

Bartlett's News Briefs



NOT JUST ANYBODY

community-sponsored stories

by Pacifican Jean Bartlett, longtime Bay Area News Group writer

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Both born before California became a state, George and Honora Sharp can be thanked for our Sharp Park Golf Course



Before Pacifica became a city in 1957 and Sharp Park became one of its neighborhoods, Sharp Park was an unincorporated area in San Mateo County, and it was named after George Sharp. Before that, in the earlier 1900s when the Ocean Shore Railroad was making its way down the coast from San Francisco and on towards Santa Cruz (stopping 26 miles shy at Tunitas Glen), there were two communities in the area that eventually became Sharp Park. One was the district of Salada Beach. Salada Beach was named for a natural salt lagoon, Laguna Salada, located where the golf course is now. The second was Brighton Beach, a neighboring subdivision along the beach, pushed by builders and realtors who envisioned a great flux of homebuyers from San Francisco, who saw what their money could buy from the window of their train ride adventure down the coast. People did come, and did buy, but the Ocean Shore Railroad was forced to stop operations in 1920 due to a number of reasons which included: labor strikes, the rapid increase in automobiles and landslides.

Salada Beach had several excellent wells and Brighton Beach's water supply was more limited. That became a problem in 1928. That year signaled the start of a major drought in California, which included San Mateo County, and Brighton Beach petitioned to join the Salada Beach Water District. Salada Beach would only allow Brighton Beach into their water district for a \$1,700 payment. This did not make friends between the two communities. Meanwhile, the postmaster wanted both communities to change their name

to just one community because there were problems with delivering the mail – including too many homeowners with the same last names. Both areas could see the value in merging, but neither community wanted to merge using any part of the other settlement's name. A lot of huffing and puffing went on and eventually everyone voted to become known as the town of Sharp Park. How did they come up with "Sharp Park" as a voting choice? Well, it's time to introduce George Sharp and his wife Honora.

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George Frederick Sharp was born in New York City on July 18, 1822 (his birth year can also be found as 1820). George attended a school run by Patrick Sarsfield Casserly, a native of Ireland. Mr. Casserly became one of New York City's first Roman Catholic educators, celebrated for his dedication to high academics, including intensive courses on Latin and Greek. George went on to Yale and following his graduation, he began his legal studies in the law office of Charles Edwards, a legal writer with a practice specializing in common law and equity. George completed his legal studies with John Townshend, a prominent legal writer and author of "The Code of Procedure of the State of New York, with Notes on Pleading and Practice." George was then admitted to practice before the New York Supreme Court.

Fascinated by the news of the new "El Dorado" out West, in 1849 George boarded a ship out of New York City which subsequently crossed the Atlantic equator, rounded the treacherous waters of Cape Horn, and stopped at the Hawaiian Islands before arriving in San Francisco. In 1852, George's younger brother William, also a Yale graduate and an attorney, joined George in a San Francisco law partnership. They opened their law office on the corner of Washington and Montgomery streets.

Their practice, specializing in civil and mercantile law for "large business houses and corporations," was not only extremely lucrative but frequently cited for its outstanding legal reputation.

George's first wife Hanna was born in 1825 and she died in San Francisco in 1859 or 1860. They did not have children. His second wife, Honora, was born in Quebec in the early 1840s and she and George married in San Francisco in 1860. By all accounts the marriage was a devoted one. The couple lived in grand residential hotels in San Francisco, which Mr. Sharp had done since his arrival in the City. Apparently, in those days, a number of well-to-do San Franciscans chose hotel living because they found it easier and more economical than managing a full staff and a mansion. One of the couple's favorite things to do was spend time in nature or in gardens, and when San Francisco's Golden Gate Park opened in 1870, they were frequent visitors.

Along with running a thriving legal practice with his brother, George was very successful in real estate investments. One such investment was an area of land, near the ocean, separated from the Pacific by an ocean ridge barrier and containing a fresh-to-brackish, non-tidal lagoon, meaning it had a salt potency higher than fresh water. This particular investment, which consisted of a great many sand dunes, can be found listed as a 410-acre ranch on the remote San Mateo County Coast. All of it was originally part of the Mexican land grant of Rancho San Pedro, an 8,926-acre property, covering most of today's Pacifica, which was granted to Don Francisco Sánchez, former Commandante of the San Francisco Presidio and 8th Alcalde of San Francisco, by Alta California Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado in 1839.

In 1880 or 1881, George Sharp retired from his practice due to a warning by his physician. "You have serious heart disease." But George didn't completely retire, remaining a prominent member of the Bar and taking care of some of his partnership's casework when he and his brother deemed it necessary.

On October 17, 1882, after returning from some business the previous week in Stockton, Mr. Sharp was taken by surprise when a messenger arrived at his office that morning. Apparently George was overdue in Department 1 of the Superior Court of the City and County of San Francisco to represent the plaintiff, Florence Tingley. He rushed from his office in all haste to ask the court for a continuance. When he

arrived he was notably exhausted. As he finished speaking and as "Mr. Bergin, attorney for the defense, was about to reply, Mr. Sharp staggered against the railing in front of the Clerk's desk." He fell to the floor, striking his head against a sharp edge. Judge Sullivan ordered the windows opened and the crowd ushered back. Dr. C. F. Buckley, also in the building, was summoned. After trying all he could, Dr. Buckley pronounced George Sharp's death. The doctor's tentative assessment of the cause of death was "fatty degeneration of the heart." At the time of his death, George Frederick Sharp was 60 years of age and he and his wife Honora lived at the Baldwin Hotel. They did not have children.

At some point in the late 1890s, Honora married Judge W. L. Pierce, a lawyer. But the marriage was not a good one and she divorced him within a few years.

Honora Sharp died in her room at the Savoy Hotel on February 8, 1905. The contents of her very thoughtful and generous will made no mention of Mr. Pierce, and all newspaper articles and court rulings following her death referenced her only as Honora Sharp, widow of the late George F. Sharp.

Honora directed that the bulk of her estate, an amount of \$200,000, be turned over to two San Francisco Park Commissioners: California businessman Adolph B. Spreckels, who ran the Spreckels Sugar Company; and Reuben H. Lloyd, a prominent San Francisco attorney who was also Honora's attorney. Both were very wealthy men and both were heavily involved in the development of Golden Gate Park. (There are two landmarks in the park associated with Adolph Spreckels: the Spreckels Temple of Music, aka the Golden Gate Bandshell, and Spreckels Lake. There are also two landmarks in the park associated with Reuben Lloyd: Lloyd Lake, also known as Mirror Lake; and the old stone columns near the lake, known as the Portals of the Past.)

Mrs. Sharp trusted both men implicitly in that they understood her initial desire was to erect some suitable memorial to her late husband in Golden Gate Park, with a strong interest in that being a memorial gate at the entrance "to what is known as the panhandle of the park." However, because she knew, and was advised, there might be laws that would challenge such a charitable bequest, she left the bequest to the two park commissioners, "without any trust or understanding either express or implied as to its use of appropriation or otherwise."

Both Mr. Spreckels and Mr. Lloyd also understood all the following which Mrs. Sharp noted in her will. "She and her husband George had obtained such enjoyment of Golden Gate Park." "George was the owner of realty which appreciated in value when Golden Gate Park was opened." "George participated in the dedication of the public pleasure ground." She trusted these men to use that money for some sort of park recreational purposes for the public: "public land kept in public use."

In addition, she left: "\$25,000 to the Salvation Army for the poor of San Francisco; \$25,000 to the King's Daughters Home for Incurables; and \$25,000 to the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals." There were some smaller and several additional \$25,000 amounts left to specific individuals. All the rest, "residue and remainder of my estate, be it real, personal or mixed, and wheresoever situate, and all illegal or inoperative bequests or devisees, I give, devise and bequeath to my said executor Samuel G. Murphy." In Mrs. Sharp's will, she additionally declared she had no relatives.

This is all mentioned because of course her will was challenged, as she suspected it would be as did her attorney, by a number of ne'er-do-wells and buttinskis. But finally, with both Spreckels (1857-1927) and Lloyd (1835-1909) leaving their share of that 410-acre property to the City and County of San Francisco, with the formal stipulation that it be used strictly for park and recreation purposes only—"if this agreement is ever breached, Sharp Park will revert to Honora Sharp's beneficiaries"—the wishes of Honora Sharp began to come to fruition in 1927. It was in that year, that horticulturist John McLaren, considered the father of Golden Gate Park, proposed a golf course on part of George Sharp's land and San Francisco officials concurred.

Golf was exceptionally popular all over the world and San Francisco recognized that their own public courses – Harding Park Golf Course, near Lake Merced, and Lincoln Park Golf Course at Lands End – were not enough to meet demand. Subsequently, British golf course architect Dr. Alister MacKenzie was commissioned to design the golf course at Sharp Park. Dr. MacKenzie, famous for his stunning yet challenging designs, created more than 50 golf courses throughout the world. They include: Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Georgia; Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach, CA; Titirangi Golf Club in Auckland, New Zealand; and Royal Melbourne Golf Club (West Course) in Australia.

Between 1927 and 1930, Dr. MacKenzie, in collaboration with his construction partner Robert Hunter, and with golf architect H. Chandler Egan, drafted the plans for the golf course without a fee. It was understood that if their plans were accepted by the City of San Francisco, they would be retained as architects. They were retained. Construction, which included the design and building of the Sharp Park Golf Course Club House by the architectural firm of Willis Polk & Co., was completed in 1931. On April 16 and April 17, 1932, Sharp Park opened with a two-day inaugural tournament. 400 golfers arrived. That same year, the residents of Salada Beach and Brighton Beach became the residents of Sharp Park.

The course, which is often referred to as "The Poor Man's Pebble Beach," was described by professional golfer and U.S. Open champion Ken Venturi as: "Dr. MacKenzie's great gift to the American public course golfer."

Honora's last request was that she be buried at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma. Following a Requiem High Mass held on February 9, 1905, at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, Honora Sharp was interred at Holy Cross, where she rests with her husband George, and with friend or family member Mrs. Mary Brennan, originally of Ireland, who died in San Leandro, CA, in November of 1885. (Section E, Row 7, Area 2, Plot 3; Sharp Overground Vault.)

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By Jean Bartlett (© October 18, 2026)

Writer Jean Bartlett was recognized by the Board of Supervisors, County of San Mateo, for "her writing that connects community and preserves local history." She can be contacted through her website, www.bartlettbiographies.com. This story was sponsored by a grant through the Pacifica Historical Society – funded by the [Sam Mazza Foundation](#).