

Bartlett's News Briefs



NOT JUST ANYBODY

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by Pacifican Jean Bartlett, longtime Bay Area News Group writer

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The puzzling ownership of the 1922 speakeasy at Pacifica's castle ~ Chateau LaFayette



Built in 1908, this grand Pacifica castle has had a number of owners of record – a few on the slippery side – with San Francisco painting and interior decorating contractor Sam Mazza being its last purchaser in 1959. The castle is now the headquarters of the charitable foundation, the Sam Mazza Foundation. (Jean Bartlett photo, 2014.)

Digging into the archives of the San Mateo County Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder's Office reveals the former owners of the castle. Ocean Shore Land Company (and Railroad) attorney Henry Harrison McCloskey and his wife Emily were the first owners. They began construction on their home/castle in 1907 and moved in, in 1908. This move was the result of the Great Earthquake of 1906. Following that disaster, Emily McCloskey wanted no part of continuing to live in San Francisco. So much so, that despite Henry's weekday commute into the City for work, the McCloskey family lived on the Peninsula in San Carlos until they could take up residence in their "earthquake/fire proof" 24-room castle.

Following her husband's death in 1914, Emily remained at the castle until her son Paul completed law school. In 1916, Dr. Galen Hickok and his wife Minerva were the next owners of record. But things here take a turn to the unusual. In early December of 1920, Dr. Hickok was convicted of performing an illegal abortion at the castle and was sentenced to two to five years at San Quentin State Prison (now San Quentin Rehabilitation Center). But as it turned out, he wasn't even a real doctor. He had stolen the medical school diploma and credentials from the Missouri-born, Dr. Galen Richard Hickok. The real Dr. Hickok would later report that a man who went by "Thompson," had worked for him as a medical assistant until Thompson took off and Dr. Hickok's professional papers went missing.

In 1922, M.L. Hewitt, a mining industrialist from Montana, bought the castle and turned it into a restaurant and speakeasy (and/or roadhouse), Chateau LaFayette. Following Mr. Hewitt's death in 1924, Dr. Hickok's son, Max Hickok, took on the castle. He continued in his father's business practice which eventually resulted in a charge of second degree murder following the death of a patient. Max's next address, just like Dad's, was also San Quentin.

Little Brown Church goes Clarence "Holly" and Annie Eakin owned the castle from 1928 until Annie's death in 1955, leasing it to the U.S. Coast Guard during the war years. Annie's nephew G. Howard Johnson inherited the castle, rented it to a sculptor for several years, and subsequently sold it to Sam Mazza in 1959. All the castle owners on record leave enough of a trail so that their ownership of the castle is not in dispute – except one. In digging into the life of M.L. Hewitt, something smells like malarkey.

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M.L. Hewitt, listed as a prominent Montana operator and industrialist, appears to be Marcus Lafayette Hewett, with the last name spelled slightly differently than the castle owner of record. The latter Marcus Lafayette Hewett was born in Fort Fairfield, Maine, in November of 1862. In July of 1904, Mr. Hewett's hometown paper, the *Fort Fairfield Review*, wrote glowingly of the life their native son had lived to date.

Hon. Marcus L. Hewett of Basin, Montana, Mine Owner and Banker

"Marcus L. Hewett is now with little doubt the wealthiest person ever born in Fort Fairfield.

"He went to Montana 25 years ago, became interested in the mining business and finally a principal owner of several good mines and vice-president and general manager of the Cataract Copper Mining company. Some of the other stockholders in this last named company are Philadelphia and New York capitalists. On the fifth day of the present July, Mr. Hewlett opened a bank in Basin, and is its sole owner and manager.

"That Mr. Hewett is a very prominent and much respected citizen of his part of Montana can easily be seen from the honors that have been bestowed upon him by his neighbors and the way he is mentioned in the columns of the papers of that state. Speaking of the new bank, the *Basin Progress* of June 25, 1904, says: 'For a number of years now, a bank has been badly needed in Basin, but it has been left to one of our most progressive and public spirited men to stand the expense of the construction, equipment and capitalization of this much needed improvement to our city, and we feel that it is only due to the Hon. Marcus L. Hewett to state, that the home prepared by him for the new banking institution, is one of the most complete and perfect of its kind in the state of Montana.'

The article goes on to describe the exceptional attractiveness of Mr. Hewett's one-story solid brick bank: its French plate windows, the iron grille work and Florentine glass, not to mention the handsome furniture and burglar-proof Diebold safe. It concludes with multi-complimentary paragraphs on this dearly-loved citizen.

"The knowledge that the people of Basin have in Mr. Hewett, will assure them that he will provide for their benefit a modern, up-to-date and complete banking institution, where they will receive, at all times, courteous and careful attention, and any matter of business entrusted to this bank will be accurately and skillfully attended to. The people of Basin and its vicinity are to be congratulated upon this new business acquisition.

"Old Fort Fairfield friends of Mr. Hewett (and he has many, who remember him as a mischievous but good-hearted schoolboy), will greatly rejoice over his good fortune in the great State of sunshine, copper and gold, and all will congratulate him that his honesty, ability and enterprise, and public spirit and generosity are receiving recognition from those who knew him best."

This Hon. Marcus L. Hewett died of a heart attack while on a business trip in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1926. When he died, the *Boulder Monitor* noted that along with being a mining promoter and well known banker, Mr. Hewett was also a veteran member of the Montana Legislature. He was 63 and was survived by his wife and two daughters.

Then we've got the M.L. Hewitt of "the famous Mystery Castle near Salada Beach, San Mateo County," which the proprietor ran as the roadhouse Chateau LaFayette during Prohibition. It was a popular spot, to put it mildly; popular both with high-society attendees and raiding Federal officers. Interestingly, during Prohibition, 1920-1933, San Mateo County was considered one of the "wettest" and most lawless areas in all of California – particularly due to its very active San Mateo County fog-laden coastline. Half Moon Bay, Moss Beach, Miramar, Año Nuevo Island and the various coastside towns of what is today's Pacifica, teemed with liquor shipments and rumrunners. There were also the occasional shootouts between Federal agents and coastal bootleggers.

In a March 14, 1923 article, the San Mateo *Daily News Leader* noted that the castle "had allowed itself to be swept into a bootleggers' ring and was raided by Federal officers." Heading the raid was Federal Prohibition Deputy Director C. H. Wheeler. There, at Chateau LaFayette, Wheeler and his agents found 60 bottles of wine and 25 bottles of Canadian whisky. They also found "a board arranged like an egg crate with 400 holes for holding small vials of liquor." These vials were five inches long and contained about an ounce of liquor.

There were no guests at the Chateau that Saturday night, but three men were arrested. Two were employees, Ernest Bazinett and his brother Joseph. The third man arrested, James Hollingsworth, was written up in the article as the Chateau's proprietor. He pled guilty and was subsequently fined \$309 by Federal Judge Robert S. Bean. The two brothers entered pleas of not guilty. Earlier on March 14, C. H. Wheeler had led his team to the Rockaway Grill and the Montara Family Club where multiple arrests were made and evidence was seized.

Wheeler's Federal dry squad became known for its massive raids on beach resorts and speakeasies. But Wheeler would face some serious job consequences. In August of 1923, local news reported that he was suspended from his duties in the San Francisco Bay Area. His suspension was "triggered by a bitter Federal dispute over the disappearance of confiscated liquor that had been seized down the coast in Monterey."

Another arrest at "Chateau de Lafayette" ran in the *Daily News Leader's* headlines. This was in late February of 1924. The article reported: "Charles Barenco (could also be Brengo or Vrengo depending on the article), Frank Brackin and Otto Dressler, alleged proprietors of the Chateau de Lafayette, formerly the Castle of Mystery, at Salada Beach, were fined \$500 each by Federal Judge John S. Partridge in San Francisco on Saturday, on charges of violating the provisions of the Volstead Act. The Chateau was raided by Federal agents last week, with a large number of prominent people being found in the place, according to the officers. The proprietors were the only ones arrested."

Given Wheeler's suspension, that arrest was conducted by W. R. Paget, Chief of Prohibition Enforcement, and a prominent Federal agent in San Mateo County. Paget and his officers scaled the walls and battered down "the heavily bolted doors." Paget told reporters there were 40 visitors in the dining room, all well-dressed, who had "motored out from San Francisco and vicinity." They were not arrested. Paget went on to say they found liquor on the tables, in the kitchen and in the cellar. He called it a "roadhouse bootlegging headquarters."

Other than the M.L. Hewitt name on the 1922 deed, Hewitt does not show up in any of these old articles.

California property law states that an individual can take and hold title to real estate under an assumed or fictitious name, as long as there is no intent to defraud. Back then there were no technical means to verify the owner on the deed matched a real person. Much later, California notaries would make it significantly harder for a buyer to commit fraud on a property deed.

Perhaps when the fake Dr. Galen Hickok, or more likely his wife, transferred the property to M.L. Hewitt, no proof of identification was required. And after M.L. Hewitt's supposed death in 1924, two years before the Montana Hewett's death, the castle was taken over by Dr. Hickok's son.

Something is not quite right in the Castle Prohibition Days of Salada Beach.

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By Jean Bartlett (© September 23, 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](#).