

The San Joaquin Historian
JULIA'S HOUSE
SPECIAL ISSUE



**A Publication of the San Joaquin County
Historical Society and Museum**

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JULIA'S HOUSE

The 108 year old home of Julia Weber and last home of her mother, Helen Murphy Weber, wife of the founder of Stockton, is to be moved from its present location just north of the Calaveras River to Micke Grove Park. There it will augment the collection of Weber home furnishings, books and papers already on exhibit at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum. This special issue of the *San Joaquin Historian* was created to provide the reader with background information about Julia Weber, her house, and the Weber descendants who occupied the historic dwelling as recently as the 1980s.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Walker has been Archivist/Librarian at the San Joaquin County Museum since 1989. Walker processed, organized and created finding aids for the Weber Family Papers and Library at the Museum. He has also written an annotated subject index to California-related books and periodicals in the Weber Library. In addition to his work with the San Joaquin County Museum, Don Walker is an Archivist at the University of the Pacific in Stockton.

**Recent photos of "Helen's Oaks" are by
Dayanna Knight (1998)**

JULIA'S HOUSE

Julia Helen Weber (1853-1935), second child and only daughter of Captain Charles Weber, was born in her parents' home on Weber Point in Stockton, the city founded by her father. Apart from the eight years she spent at the Academy and College of Notre Dame in Santa Clara (1865-1872), Julia lived her entire life in Stockton. Until four years before her mother's death (1895), Julia lived in the family home, but in 1892, having decided that the old Weber adobe was beyond repair, she and her mother chose to abandon it and to create a new dwelling on the same site. Five years after Helen Murphy Weber's death, in response to what she perceived as the irretrievable deterioration of the neighborhood around Weber Point, Julia moved this house from the Point to her ranch just north of the Calaveras River on West Lane (1900). There it remained for more than a century.

The longest-lived of Captain Weber's children, Julia was devoted to her parents' memory and preserved their furniture, library, correspondence and business papers in her home. Julia Weber's origins naturally fed her interest in California history. She amassed a substantial collection of books and pamphlets on California topics, many of which are quite rare today. Much of this material is presently either on display or is available for research use at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum, while an important collection of Captain Weber's earliest papers is held by the Bancroft Library in Berkeley.

Like her mother, Julia was a devout Catholic. Her religious convictions led her to a deep and continuous involvement with local Catholic charities and education. She

was a prime mover in building campaigns for St. Agnes Academy (precursor of St. Mary's High School), St. Joseph's Hospital and the Children's Home of Stockton. She donated land for, and served on the first Board of Trustees of St. Joseph's Hospital (1899-1912). Julia was also first President of the Catholic Ladies' Aid Society of Stockton whose humanitarian initiatives included St. Mary's Dining Room.

Julia Weber gave up much of her interest in the Weber family's Stockton residential properties to her older brother, Charles, so that she could devote her time to agricultural pursuits. Julia managed several ranches north and west of Stockton, where she raised fine barley and subsequently planted an orchard of cherries and walnuts and a vineyard of more than 150 acres. She served on the Board of the Woman's Syndicate, a company dedicated to assisting women with business investments, and was one of the earliest members of the Philomathean Society, a Stockton educational women's club.



JULIA WEBER (ca 1901)

OLD WEBER HOME WILL BE OBLITERATED

The Historic Adobe Will Be Razed to Make
Room for Warehouses--New Residence
Will Be Moved to Ranch.

One of the oldest or probably the oldest landmarks in the city is to be obliterated in a few days to make way for increased shipping facilities and warehouse room on the local water front. It is the old house in which Captain C. M. Weber resided when he first came to Stockton in the '40s. The building was made of adobe in 1841 or just sixty years ago and a portion of it is still standing on what for years was known as Observation Point or Weber peninsular, near the mouth of McLeod's lake.

When the adobe structure was completed there was probably not over fifteen or twenty people in the territory, which later became known as Stockton. It was in 1847 that Mr. Weber decided to make this city his home and the following year he set about improving the peninsular and building a more commodious home. He was compelled to go to San Francisco by water to secure lumber and after he made the purchase a three-mast sailing vessel was chartered to bring the material to Stockton.

At that time almost any sailing vessel that came to the Pacific coast could come up to El Dorado street or anchor in McLeod's lake, the water in the San Joaquin river was so deep. In the background of a photograph taken on the Weber home in 1850 appears a large three-mast brig at anchor in the lake. Most of the cargoes from the ships were transferred to lighters and in turn the smaller craft was discharged at the shore. Since then the debris from the mountain streams and the construction of levees have caused the river to fill up till it often has to be dredged to get flat-bottom steamboats up to this city.

When the lumber for the Weber home reached here it was estimated that it cost \$1 a foot. The adobe building was left standing and what is now known as the old home was built. A wide porch on the ground and second floor extended almost around the structure and it was considered the finest building in the interior of the State for years. In 1893 the present residence was built and most of the old structure was removed, but a portion of the original adobe building still remains.

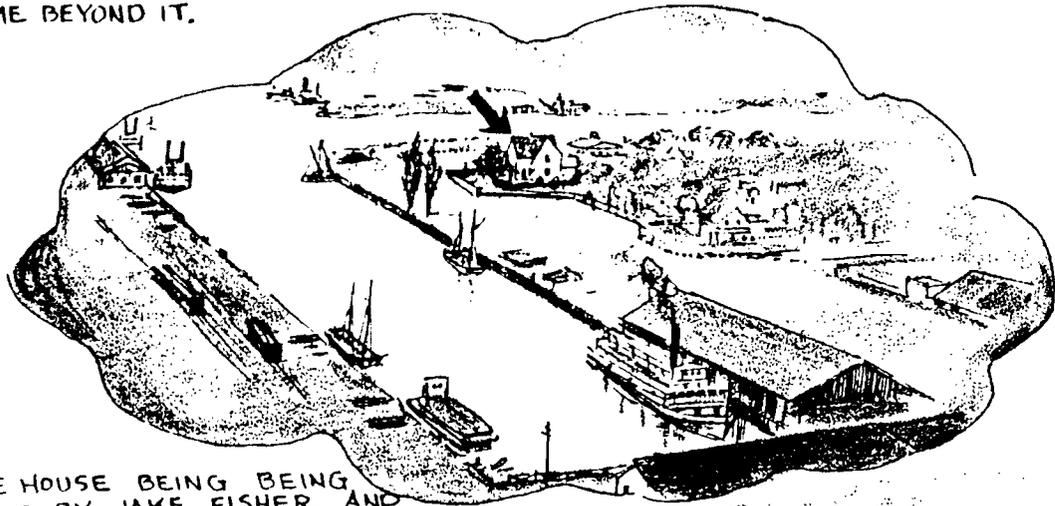
For several days workmen have been engaged in placing the big wooden building on wheels preparatory to moving it to what is called the middle Weber ranch back of West's vineyard on the bank of the Calaveras river. Shortly after the Weber estate was partitioned Miss Julia Weber decided to move out of the city onto her ranch. The property on the peninsula has long since become entirely too valuable for residence purposes and it is only a matter of time till it will be given to shipping and warehouse purposes.

Miss Weber owns 23 lots on the point and it is her intention to make it income property. At present a large warehouse, which is under lease to Wright & Dickinson, is located on the peninsula. Another big warehouse will probably be built near it soon and most of the property will be used for warehouses or to increase shipping facilities before many years have passed as it is a convenient and ideal place for such purposes.

The old adobe building, which was erected in 1841, will be razed soon and the last landmark of the point will be obliterated.

Stockton Daily Independent story on
Julia's house move (August 16, 1901)

NARROW POINTS TO RESIDENCE OF
MRS. C. M. WEBER AND MISS JULIA
WEBER, BUILT ON "THE POINT" IN THE
NINETIES. ORIGINAL WEBER
HOME BEYOND IT.



THE HOUSE BEING BEING
MOVED BY JAKE FISHER AND
THREE TRACTORS TO ITS PRESENT
LOCATION ON WEST'S LANE JUST
BEYOND THE DIVERTING CANAL.
IT IS NOW THE RANCH HOME
OF MR. AND MRS. GERALD D.
KENNEDY.



Cartoonist Ralph Yardley's sketch of the relocating of Julia Weber's house to "Helen Oak's," West Lane at the Calaveras River, ca. 1900. (San Joaquin Historical Museum)

Julia's papers in the Weber Family Collection at the San Joaquin County Museum reveal a wide-ranging, fun-loving, adventurous personality. Among the papers are a sheaf of her pencil drawings indicating both a talent for art and a love of travel. A date on one of these drawings (1868) suggests that Julia's interest in travel began while she was still a schoolgirl. She is known to have traveled to Alaska (1898), Hawaii (1899) and Mexico (1900). The papers are also replete with local and Bay Area theatre programs, baseball season passes dating from as early as 1887, and tickets to bicycle, horse and dog races.

After Julia Weber's death, her niece, Helen Weber Kennedy (1889-1983) with husband, Gerald D. (1891-1954) occupied the house. Helen Weber Kennedy, who had been born in San Jose and was the only daughter of Capt. Weber's oldest son, Charles Martin Weber (1851-1912) and Grace May Sinnott, moved to Stockton with her parents after her Grandmother Weber died (1895). Helen's mother, Grace, died of typhoid less than two years after the move (1897), leaving Helen motherless from the age of eight. One consequence of this was that her Aunt Julia became a second mother to Helen and to her younger brother, Charles M. Weber III (b. 1893). Helen's education, like her aunt's, included a stint at the Academy of Notre Dame in San Jose. Subsequently she attended the University of California, graduating (1913) as the first woman with a major in agriculture. Two years later, Helen married Gerald Driscoll Kennedy, whom she had met at the University.

Kennedy, also an agriculture major, devoted his entire business life, including a lengthy career in banking, to agricultural concerns. The Kennedys lived in Stockton from 1915 until 1928, first in a house at 426 East Vine

Street given them as a wedding gift by Aunt Julia, and subsequently in a larger home at 1021 North Commerce Street (1920-1928). Gerald Kennedy was first employed as a land salesman for Dietrich & Leistner, then for California Delta Farms, and, subsequently, as a land appraiser (from



Helen Weber Kennedy (ca 1914)

1923), until the Kennedys moved to San Francisco, where Gerald became Vice President in charge of farm loans for the American Trust Company. During these years, the Kennedys had four daughters, all of whom have been instrumental in the creation of the Weber Family Papers, Library and exhibits at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum. Four years after Aunt Julia's death, Helen and Gerald Kennedy returned to Stockton, where Gerald spent his final working years as the American Trust Company's Vice President for the San Joaquin Valley. The Kennedys settled permanently at "Helen's Oaks," as Julia's home came to be known. Like her aunt, Mrs. Kennedy had a well-developed interest in

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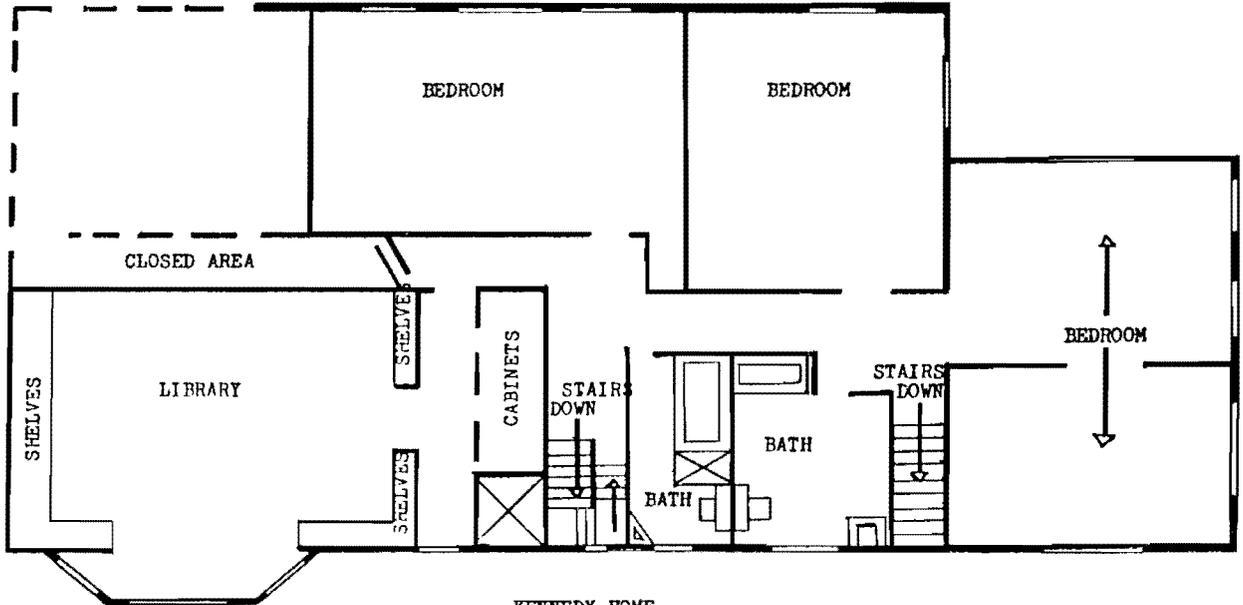
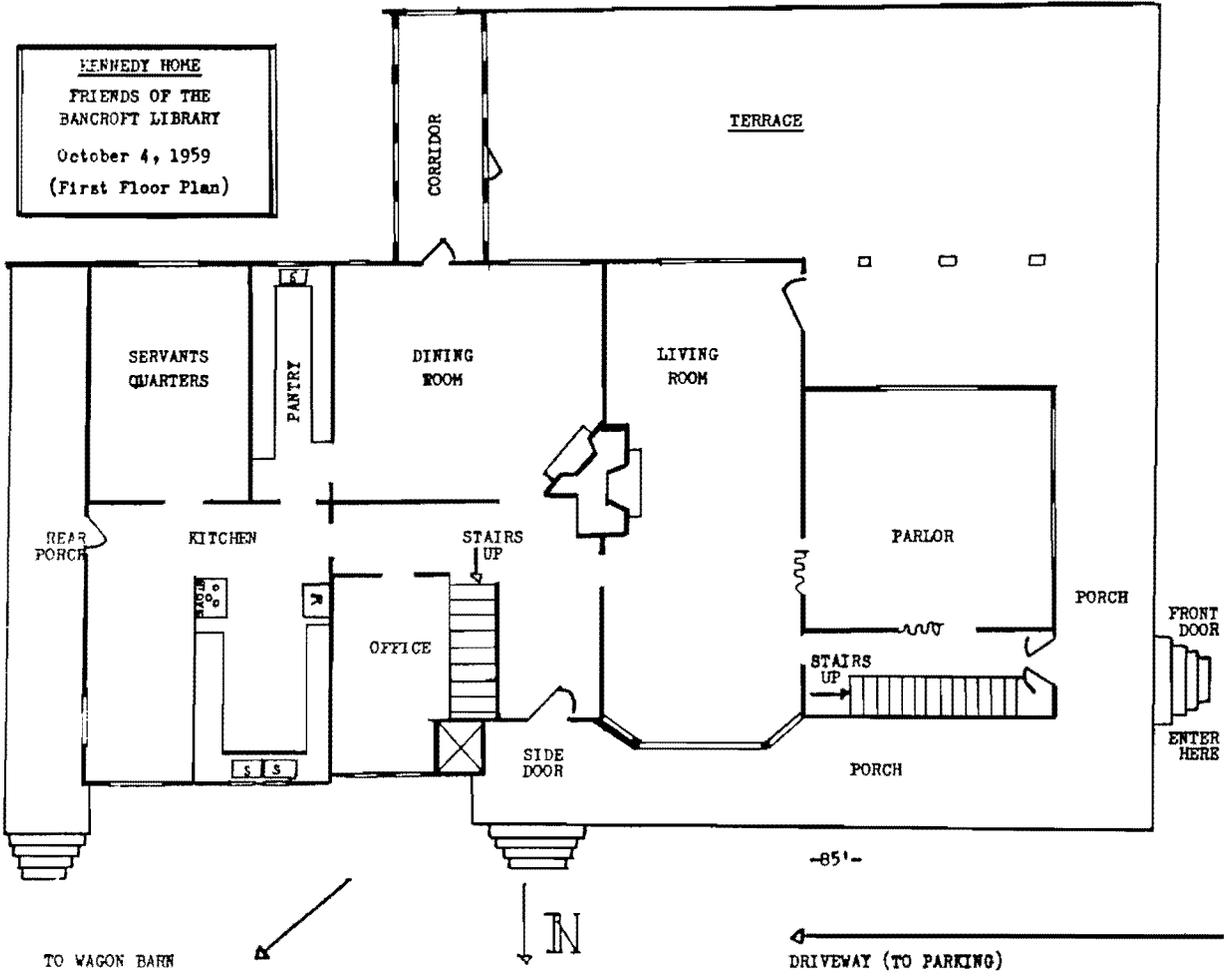
California history. For the nearly fifty years she continued to live in Julia's home, Helen Weber Kennedy carefully preserved the family furniture, library and papers Julia had brought there in 1900.

Weber family descendants believe that Julia and Charles M. Weber II designed "Helen's Oaks" and that Julia gave the home its name when she moved it to her Calaveras ranch. Charles Weber is supposed to have chosen the redwood moldings. These, together with certain doors, inside shutters, and a marble washbasin, were taken from the house and installed in the Weber exhibit rooms at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum during the mid-1980s.

The house Julia brought to her ranch followed for the most part a typical Victorian model, which included multiple upstairs

bedrooms (and, in this instance, a library) as well as a downstairs complement of living, sitting, dining and food preparation rooms. All of the furnishings presently on view in the Weber exhibition rooms at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum were originally a part of Julia's household furniture. Captain Weber's original kitchen and dining room had been housed in a separate building connected to the main house by a corridor lined with floor-to-ceiling windows. Julia brought these structures to the ranch and connected them to her home, but used the little kitchen-dining room as a guest cottage. The house had no indoor plumbing until the Kennedys occupied the site following Julia Weber's death.

KENNEDY HOME
 FRIENDS OF THE
 BANCROFT LIBRARY
 October 4, 1959
 (First Floor Plan)



KENNEDY HOME
 Second Floor Plan

Julia also brought favorite plants from the family's gardens on Weber Point to the Calaveras ranch. These included: two date palms which she and her brother had planted as children; a pink oleander, which grew between the guest cottage and the tank house; a large century plant near the road, lemon verbena; and, an entire rose garden.

Even in Julia Weber's time the house was threatened by various forms of progress. First, the county built the Calaveras River Diverting Canal (1906), and later, the East Bay Municipal Utilities District purchased a 100 foot wide right-of-way for three aqueducts on the property (1928). The former improvement necessitated the removal of a small oak woods on the Calaveras side of the house.

Before the Kennedys moved into the ranch house, they carried out several interior modifications to the main structure under the supervision of nationally known California

architect, William Wilson Wurster. These included, in addition to modern plumbing, the creation of an enormous downstairs living room, through the removal of an interior wall and fireplace. Into this space, the Kennedys transferred Captain Weber's bookcase, together with some of the contents of Julia's upstairs library. The new occupants also provided Gerald Kennedy with a substantial office and converted the basement into a large recreation room, which they filled with billiard tables and other appropriate furnishings. The Kennedys further enlisted Fisher Brothers Lumber of Stockton, who had moved Julia's house to the banks of the Calaveras some forty years before, to move the home again---this time some three hundred feet back from the River and from West Lane.

Landscape Architect Thomas Church was hired to redesign the gardens to emphasize the remaining valley oaks and the various plantings Julia had brought to the site from



"Helen's Oaks" seen from the north side

Weber Point. He planted an extension of the original rose garden next to the old house foundation, added a purple wisteria on the terrace and introduced various fruit and nut trees, including cherries, loquats and pears. Friends of the Kennedys gave them two fountains, which Church also integrated into the new garden design.

In 1953 the Kennedys again modified the interior of "Helen's Oaks," this time introducing an elevator and creating a second floor "Californiana" library. Helen Weber Kennedy used these appurtenances to good advantage when entertaining the many historical society groups who were given tours of "Helen's Oaks" during the 1950s.

Late in life, Mrs. Kennedy received a great blow when she was obliged to sell a strip in front of "Helen's Oaks" on West Lane for street widening and a second parcel on the other side of the house to permit the extension of Bianchi Road. These incursions resulted in the destruction of ninety-two oak trees, twenty-five Chinese elms and many other plantings (1964).

A member of the Friends of the Bancroft Library, Helen Weber Kennedy resolved to protect Capt. Weber's earliest correspondence, maps and business papers by donating them to the Bancroft Library at this time. When Mrs. Kennedy died (1983), she deeded "Helen's Oaks" to the Helen Weber Kennedy Charitable Trust. One year later, her daughters donated more than \$300,000 from the Trust, together with furnishings, papers and books from the house to the San Joaquin County Historical Museum. "Helen's Oaks" was to be sold to the Museum for \$1, but moving costs proved at that time to be more than the Historical Society could afford. The small attached cottage, which had once functioned as Capt.

Weber's kitchen-dining room was moved to the Museum grounds (1984), but the main house languished forlorn and empty on the banks of the Calaveras well into the present century.

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Julia's House shortly after 1901 move
[San Joaquin County Museum Collections]

The San Joaquin County Museum Salutes

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the second century in a row**

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