

The Novato Historian

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Preserving Novato's History Feature Section

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The Reichert Villa Story

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Theodore Reichert was a native of Ohio, born February 14, 1842 and came to California as a young man, probably in 1858.

While no facts concerning his background or education are known, it is fairly apparent that any formal education he may have received was not in a professional field; however, his written reports and extant letters indicate either some higher education or keen natural ability.

Arriving in California in 1858, Reichert settled in Sacramento, where he opened his own business in the field of grain commissions. Between 1863 and 1867, he returned East and traveled for a year, working as a grocer.

His father, John G. Reichert of Tiffin, Ohio, died July 17, 1866. His father was 76. Reichert returned to the Pacific Coast in 1868 and settled in White Pine, Nevada, until 1869.

In White Pine, he was involved with a number of silver mining companies. One of them being Grant Invincible Silver Mining Company with capital stock of \$800,000, in shares of \$100 each. Trustees were Stephen B. Whipple, A. Heyer, S.C. Bowley, Charles W. Case (of the 1888 Novato Home and Farm Company) and Theodore Reichert.

Reichert moved to San Francisco and soon after settling there, he took an active part in state and national politics. He made himself felt as a factor in party councils.

He was honored with the position of Deputy United States Surveyor-General for California from 1877 to 1885.

In 1886, Reichert then became the nominee of the Republican party for the office of State Surveyor-General and was elected by the highest vote cast on the entire ticket. Having served the State well and conducted his office without the slightest reproach, Reichert was re-elected to that position in 1888, 1890 and 1892.

As a party man, he was the Corresponding Secretary for the Young Men's Republican Club in 1875 and was one of the most effective and energetic workers on record. In the Republican party in San Francisco he had been notably active and his potential in managing the organization known as "The Invincible." It is through his efforts that the organization became the largest political body in the metropolis. It had its own quarters "The Wigwam," and was thoroughly disciplined under General Reichert's supervision and able generalship. Its building during the campaigns was crowded nightly to hear public debates.

Reichert was prominent in many fraternal organizations. One of the first lodges he joined in California was I.O. of G.T. of Capitol Lodge, No. 51. He was already the W.M. (Worthy Marshall) in August 1862. He became Worthy Secretary in 1863. Other organizations he participated in were Occidental Lodge, No. 22; Free and Accepted Masons, California Chapter, No. 5; Royal Arch Masons; Golden Gate Commandery, No. 16, Knights Templar; Islam Temple, and the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of Mystic Shrine.

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On September 15, 1887, the *Independent Journal* reported "On Sunday last Ex-Governor Petkins, Capt. Knowles, Capt. Griffith, James Prescott, Surveyor General Reichert, Mr. Walter, and a number of other capitalists from San Francisco, Los Angeles and Sacramento, made a general inspection of Novato lands, with a view to possible investment and colonization. They expressed themselves well pleased with the outlook."

On January 5, 1888, Ex-Senator Frank DeLong sold the lower portion of his extensive ranch for \$230,000 to Charles W. Chase. He was the same person that Reichert was involved with in the silver mine in 1869.

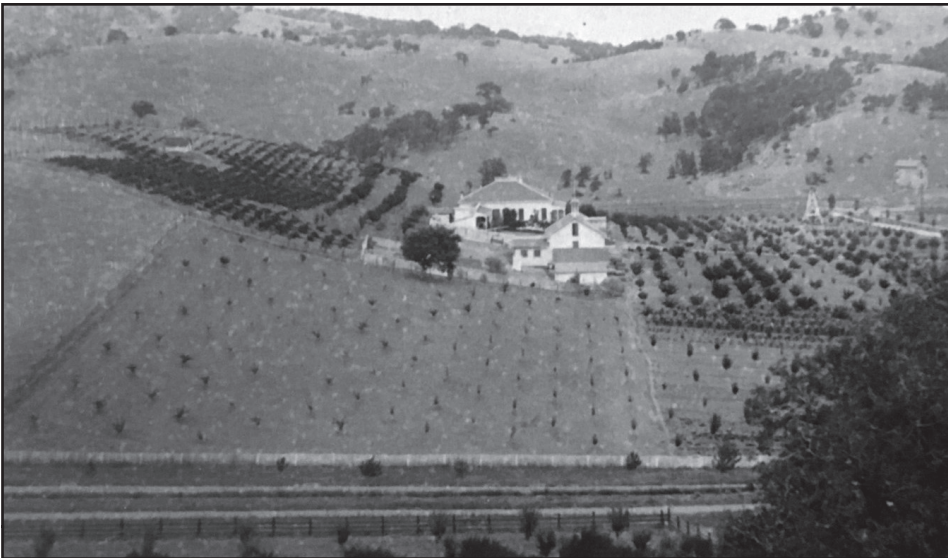


Reichert in the 1870's and 1890's

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This picture taken above the Judge Rudolff home and his cheese factory, looking east, you can see the roof of the Villa in the center of photo, Hayden Mansion is at the top right, old Novato is off to the top left and the street at the left is Lamont Avenue.



The Villa looking west from the Hayden mansion (Hilltop). Reichert Avenue is the street at the bottom of picture.

In March 8, 1888 Surveyor General Reichert purchased two lots in the new town site. By the 29th of 1888, he purchased 10 acres of land and had it staked off and ploughed. His lumber was already on the ground and building commenced at once under the direction of contractor C.J. Grant.

By April his residence was nearly completed, and his family moved into their new home by June 7, 1888. He built an addition to his house in August of that year and built a handsome new

barn in January 1890. He added more to his cottage in November 1892.

In June of 1890 it was recorded that the Home and Farm Co. sold to Theodore Reichert - Prospect Place - Lots 2, 3,4,5, and 6. He called his ranch "Illawarra Villa."

The Quiet Divorce

October 7, 1894 the *San Francisco Call* reported "A QUIET DIVORCE - Surveyor-General Reichert and his

wife separated last Tuesday, in the Superior Court of San Rafael, a decree of divorce was granted Theodore Reichert, Surveyor General of California, from his wife, Mollie Roberts Reichert.

The proceedings were carried on with the greatest secrecy, every effort having been made to keep the matter silent. However, the affair gained publicity, and it was found that the proceedings were carried on by stipulation.

Reichert's wife was given custody of their 10-year-old child and was allowed a remittance of \$1000 cash and a note for \$250. Their son, Theodore Charles Jr., was born October 18, 1885.

The couple had been married for twelve years, and had resided for a time in Novato, but it is said that their married life was of a most unpleasant character.

Another story which has gained ground is to the effect that Mr. Reichert is soon to be united in marriage to a young lady of this city, although nothing definite regarding the matter has been made public."

In 1882 it was reported that Mr. and Mrs. Reichert had a 5th year wedding anniversary party in San Francisco, which had hundreds of guests, including Governor E.S. Salamon. It appears Mr. Reichert was married before his divorce from Mollie Reichert. Also, Theodore Reichert (Reichart) does not show up in any U.S. Census from 1850 to 1910.

October 1894 - Mollie M.J. Reichert deeded to Theodore Reichert - Lot 2, 3 ,4, 5, and 6, Prospect Place for \$250.

February 23, 1895 the *San Rafael Tocsin* paper reported: "WEDDING OF THEODORE REICHART - On Tuesday afternoon Theodore Reichart, ex-Surveyor General, was married to Miss Ida Wick of San Diego. The ceremony was the culmination of a somewhat romantic train of circumstances. The young lady, who is about thirty years of age, was the secretary of Surveyor General Reichart while he was in office at Sacramento and he fell in love with her. ... The newly married couple will remain at the Baldwin for some time and spend

their honeymoon, after which they will then go to the General's county seat in Novato."

Mollie J. Reichert married Daniel L. Hayden (Hilltop) in 1894. The 1900 census showed Daniel living in Novato as a boardinghouse keeper with Mollie, his daughters Gertie and Lottie, and her son Theodore C. Reichert. Mollie died August 20, 1912 in San Francisco.

In June of 1895 Mr. Reichert leased the villa to Wakerfield Baker of Baker & Hamilton, hardware merchants, from San Francisco. Baker moved out in September.

In December of 1896 the villa was rented to the foreman of the creamery. The *Novato Township* book says, "The Reichert home was leased for a number of years. One of the tenants was Judge Hermann Rudolff and his family who lived there briefly in 1898 until their own new home was built."

Sold Reichert Villa

April 1899 - Ida and Theo Reichert sold the Villa to Thomas L. Pelkey, 'Lots 2,3,4,5 and 6 Prospect Place,' and 'Lot 3 Franklin Place' containing 19.97 acres for \$22,000. The Reicherts moved to San Francisco.

At the closing of the Novato Home and Farm Company, the Reicherts were back in Novato buying at auction the last lots in town. They bought 'Lot 13 Block G' and 'Lots 38 and 39 Block J.'

On July 9, 1910, Theodore Reichert died at the age of 68. He was in ill health for about two years, but was able to attend to business. His death came unexpectedly in San Francisco. Ida K. Reichert was killed in a collision of a motor bus with a streetcar while visiting in Los Angeles on August 19, 1912. Her estate sold 'Lot 13 Block G' to John P. Loutanau and 'Lots 38 and 39 Block J' to Hans and Suisse Neilsen.

Theodore's son Theo Jr., was traced to his 1918 draft card in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He became a farmer going by the name of Charles Reichert and listed Mrs. Ida Reichert as his nearest relative. It appears that he did not know that she died in 1912. Further records of Theodore Reichert Jr. cannot be found after 1918.

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Pictures of the Villa in the 1930's. The barn is in the background on bottom picture.



Mr. Chase

Dec 1, 1916 *Brooklyn Times Union*
(Owner of the Home and Farm Company)

Charles William Chase, 85, a retired New York Produce commission merchant, Civil War veteran and famous traveler in his time in the West, died of pneumonia after a week's illness, at his residence, 205 Quincy Street. Mr. Chase was born March 1, 1832, in Rochester, N.H., and a couple of years after the California gold discoveries

started, he went West where he had some exciting experiences as a prospector among the wilds of the Rocky Mountains.

When the Civil War broke out, he enlisted in a California cavalry regiment and served until the end of the conflict. He was a member of Lafayette Post, G.A.R., and the Clinton Avenue Congregational Church, and is survived by his wife, Catherine Bemis Chase, who was married December 2, 1873 in Canandaigua, New York, two

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daughters, Mrs. Samuel Cole Fairley and Miss Alice L Chase, and a son, George C. Chase, of Tooele, Utah.

New Owners of Reichert Villa

Thomas Pelkey, the new owner of the Villa, was an eastern capitalist and on February 24, 1900 the *Tocsin* paper reported "Our Klondike king, Thomas Pelkey, who with his family occupies the Reichert mansion, will leave shortly for Cape Nome to look after some mining interests." In February 1903 he disposed his property in Novato and moved his family to Seattle.

Harriet D. Brown was the buyer and flipped the property, selling it to William A. Powning.

The 1900 U.S. census showed W.A. Powning living in Belvedere with his father Joseph, who made a fortune in manufacturing powder.

Around 1901, the Pownings purchased five acres of land next door to Constable L.A. DeVoto's ranch and started a chicken ranch. All the papers in California carried the story about the Pownings chickens getting on the DeVoto ranch - eating his seeds and DeVoto killing eighteen of Pownings chickens. But that's another story. (See page 48 of the book *Novato Township*.)

March 1903 - W.A. Powning with Col. Jud. C. Brusie took possession of his new villa, formerly the Reichert place and had the premises overhauled and improved.

To be continued ...



Novato in 1924. This aerial shot was taken from above Reichert Villa, foreground, when downtown Novato was about six blocks big and everybody knew everyone else. The orchards pictured in the foreground were typical of the rows of trees that once covered most of this fertile 'Valley of Gentle Seasons.' The trees produced fruit and nuts, and the orchard owners provided employment for local residents. Even children could earn money - five cents a tree for putting windfalls on the shady side, to be gathered later by pickers. The rectangular arrangement of buildings at the center of the photo is the entire downtown of the day. Now known as Old Town Novato. The railroad curves along the right side of downtown.



(Above and left) 1973 pictures of the Reichert barns.