

The Silverado Story

Rancho Yajome and the Miller Estate

President Abraham Lincoln, President Andrew Johnson, President Ulysses S. Grant, President Theodore Roosevelt.

American presidents all, great names in American history, and all, in some way or another, linked with the beautiful Napa Valley estate once a part of Rancho Yajome and which is today the incomparable recreational and residential community of Silverado.

And there are other names, not unknown, whose bearers passed this way - General Mariano G. Vallejo, General John C. Frisbie, General John F. Miller, General Thomas Holcomb, Admiral Richardson Clover, General John J. Pershing and California's Governor Newton Booth. All of them tied to these romantic acres.

General Vallejo was the official representative of the Mexican government when his brother, Salvador Vallejo, acquired Rancho Yajome. There is a story that General Vallejo gave the property as a wedding present to his daughter when she became the bride of General John C. Frisbie. Records fail to confirm this, but there can be little doubt that the Frisbies visited the rancho while it was owned by Uncle Salvador.

John F. Miller

Born in Indiana, John Franklin Miller grew to manhood under the favorable influences of his native state. Serving a partial term in the Indiana State Senate he resigned to take command as a colonel of the Twenty-ninth Indiana Volunteers in the Civil War. He fought at the battles of Stone River; La Vergne and Nashville, so distinguishing himself that he was promoted in the field to the rank of major general.

Following the Civil War he returned to California, where he had lived briefly before the war. He became Collector of the Port of San Francisco.

Then, not yet 40 years of age, General Miller embarked upon a political career. He was President Elector at Large in 1872, 1876 and 1880. In 1879, he was a member of the Constitutional Convention and the following year was elected to the United States Senate.

The Silverado Estate

Long before entering California politics, General Miller sought a permanent homesite remote from the commercial bustle of San Francisco.

Having lived in Napa as a young attorney, and having served as Treasurer of Napa County in the mid 1850s, he was familiar with Rancho Yajome and the beautiful valley which was one day to be made famous in Robert Louis Stevenson's story "The Silverado Squatters." When he acquired the first parcel with its rolling hills, wide meadowlands and groves of oak, birch and pine, with sparkling, chattering Milliken Creek winding across the valley floor and the beautiful Napa hills framing it against a cloudless sky, he knew he had reached the end of his search.



General Miller and his wife actually purchased what is today the 1200 acre Silverado property in several parcels of land over a period of years from different grantors including the United States and the State of California. Among the deeds was one containing the signature of President Ulysses S. Grant and another signed by California's Governor Newton Booth.

The deeds conveying the various parts of land to General Miller and his wife are dated 1869, 1873 and

When the property transfers were completed, General Miller named his new estate La Vergne in 1881. memory of the battle in which he first heard the whistle of a bullet fired by an enemy of the flag of his country.

The Miller Mansion

The Millers planned the landscaping of the grounds and the design of their residence to incorporate adaptations of Italian and French architecture that they had seen in their travels abroad. The great mansion, constructed in an idyllic grove of trees above Milliken Creek, contained 14 rooms of which four were bedrooms. Each of the downstairs and upstairs bedrooms had connecting baths and marble-faced fireplaces.



Construction began in the early 1870s and an intriguing story has come out of this event which adds a touch of mystery and romance to the beautiful and stately building.

According to legend an old Spanish adobe stood on the property when General Miller purchased it. Because he believed the ancient superstition that ill fortune would come to whomever caused the adobe to be destroyed, he is said to have ordered the residence to be built around the adobe. The story was that the adobe is actually contained within the southwest section of the first story of the massive residence. The three foot thick walls in that part of the building certainly seem to lend credence to the story.

Simplicity and quality were emphasized in the furnishings which inducted floor coverings and tapestries selected from the best American and European dealers. Master bedrooms contained marble-topped dressers and over-sized colonial style beds with tassel-fringed canopies. A huge owl clock, a designed brass wood box and a unique music box were among the many intriguing items of the Miller mansion in the days of its builder's residence.

The mansion's great living room, later used by Silverado as a dining room, and now as the resorts lounge, is 84 feet long and 20 feet wide with the lofty ceilings that were marks of the time.

Outside, the mansion and its surroundings gave an impression of quiet grandeur. In the area immediately in front of the house were majestic trees, including oak, palm, birch, magnolia, pine and elm.

Behind the mansion along the terrace overlooking the creek were huge oak trees and an unusual and beautiful 250 foot long stone wall. This wall, which still stands in a state of perfect preservation, is a remarkable example of the masonry skill of the era. Made of sectional panels each about 10 feet long and faced with stones worn smooth and round from centuries of rushing creek water; the structure was created by skilled stone masons, most of whom came from Europe. The panels are separated by masonry pillars upon which are large urns used as planters, then and now.

No one knows how long the wall took to build, but the back-breaking process of selecting and gathering the stones from the creek bed alone must have taken many months. Now, years later, it is still one of the most exciting and beautiful examples of the stonemason's art to be found anywhere in California.

The Clover, Maxwell Era

While neither of General Miller's children were born at La Vergne, they grew to enjoy the beautiful country surroundings. Son John died when only seven years old, but daughter Mary Eudora grew up to marry Admiral Richardson Clover and to inherit the mansion and the estate.

During her time of residence, the mansion housed many distinguished guests including President Theodore Roosevelt and General John J. Pershing. Mrs. Clover, in 1932, sold the property to Mrs. Vesta Peak Maxwell.

La Vergne becomes Silverado

In 1953, Mrs. Maxwell sold the Miller estate, or La Vergne as it was named by General Miller, to a group organized as the Silverado Land Company. Now, for the first time, the name of the great estate officially became Silverado. Mrs. Maxwell retained one acre on the southern end of the property for her own use. Here, she built a modern home as her permanent residence.

Pat Markovich, one of the former owners and a former golf professional, converted the mansion into a clubhouse, had an 18-hole golf course built, and the original Silverado Resort came into being. Silverado continued to operate as a semiprivate golf club until the early part of 1966, when the clubhouse and the 1200 acre property was purchased by Westgate Development Company and later Amfac, Inc. of Honolulu.

In the ensuing years, Silverado has grown in notoriety and prestige by being featured on the television series "Falcon Crest" and by hosting the Senior PGA tour, as well as numerous professional and celebrity tennis tournaments.

In 2010 Dolce was appointed manager by the property's new owner: Silverado Resort Investment Group LLC, led by Johnny Miller, World Golf Hall of Fame member and lead golf analyst for NBC Sports; Roger Kent, a former longtime Californian who founded Rug Doctor, a manufacturer of carpet and upholstery cleaners, and served as the company's chairman and chief executive officer; and another California native, Tim Wall, chief executive officer of a consumer products company in the Dallas area.

The new owners envision repositioning the resort and its two 18-hole, championship golf courses as upper-upscale facilities and establishing a golf school to be named the Johnny Miller Golf Academy in conjunction with their dream of creating "a new iconic golf experience"

The property presently has grown to include 439 one bedroom condominium suites, two championship 18-hole Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf courses, 17 plexi-paved tennis courts, ten swimming pools, three restaurants, a 16,000 square foot spa, exercise facilities and salon.

A comprehensive 15,000 square foot conference center has been built to accommodate meetings and social events. Throughout its history, Silverado has continued to assure uncompromising luxury and service to its guests.