



Courtesy of James Osborne

A CLOSER LOOK—The section of land owned by William F. Somers, left, is taken from an 1898 Los Angeles County map. At right is an aerial view of the same parcel of land, on which sits Alondra Park and El Camino College.

WILLIAM F. SOMERS: The Man Who Owned Property Which Was to Become Alondra Park, El Camino College

Another of Gardena Valley's earliest settlers was a fellow who, many years ago, owned a large section of land in what was once considered a portion of the valley, and that today comprises the boundaries of both Alondra Park and El Camino College. His name was William Francis Somers.

Somers was born in 1827 in Caledonia County, Vt. By the time he reached age 13, his parents decided to move to Clay County, Ind. where his father started a farm.

In 1850, Somers decided to make the long journey to California. He first traveled down the Mississippi River to New Orleans where he boarded a small schooner. Next, he sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, and after crossing the Isthmus, sailed north to San Francisco. Somers arrived in California on Sept. 18, 1850—just nine days after it had been admitted into the Union.

Soon after his arrival, Somers took up gold mining, first on the Tuolumne River and later on Woods Creek near Sonora. In 1852, Somers became one of the first persons, other than Native Americans, to visit the Yosemite Valley—a full 16 years before naturalist John Muir first visited the valley.

Somers later conducted mining operations at Fort Miller, located on the San Joaquin River. Next, while at Antioch in Contra Costa County, Somers entered into the cattle business. Sometime after that, he developed the Mt. Diablo coal mine, but three years later sold his interest in the mine and traveled to Oregon and Idaho to pursue additional mining ventures for another two years.

Marking his return

Somers eventually decided to return to Southern California and purchased 900 acres of land in the

San Fernando Valley to conduct wheat farming. He later sold this land and then decided to purchase acreage in a part of Los Angeles County that would one day be known as the Gardena Valley.

Los Angeles County records show that Somers acquired his land on Feb. 21, 1868 for \$225. He later bought more property on July 10, 1872 and again on Aug. 16, 1872. The section Somers once owned had boundaries that today would be composed of Crenshaw Boulevard on the east, Prairie Avenue on the west, Manhattan Beach Boulevard on the north and Redondo Beach Boulevard on the south. In other words, both Alondra Park and El Camino College combined.

At first, Somers rented out the

\$2,000 going to the family and the acreage itself being condemned by the county of Los Angeles in 1926 for the establishment of Alondra Park.

Today, there are relatives of William Somers still living in the South Bay area. Mrs. Robin Mitchell of Torrance is the great-granddaughter of Somers' sister, Julia. Mitchell's mother, Juliana, told her stories about the farming days on the Somers land and her tales included pumpkins being raised on the farm many decades ago.

According to Mrs. Mitchell, "My mother said there were very large pumpkins and also small pumpkins grown on the farm. She and her younger brother, J. R. would use a big pumpkin as a table and some small pumpkins as seats and then hold tea parties.

The farm also produced vast quantities of lima beans and after visiting, her family would take home large sacks filled with lima beans. During lean times the family had a lot of lima bean soup for dinner."

Regarding her great, great-uncle, she said, "After William finally settled down on the farm, he wrote to his sister, Julia and described the Gardena Valley area. He wrote that it was a wonderful place to live and that the weather was perfect and that the land was the best ever."

It could certainly be argued that the good weather in the Gardena Valley area is still one of the things that attract newcomers to the Gardena area to this day.

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.

Gardena Valley Yesterday & Today

future Alondra Park acreage and returned to mining operations. He also purchased an additional 1,600 acres of land in San Bernardino County where the present city of Redlands is located. Soon after, he bought additional pasture land and started a dairy there. Unfortunately, a drought forced him to sell the pasture and close the dairy.

In 1904, Somers returned to the Gardena Valley property where he started another small dairy. He continued to live on the property until his death on Nov. 11, 1916 and burial at Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles.

No will, no heirs

Somers did not have a will at the time of his death and left an estate valued at \$100,000.

He also did not leave any children and so the estate was later petitioned by descendants of his older sister, Julia Somers Townsend. The end result amounted to



Courtesy of James Osborne

AT REST—The headstone of William F. Somers' burial site at Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles.

JCI

2:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.
3 p.m. - 4 p.m.
6:30 p.m. - 10 p.m.

FRIDAY

9 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.
9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
10 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
1 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.
1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
7 p.m. - 10 p.m.
7:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY

9 a.m. - 12:25 p.m.

10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

1:30 p.m. - 6 p.m.
1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

SUNDAY

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

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Intermediate Line Dance with Jean
Advanced Ukulele with Chika
Gardena Judo Club

Card Games
Crafts Class with Elsie
Restorative Yoga - Gardena
Adult School
Japanese Lunch Box Bento
Ballroom Dancing
Tai Chi for Seniors
Gardena JCI Kendo Dojo
South Bay Shorinji Kempo

GVJCI Japanese Language
School - children
GVJC Japanese Language
School - adults
Sanmi Shamisen Class -
Lillian Nakano
Saga Art Center for children
Taiko Class - Tom Kurai

Meito Calligraphy (once a month)
Meito Calligraphy (once a month)