

# ABRAM POMEROY

## *Gardena's True Founder Assumes His Rightful Place in History*

By JAMES OSBORNE  
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

It is not uncommon for some cities to lose track of their origins or founders. Early records are sometimes lost and names are often forgotten. Such was the case with Gardena's founder, Abram Ehle Pomeroy, who first marketed the Gardena Tract with an opening date of Jan. 3, 1887.

In many articles, written in recent decades, the founder of Gardena has been incorrectly listed as Spencer Roan Thorpe. Thorpe was born in Louisville, Ky. in 1842 and later served as a captain with the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He was wounded three times during various battles and was later captured by Federal troops and sent to the prisoner of war camp for Confederate officers at Johnson Island, Ohio.

After his release from prison at the close of the war, he was a physical wreck and never completely recovered. However, on Jan. 20, 1868, he did manage to marry Miss Helena Barbin. In 1877 the couple made their first visit to the Pacific Coast and stayed for six months in California. In 1883 they returned to California and stayed as permanent residents of San Francisco. In 1889, however, they moved again; this time to Los Angeles.

The idea that Thorpe was the founder of Gardena supposedly

first sprang from an account of the history of the harbor district for the Boy Scouts, written by Willis P. Moore, who credited Thorpe with the actual naming of Gardena. However, it was in the fall of 1891, four years after the Gardena Tract was originally laid out, when Thorpe purchased his 900 acres of Gardena land for \$112,000 with the idea to plant all of it with fruit trees.

Thorpe was instrumental in the formation of the Gardena Town Hall Company in October 1892, and sat on the Board of Directors. The Board managed to raise \$2000 of capital stock for the purpose of constructing and furnishing a building for the benefit of Gardena's residents. No doubt, Spencer Thorpe was certainly an early pioneering figure in Gardena, but he was not the actual founder.

Abram Ehle Pomeroy, or A. E. Pomeroy as he was commonly known, was born in Athens, Mich. on Oct. 2, 1838. He was one of eight children born to parents Charles and Permelia Pomeroy. The senior Pomeroy was a pioneering settler in Michigan while it was still only a territory. He also served as a captain during the Black Hawk Indian war, and lived until the ripe old age of 98.

In 1850, the Pomeroy family left for California and first settled in Santa Clara County. For a time, Abram's father, Charles, served as a councilman for the City of San Jose.

Abram was educated in the public schools of San Jose and later at the University of the Pacific, where in 1863 he graduated with a B.A. degree. For a time, he worked in the newspaper field, having risen from the lowly position of "printer's devil," or apprentice, to that of a compositor. He later served for four years as the County Clerk for Santa Clara County.

In 1881 Abram moved to Los Angeles and established his own real estate business. In addition to developing Gardena, he was also instrumental in the development of the nearby communities of Hermosa Beach and Long Beach. But his contribution to the formation of these and other cities has also been largely forgotten.

On Dec. 31, 1886 Abram Pomeroy first advertised "Gardena!" and marketed 20 acre sites for sale. Advertisements placed in the Los Angeles Times claimed there was "Abundant water to be piped on every lot." In addition, the Gardena acreage was promoted as having "The finest garden soil" and "The best of fruit and vegetable land." The original tract was bordered by what is today Redondo Beach Boulevard on the north, 168th Street on the south, Normandie Avenue on the west, and Main Street on the east.

The Gardena Tracts' proximity to the old Dominguez Slough on the south end would have meant that it would have had years of deposited topsoil available for agriculture. In fact, it has been widely thought for years that Gardena earned its name as result of the lush greenery surrounding the old slough area which looked like a "Garden Spot" during the dry season. It may or may not have inspired the name. A Los Angeles Times passage dated April 11, 1887 stated that Pomeroy's company would plant 60 acres of fruit trees, and "A few years this will prove its name indeed appropriate- Gardena." This would seem to indicate the name was selected to entice land buyers who wished to develop orchards, or "gardens."

Another clue as to the origin of Gardena's name comes from a notice in the Los Angeles Times dated April 30, 1885. It mentions a new Masonic lodge being instituted at Alhambra under the name of the "Gardena Lodge, No. 127, Knights of Pythias." Pomeroy was in fact a Mason and he was also involved with the early development of Alhambra.

For a time, Abram Pomeroy and Spencer Thorpe actually had business interactions, other than real estate, with one another. In January 1893, the Union Bank of Savings filed articles of incorporation with the Los Angeles County Clerk for the purpose of creating a general savings bank. Pomeroy served on the bank's board of directors and Thorpe was listed as one of the principal subscribers for stock in the bank.

In addition to Pomeroy's business dealings, he served as a trustee of the University of Southern California and was a charter member of both the California Club and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. He was also a trustee of the First Methodist Church of Los Angeles.

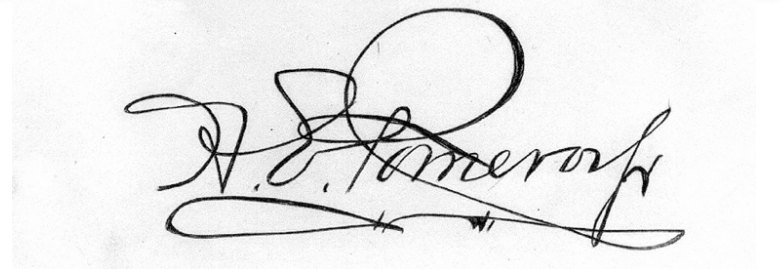
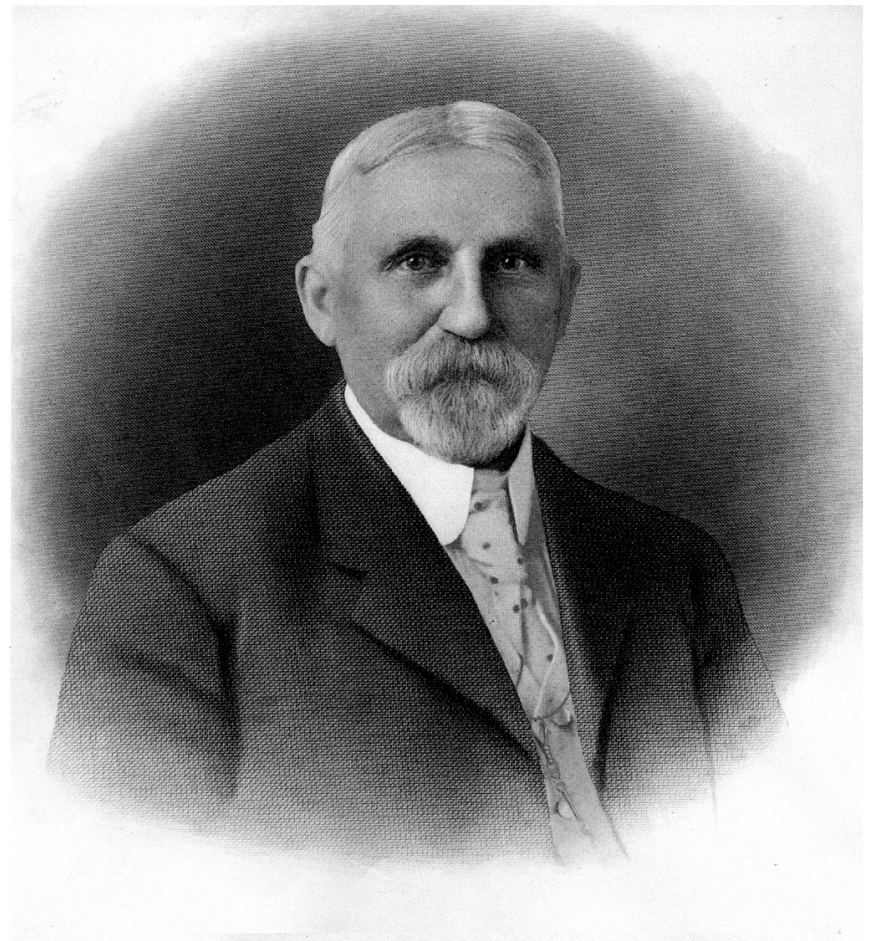
On March 14, 1928, Abram Pomeroy died at his Los Angeles home at the age of 90. Coincidentally, Abram's younger brother George, died in Redondo Beach on the same day at the age of 82. Abram's wife, Florence, died at the age of 76, 11 days after her husband's death.

Pomeroy had attained the 32nd degree in Masonry and his funeral service was conducted by the Pentalpha Lodge No. 202 of the Masons.

Both Abram and Florence Pomeroy were interred at the Evergreen Cemetery in Los Angeles.

Today, it could be said, that those Gardena residents who have planted fruit trees in their yards or who tend a garden are continuing to fulfill Abram Pomeroy's concept for naming the area "Gardena."

*James Osborne is an author of South Bay history and was a contributor to the book: "Gardena" published by Arcadia Publishing in 2006. His family was among the early settlers in the Gardena area, arriving in 1902.*



Real Estate.

Will be Ready for the Market January 3, 1887.

## GARDENA!

The new land tract, situated on Main-st. road, 10 miles south  
of Los Angeles, 2 1-2 miles west of Compton.

## Subdivided into 20-acre Tracts.

ABUNDANT WATER TO BE PIPED ON EVERY LOT.

The finest of garden soil. Level land. The best of fruit and vegetable land. On 800 acres of this tract this year 12,000 sacks of grain were produced. On 2 1/4 acres immediately adjoining this tract were raised and sold in Los Angeles market over \$2000 worth of strawberries.

For prices and terms apply to

**A. E. POMEROY, 18 Court St.**