



Under the Gables

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Alta Bates in Inverness

A History by Roger Emanuels



Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History

Inverness Way at Park Avenue in the Inverness Library Phone 415-669-1099

Alta Bates in Inverness

© by Roger Emanuels

An early summer visitor to Inverness was Miss Alta Miner Bates, founder of the hospital of the same name in Berkeley. She was a woman with vision, whose mission was to provide comfort and care. She trained nurses, raised funds, was an outstanding anesthetist, and generally led the hospital from its beginning in 1905 until her retirement in 1951. She also raised two adopted children as a single mother.

Born in Michigan in 1880, she served as postmistress in her home town before moving west in the early years of the new century. She arrived with her older brother and parents, settling first in the northern California town of Eureka. At the age of 23 she became the first nurse to graduate from the Eureka Sequoia Hospital.

A year later, in the spring of 1904, they packed the household furnishings in boxes, trunks and hampers, and had a drayman take them by horse and wagon to the dock where the boat for San Francisco would tie up. They had booked passage on a coastal steamer that would carry them from Eureka to San Francisco. The family moved into a lower flat on Walnut Street near Vine in Berkeley. Her father was a contractor, so the young city would provide plenty of opportunity for his services.

Berkeley in 1904 had just over 13,000 residents. It was an inspired and creative community. The University of California, established in 1868, had a Medical Department, College of Pharmacy,

College of Law, and Dental College. Philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst financed anthropological research expeditions and established a Department of Anthropology.

The Bancroft Library was established in 1905 at the University. That same year the city opened the new library. The Carnegie Foundation contributed the funds for the building and Rosa M. Shattuck donated the land, reported as "a pretty place full of trees, flowers and vines." Architect Julia Morgan was active designing homes for prominent residents and

had just consulted on the design of the Greek Theater.

Alta Bates immediately put her new nursing degree to use, and she admitted those needing care into her parents' home on Walnut Street.

A neighbor of the Bates family was Dr. Frank Kelsey, who had a maternity practice in the area. He convinced the young woman to open a care facility. With her father's advice and \$114 of her own money she rented a fourteen-room house at 2314 Dwight Way, and on April 1, 1905, opened



A portrait of Miss Alta Bates late in life.
Courtesy of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center

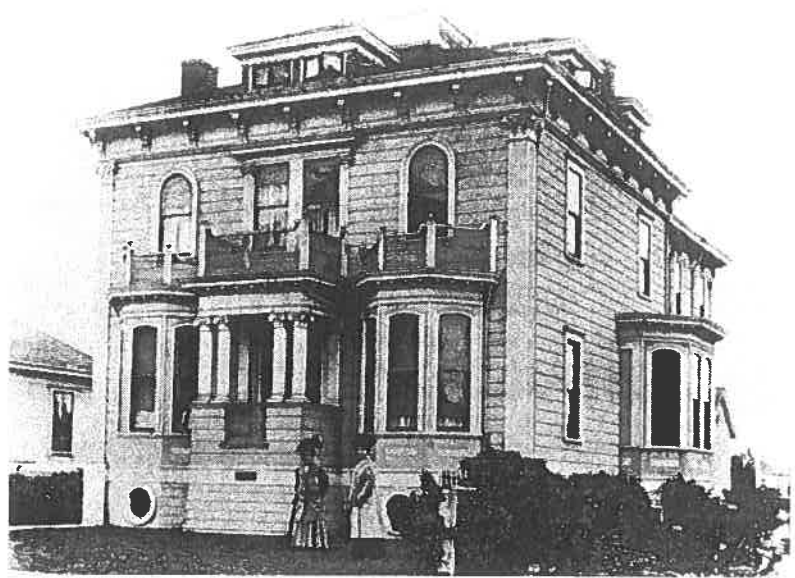
a ten-bed hospital for women and children. It was called Alta Bates Sanatorium.

One year later, on April 18, 1906, a major earthquake shook northern California. The new facility soon overflowed with victims, just at the time when the first class of six nurses graduated from their studies with Miss Bates.

While most of downtown Berkeley was still open fields, there were a few frame buildings along Center Street east of Shattuck Avenue which had become stores and a few offices. These were torn down in 1906 to be replaced gradually by brick buildings. This block would become the hub of commercial life in Berkeley.

It soon became apparent that a general hospital was needed. Her father appealed to Noah Webster to provide the site, who accepted \$200 in cash and a mortgage for \$1,800. The Bank of Commerce in Oakland helped finance a three-story frame and stucco building for \$8,000 at 2460 Webster Street. It opened in 1908 and contained a major and a minor operating room, a delivery room, and nurses' quarters. Miss Bates and her brother took care of all the demands of the institution. He alone made whatever repairs to the electrical and plumbing systems were needed in the building.

Miss Bates went into debt at once. Needing linens, she appealed for credit to Lester Hink of the J.F. Hink and Son dry goods store, at that time located on the east side of Telegraph Avenue at about Channing Way. Hink, a major Berkeley businessman and philanthropist, was quoted as saying he was "only too glad to extend credit to such a person." Hink later became a hospital trustee. From then until the government curtailed all extension of retail credit in 1942, Miss Bates was in his debt.



With \$114 of her own money, Miss Bates rented a fourteen-room house at 2314 Dwight Way, and on April 1, 1905, opened Alta Bates Sanatorium. Courtesy of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center



A portrait of Miss Alta Bates at her desk. Courtesy of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center

In 1912, an additional 22 beds were added to the hospital, and later another addition was built that accommodated 40 more beds. Miss Bates trained the nurses, and by 1914 the nursing school had 22 students. "She was a soft-spoken woman with [an] uncommon compassion for her patients."

As if her hospital duties were not enough, she soon adopted two children, Peggy and Rogers, whom she raised alone. There is no record of



Alta Bates and a group of her dedicated nurses. Courtesy of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center



Highland Lodge in Inverness, shown around the time Alta Bates stayed there. Courtesy of Carol Harlan.

their origin or whether they were related to each other.

Frank Simpson was one of many of the early doctors who supported Miss Bates and her efforts. A graduate of the University of California, he had married Anne Mason in 1901. Miss Mason was the daughter of Berkeley real estate broker Joseph Mason and Barbara McPherson Mason, this author's great grandparents, who

had immigrated from London in 1869 and 1872.

Mrs. Mason was a Scottish woman who built a summer home in Inverness in 1898, on the corner of Laurel View and Mesa Way. She enjoyed spending summers there with her three children, while husband Joe preferred to continue working in Berkeley. She later welcomed the summer visits of her grandchildren, all of whom were born at the Alta Bates Hospital.

Alta Bates began to join the Simpson and Mason families in summer visits to Inverness. Family photos from about 1915-16 show Miss Bates and her children at July Fourth races and at a picnic on Shell Beach.

Miss Bates and her children might have been house guests of her Berkeley friends, or they might have lodged at one of the three establishments in Inverness that took overnight guests, such as the Inverness Hotel with its 23 rooms, recently built by the Reeves brothers. Mary Burris ran the Highland Lodge, and Loleta Winchester had a boarding house on Edgemont. These last two lodging houses each had a stoop, a wooden platform that enabled women passengers to gracefully exit a horse-drawn wagon. The flat-bed wagons had three or four wooden benches, which resembled church pews, for passengers to sit on. These were easily removed so the wagons could be used to haul loads.

One of Barbara Mason's grandchildren, George Emanuels, remembers the skiff that Miss Bates bought for her son, Rogers, in 1916 or 1917. They probably stored the skiff at Brock Schreiber's boat house during the winter. George recalls, "We enjoyed going to Shell

Beach on picnics together. We would all go in Schreiber's launch *Kemah*. Of Miss Bates's two children, Peggy was a little older and didn't play with us. Her brother, Rogers, was my age and we did boy things together. One time Rogers had a rowboat and I searched for something I could paddle like a raft. We were going to fight a naval battle. I couldn't find any logs or pieces of lumber big enough to build a raft, which I suppose was a good thing.

"During the summer at Inverness there wasn't a whole lot to do. There was one thing we did though. I think it was the National Biscuit Company that offered to send us prizes if we sent them a quantity of the paper ends of any of their cookie or cracker boxes. Each end had a swastika printed on it. We would comb the edges of the highway toward Inverness Park. We could always find a few empty boxes along the road, but I don't think we ever sent them any."

George continues, "The first thing you noticed about Miss Bates was her complexion. Her skin had an olive tint, and her dark eyes and quiet demeanor gave her a look of confidence. She stood about five feet, six or seven inches tall. At about age 35 she was slender. When outdoors she always wore a soft hat with a two-inch ribbon on it. But the crown was very distinctive. The only time I recall that she raised her voice was when she commanded her son and me to stop doing something that annoyed the adults. Otherwise she was a quiet lady, thoughtful and considerate of others. Alta Bates was our friend."

Alta Bates eventually purchased three adjacent lots and built a home at 50 Dundee Road in Inverness. The lots were far from ideally located, steep and far below Dundee. Much better lots

were as yet unsold. The three lots were purchased in different years: July 1917, May 1918 and July 1920. But they were all recorded with the county on February 28, 1923. The seller was Bertha Shafter Hamilton. Documents suggest that the price paid was \$500 per lot.

The high quality of the home's construction suggests that Miss Bates's father might have



Bates family and friends on Shell Beach. Back row left to right: Barbara Mason, Mary Mason, Janet Mason Emanuels, Quong, the Simpson family cook, George F. Emanuels, Jr. Seated: Rogers Bates, Alta Bates holding Dolly Simpson, Barbara Simpson; Mason and Barbara Emanuels in front; three of the four other young women are Peggy Bates, Betty Orr-Mason, and Bernice Higgins, a schoolmate of Barbara Simpson. Photos from the George Emanuels photo collection.

been the builder. Current owner, John Fall, reports that "the house is in Berkeley style, cedar shingle exterior finish. The downstairs interior is douglas fir, flat-grain board and bat, with no finish at all. It has aged to a warm mahogany color. There is a living room and dining room with an interior fireplace between these rooms. When the chimney is warm there is comfortable radiant heat throughout the house. The kitchen had a wood-burning stove and an adjacent cook's room with a shower.

"The upstairs partitions are single-wall unfinished douglas fir 'railroad siding'. There was one bathroom, a screened sleeping porch (so popular at the time) and three bedrooms.

"Hot water was provided from a tank in a closet

under the stairs next to the fireplace, which was fitted with water pipe coils in the fire box. Electricity was provided by one thirty-amp circuit. There were four utility outlets in the living room but nowhere else. The bedrooms and sleeping porch had only a light dangling from the ceiling."

Long time Inverness resident Megan Mery



Alta Bates' house at 50 Dundee Road, Inverness, now the home of John and Margaret Fall. Photo by Roger Emanuels.

recalled in a 1990 oral-history interview that "Peggy Bates's birthday party was a big summer event here, and it was held at the Yacht Club. If you weren't invited to Peggy's birthday party, you might as well go home. [Miss Bates] was a very generous woman, and [she] liked to include everybody in the community in anything that went on there." Peggy married Irwin Cassidy, a family friend. They had a daughter, Joanne.

George Emanuels was not able to participate in the social life of teenagers in Inverness during the 1920s. "In 1917 my father was made sales manager for a San Francisco firm in Japan, so my mother and we three children went too. I never saw Rogers again but I did see Peggy once. After returning to California I had read in the newspaper in 1931 or 1932 that she had given birth. Soon after, on my way home from work one day, I stopped off at the Alta Bates Hospital to congratulate Peggy. I made my way

to her room. A few minutes later Miss Bates also appeared and we had a wonderful reunion." Peggy must have remarried by 1947, as her name is reported then as Claussen.

Alta Bates retired in 1951 after 46 years of guiding the hospital. She lived at her home in Inverness with her daughter until she suffered a stroke two years later and required hospitalization. She was cared for in a nursing home located across the street from her hospital, in the care of nurses she had trained herself. She died in 1955 at the age of 76.

The house at 50 Dundee in Inverness was sold by Miss Bates's conservator to Robert S. Wheeler in 1953. John and Margaret Fall bought the house from Wheeler in August 1959.

An essay published on the Internet by the Alta Bates Hospital in January 2000 states, "She was always known as Miss Bates, the formal, dedicated nurse in the starched-stiff white uniform. Her painted likeness, complete with nurse's cap and

navy-blue cape, greets visitors in the hospital's main lobby today. Today, Alta Bates Hospital includes the Herrick Campus and has distinguished itself particularly in the area of women and infant services, cardiovascular services, burn treatment, cancer care, bone marrow transplantation, rehabilitation services and mental health." All this is due to an enthusiastic nurse from Michigan.

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About the author:

Roger Emanuels has spent many joyful times at Inverness and Tomales Bay since the 1940s. His great grandmother, Barbara Mason, built the first family home on the Inverness mesa in 1898. Most of his relatives were born at the Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley.

Roger is a cellist who currently performs with Symphony Silicon Valley and the Cabrillo Music Festival and as a recitalist. He performed with the San Jose Symphony for 22 years. He is a lecturer and radio producer, and maintains an active cello teaching studio.

HOME COOKED
FOOD:
BARBECUED RIBS
"MENDOZA BEANS"
GARLIC BREAD
SALAD
APPLE PIE



STEP INTO THE PAST FOR AN EVENING
OF FAMILY FUN:

Music performed by local groups
and a sing along led by Carrick McLaughlin

Slide show by Dewey Livingston

Prizes for costumes.
Get out your 1889 camp clothes!

