

Leland and Jane Stanford

The beginning of the Stanford story:

It was 1850 when Leland Stanford finished school and later passed the bar, he decided to set up practice on the frontier of Wisconsin. He asked his Albany neighbor, Jane, to marry him and so the new couple moved to a small settlement outside Milwaukee. The town failed to prosper and the final blow was a fire that destroyed his office and library.

Devastated, he didn't know what to do. Jane suggested, "Let's go to California!". They returned to Albany to make preparations and Jane's father declared that California was no place for a woman. Leland agreed, so set sail without her. He joined his brothers who had established several retail stores to outfit the gold miners. He opened a successful store in Michigan Bluff, above the Middle Fork of the American River and while there took shares in a gold mine to cover a bad debt. These shares eventually turned out to be worth half a million dollars. Three years later, Jane's father died, so Leland went back to bring his wife to California, where they lived until 1860. Leland never intended to stay in California, so that year the couple returned to New York. While in the East they attended President Lincoln's inaugural ball. (Leland had been one of the founders of the Republican party in California) After California, Albany seemed dull and Jane suffered from the gossip about her being abandoned by her husband, so she was also eager to return to California. His store on L and Front street was doing well and so he then ran for governor and won. On his inauguration day –the American and Sacramento Rivers were on a rampage and flooded the capitol with 5 to 10 feet of water. The Stanfords and guests arrived at the inaugural ball by boat.

Stanford was partly responsible for keeping California in the Union during the Civil War, and even though he had been a popular governor he decided not to run for a second term as he wanted to devote more of his time to the Central Pacific Railroad, of which he was president. About this time, at the age of 40, Jane gave birth to their only child, Leland Jr. From this time on the child's welfare was the determining factor in every decision his parents made.

As profits from the railroad amassed and as Huntington took over the management leaving Stanford in a secondary position he seemed to try to out do everyone else in other ventures. He first built a huge mansion on 8th & N streets in Sacramento. To raise Leland in a more urban atmosphere than Sacramento, in 1875 he encircled 2 acres on Nob Hill in San Francisco with a 30 foot wall and built an opulent mansion that looked down on San Francisco like a medieval castle. Because the ascent up to the home was steep for horse and carriage, he built the California Street Railway - a cable car. When Hopkins and Crocker also built homes nearby, he lost interest in San Francisco and bought 9,000 acres on the peninsula where he indulged in his new hobby, horse breeding, which was named the Palo Alto Farm, from the large lone tree growing on the property.

The farm became the center for horse breeding in the west, and the most celebrated crop in California became the 60 acres of carrots planted yearly for his stable residents. They put in orchards, vineyards, stables and a race track. It was here, by the way that famed photographer Muybridge took a series of pictures that showed that a running horse had all four legs off the ground. You might say that it was the first moving picture. Next, to give their active boy room for exercise and an area beneficial to his health, they bought 55,000 acres in the north Sacramento valley and planted 2,800,000 grape vines, built a winery, put in irrigation, built a mansion, and the town Vina was born. However,

his goal to rival the great wines of France died on the vine as the soil and climate didn't cooperate (If you're keeping track that is 4 homes built in one decade.)

Leland Jr. was being groomed to be a leader in finance and industry. In addition to his many studies at home, for two years the family toured Europe where they bought trinkets and paintings for their many homes.

They returned to San Francisco and then leased a home in New York where Leland was studying for his entrance exams to Harvard. Because of some health concerns for Leland Sr. they returned to Bavaria for the water-cure.

They continued traveling thru Italy where Jr. became ill. He was diagnosed with typhoid fever and three weeks later died, at the age of 15.

Coming home, Leland again entered politics, becoming a U.S. Senator from California. It is often said that the Stanfords were devastated by the death of their only son, but evidence shows that it generated an energy to create something that would be a tribute to their son. That venture became the establishment of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. The idea of starting a new university in a sparsely settled state just 40 miles from U.C.. that only had an enrollment of 300, was considered ludicrous. They were undaunted. Leland wrote an endowment act that put all of their 82,000 acres in deeds of trust for the new university. They traveled all over the U.S. visiting universities, and while in Indiana found the president they were looking for, Dr. David Jordan.

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