense was spared to make Linden Towers the finest home in the West.

Beyond the house, the palatial stables matched the house almost frill for frill.

The grand housewarming party for Linden Towers was almost that—literally. "They had all the gas fixtures and candles and everything going, and it got so hot the

fire alarm went off," says Mr. Flood. Terrified everyone ran out of the house. When it turned out to be safe, they all went back and continued the party.

Surrounding the house were 23 acres of lawn dotted with statuary and fountains, some of which can be seen today around Flood Circle. "They had any number of gardeners," Mr. Flood says. "All these Chinamen ran around all night with lanterns watering."

Just as in Virginia City, old Mr. Flood owned the utilities supplying his estate and most of Menlo. He bought the watershed up Bear Gulch Creek and developed the basic water system now operated by California Water Service Company. He also developed a gas works which served Menlo.

Down near where the railroad tracks now cross Bayshore Freeway, he built an artificial lake fed by four artesian wells. "My father used to spend winters down there as a boy around 1880," recounts Mr. Flood. "He'd go duck shooting, and he'd supply the whole village of Menlo. He kept them in ducks all winter long."

During old Mr. Flood's heyday Linden Towers was the scene of spectacular parties. One of the most famous was in 1879 when General Grant came through. "I guess he was trying to run for president again," comments the grandson. General Grant had 250 soldiers on horseback

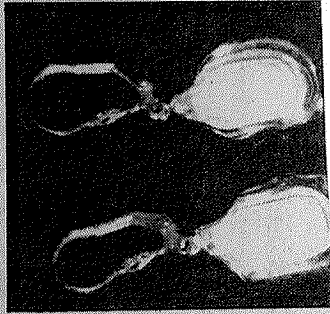
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This Christmas...

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James Flood grew up in the 'wedding cake'

(Continued from Page 35)

with him and they rode up Middlefield Road on their way to Linden Towers. "They said it was very colorful."

One of the results of that visit was the courtship of Mr. Flood's aunt, Cora Jane Flood, or Jennie, by General Grant's son, Buck Grant. After they became engaged, Buck Grant was returning from the East to meet her at Donner Summit. "So she went up in her private car. It took her three days, and he never showed up," Mr. Flood recounts. "He'd found another girl in Denver who had more money than she did. He married her and they went down to San Diego and built the U.S. Grant Hotel, which is still there. So Auntie never did get married."

One of grandfather Flood's hobbies was harness racing. He kept his harness horses in special stables where Flood Park is now and had a racetrack nearby. His friend, neighbor and competitor was Leland Stanford who kept his racing stable nearby. They once had a bet about whether a trotting or galloping horse had all its feet off the ground at once. They tried to answer it by setting up a project with English photographer Eadweard Muybridge to photograph a moving horse by lining up a row of cameras triggered by strings which would be broken by the passing horse. "That was where they got the first idea for moving pictures," Mr. Flood says.

Mr. Flood's father, James Leary Flood, had a sometimes difficult relationship with his father, because, at 21, he married an opera singer, Rose Fritz. His father got the marriage annulled, paid her \$25,000 and sent her to London, and sent him around the world. They met in London, married again and kept the money.

James L. Flood was married happily until his wife died in 1899 when he married her sister, Emma Lou Fritz, the present Mr. Flood's mother.

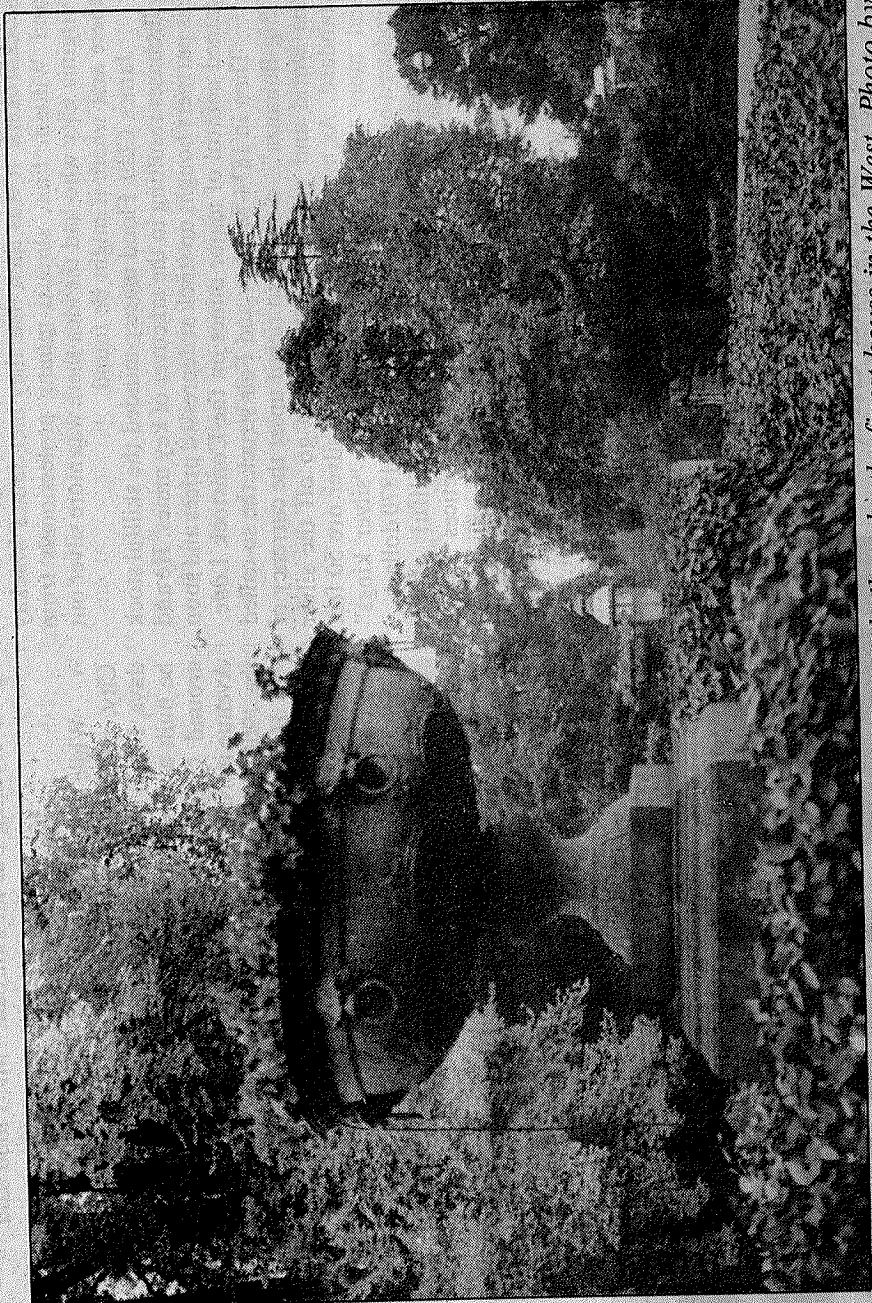
This dispute may have had something to do with old Mr. Flood's will. When he died in 1889, he left both the town and country houses to his daughter. She promptly gave Linden Towers to the University of California together with an endowment to keep it up. In 1904 her

brother bought it back for \$150,000 plus free water for 50 years and moved in with his family.

Then in 1906 a great earthquake shook the Peninsula. "All the chandeliers fell down, but it didn't hurt the house a bit," Mr. Flood says.

"Up on the tower they had wooden knights in armor. One of those was shaken loose and thrown clear of the house," he adds, "so you can imagine how that tower must have been rocking."

(Part one of a two-part series.)



THIS URN AND IVY-COVERED WALL in Lindenwood remain from the opulent days when James Clair Flood entertained at Linden Towers, built to be the finest house in the West. Photo by Marion Softky.