

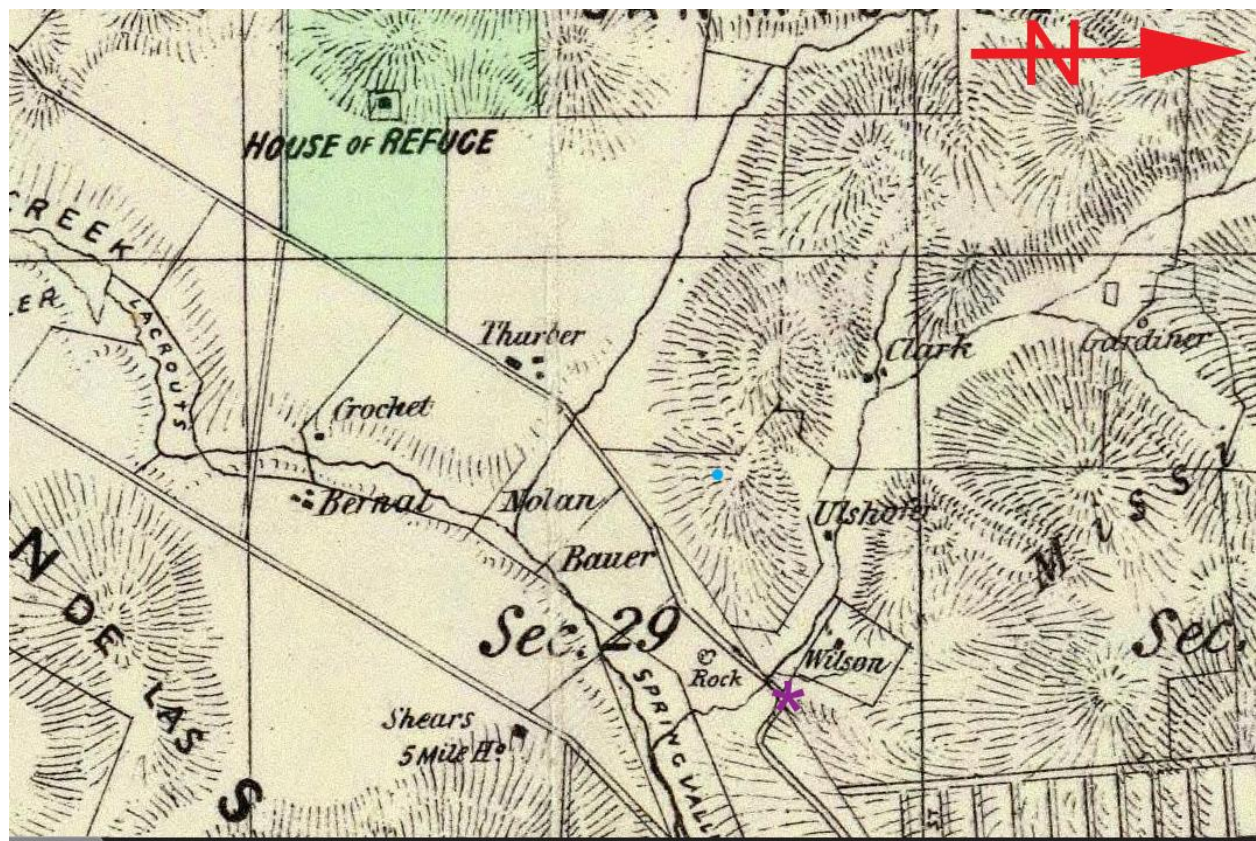
## The House at 211 Acadia Street

By Amy O'Hair, Glen Park Neighborhoods History Project  
[sunnysidehistory.org](http://sunnysidehistory.org) § [glenparkhistory.org](http://glenparkhistory.org)

The house at 211 Acadia Street was built in mid-1898. It reflects the straightforward style of many Victorian cottages built in Sunnyside during the first decade after streets and lots were laid out by the Sunnyside Land Company in 1891. House-building in Sunnyside had no organized development until it took off in the 1910s and 20s or so. As a result, there is a wide variety of architectural styles here, as in other neighborhoods with their origins in that period such as the Excelsior and Lakeview. Right: 211 Acadia Street, 2016. Photo: Amy O'Hair.



Before this, the land had been exclusively in private hands. It was owned by Leland Stanford, who had purchased this portion of the Rancho San Miguel from Adolph Sutro. The land offered ideal pasturing and had been leased to dairy farmers for grazing cows for many years. A map from 1861 shows the various dairy (or *milch*) ranches by their owners' names. [Read more about our local dairy history.](#)



Above: A portion of the 1861 Wackenreuder map for San Francisco, from DavidRumsey.com.



In the map above, the location where 211 Acadia will be is marked with a small turquoise dot, near the center. For reference, where Balboa Park and City College will be located is marked with green shading and the future corner of Chenery and Diamond with a purple asterisk. This map is oriented with north on the right side. [See full map here.](#)

## The Name of the Street

I have written elsewhere about [the origins of Sunnyside street names](#)<sup>1</sup>, but Acadia in particular has an interesting history. It is a name very much of its time in the nineteenth century.

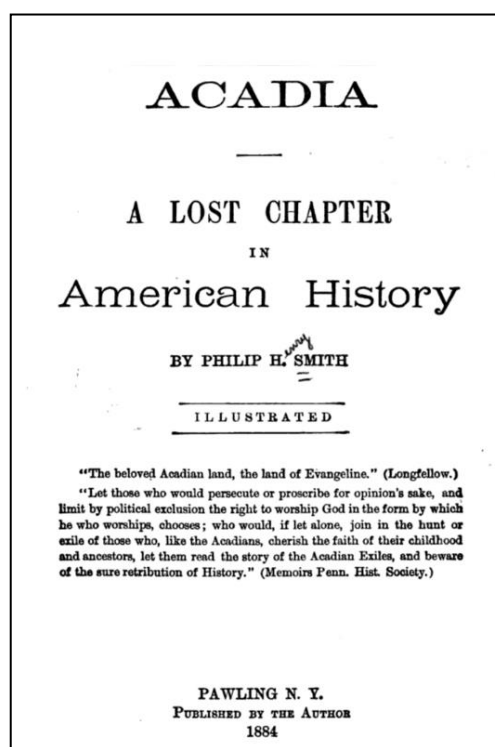
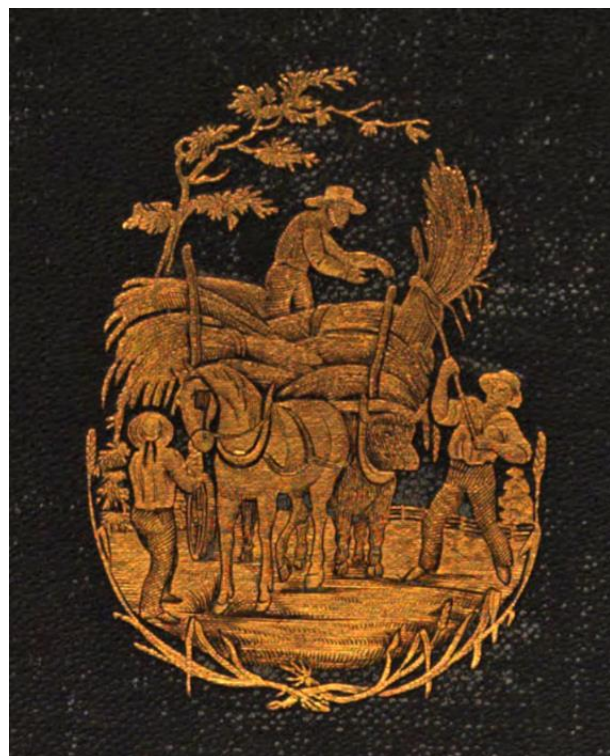
To start with, there is the political history: L'Acadie is the name of the area where French pioneers explored and then colonists settled in eastern Canada—areas that are now called New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. In 1755–1764 the British expelled the French settlers, called Acadians, an event known as the Great Expulsion. They were shipped off to various places in North America, including Louisiana, where their name transmogrified into “Cajuns.” [Read more on Wikipedia here.](#)



*Deportation Grand-Pré*, by George Craig (Université de Moncton) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

This forced exodus captured the imagination of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the 1840s, and he wrote a long poem that was well-known to readers in the nineteenth century, *Evangeline* (1847). [Read more about the poem here.](#) This rather sentimental work follows the trials of a young Acadienne named Evangeline, separated from her beloved during the upheaval. Historical and political accuracy are lacking in the poem, but “the poem had a powerful effect in defining both Acadian history and identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” ([Wikipedia](#)).

What followed later due to the popularity of the poem was a historical work by Philip Henry Smith in 1884, *Acadia: a Lost Chapter in American History*. Smith attempted to present a more accurate record of this little-documented episode in North American history. [Read it here.](#)



Cover and title page from Philip H Smith's book, 1884. Google Books.

Smith wrote: "It is hard to explain in light of the present century the extreme measures decided on by the Governor and Council ... convened at Halifax on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1755, no less a measure than the eviction of the whole of the French population of Acadia and their dispersion among aliens in a strange land." (Philip Henry Smith, *Acadia: a lost chapter in American History*, p.198-9).

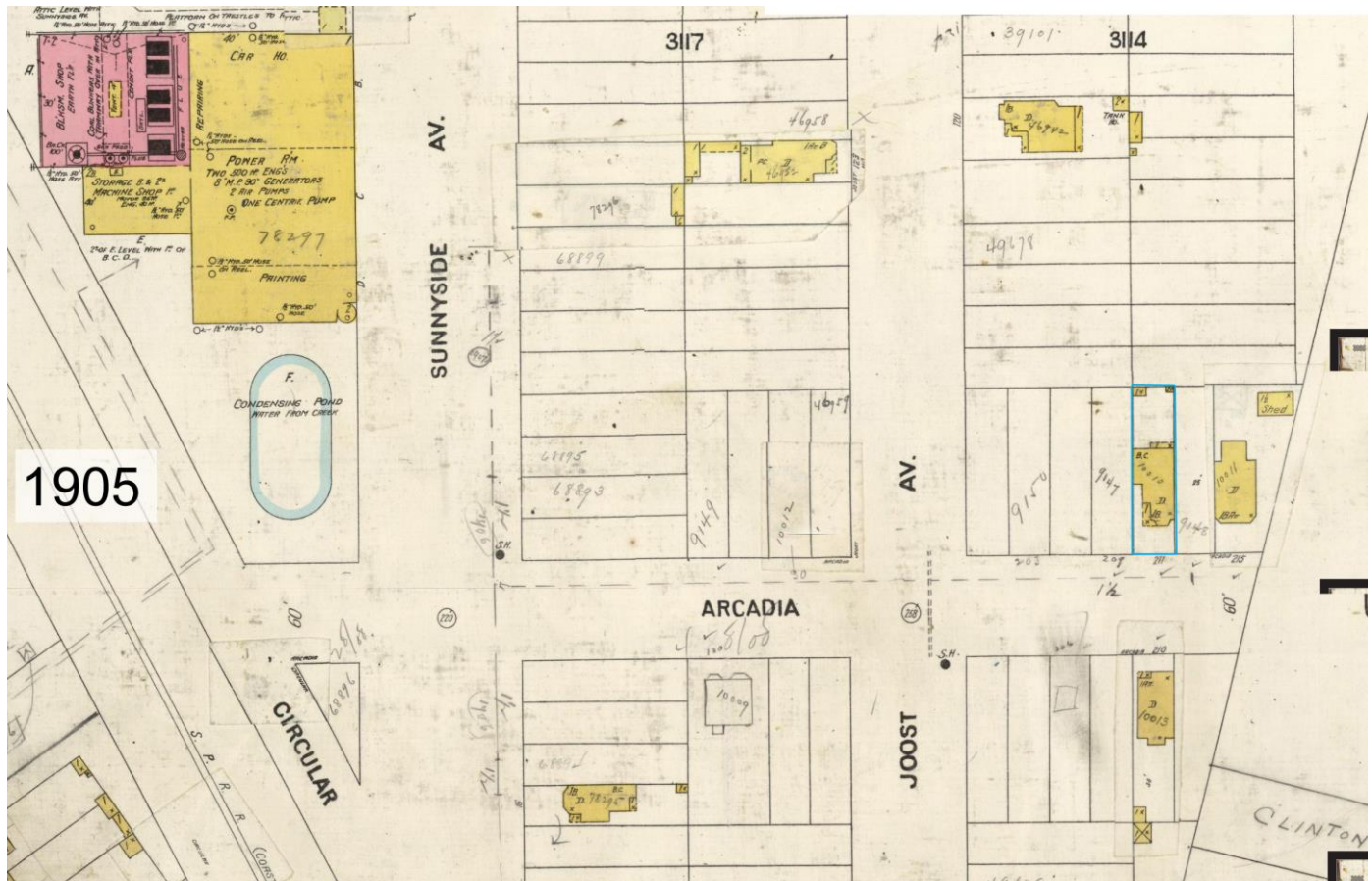
Even though this book was not a rigorously annotated work, Smith sought to redress the lack of information and allay the sentimental haze that surrounded the event, to better inform people about the nature of the atrocity.

I suggest that its connection to Sunnyside's beginnings is this: for any late-nineteenth-century history buff interested in the annals of colonized North America, this book is likely to have been on his or her bookshelf; my research suggests that **James P. McCarthy**, the major capitalist behind the development of Sunnyside, Mt Davidson, and Lakeview, as well as his son and Sunnyside investor **E. Avery McCarthy**, had just that sort of interest. They originally came from upstate New York, not far from the area in question. [Read more about the McCarthys here.](#) But in the end, this is just my speculation, based on studying the men who were the original investors and creators of the homestead map, the men who named the streets.





To power the cars, there was a large electrical powerhouse located at the center-point of the line—on the south side of Monterey Blvd (then Sunnyside Ave) between Acadia and Baden. The map below shows its position.



Above: a portion of the 1905 Sanborn Insurance map. 211 Acadia Street marked with turquoise box, right side, one of only three houses on that street. On the left is the Sunnyside Powerhouse. Note how Acadia Street extended at this point through that flatiron block. This section was later closed and houses built on it.

The powerhouse operated from 1892-1902, and then sat empty for decades after, until houses were built there in the 1940s.

Right: Photo of Sunnyside Powerhouse, from Street Railway Journal, July 1893.





The powerhouse was coal-fired, burning 25 tons of coal a day. To state the obvious, it was very much a part of everyone's life in Sunnyside those first years. Located just a block or so away, with little between, the house at 211 Acadia was sure of have had a great view of its witch's-hat tower and its one-hundred-foot smoke stack. There was also a set of fountains in front that were part of the cooling system for the generators. [Read more here.](#)

There are a few other clues to life in the neighborhood in those early years. Here is a photo of the corner of Circular Ave and Monterey Blvd, 1910s. You can just see one of those newfangled cars, on the right. The building in the center is a flop-house-type hotel that stood there for many years.



The photo below was taken on Monterey Blvd, looking east toward Baden, 1914. They were relaying the tracks for the streetcar to go down Monterey Blvd. Center right in photo: the witch's-hat tower of the powerhouse. Ten years after the map on previous page was made, it is still quite barren in Sunnyside.



Above: courtesy Western Neighborhoods Project, <http://outsidelands.org>.

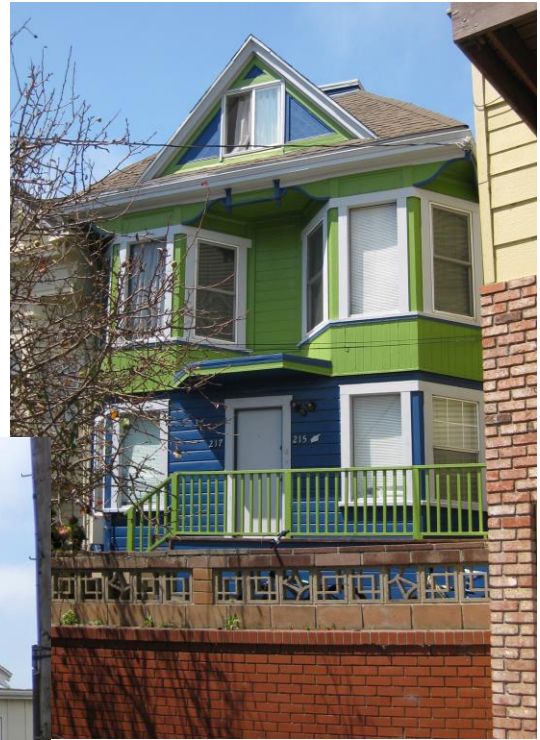
Right: courtesy SFMTA, <http://sfmta.com/photos>.

## The Builder

My research indicates that a carpenter and contractor named **William A. Hicks (1854–1923)** built the first three houses on the 200 block of Acadia Street in 1898, including 211. The other two were 210 (now 224) and 215 (now 215-217). The Sanborn map from 1905 ([see page 5](#)), clearly shows only three houses on that block until that year. That would soon change, as people began to move out to Sunnyside after the 1906 Quake and Fire.

*Right: 215-217 Acadia Street, 2016. Photo: Amy O'Hair.*

Hicks came from Canada in 1872. He had begun building in Sunnyside in 1896, when he constructed the cottages at 410 and 412 Foerster Street. 412 has something like its original carpentry details, while 410 has suffered alterations over the years including a boxy addition on the front. The Hicks' lived at 410 Foerster for two years or so after it was completed.



*Left: 412 and 410 Foerster Street, 2016. Photo: Amy O'Hair.*

Hicks went on in the following year to build 217 (now 227) Joost Avenue, pictured on the right.  
*Photo: Amy O'Hair.*

After finishing the three Acadia Street houses in 1898, Hicks and his wife **Elizabeth Hicks (1856–1935)** lived at 215 until 1902.

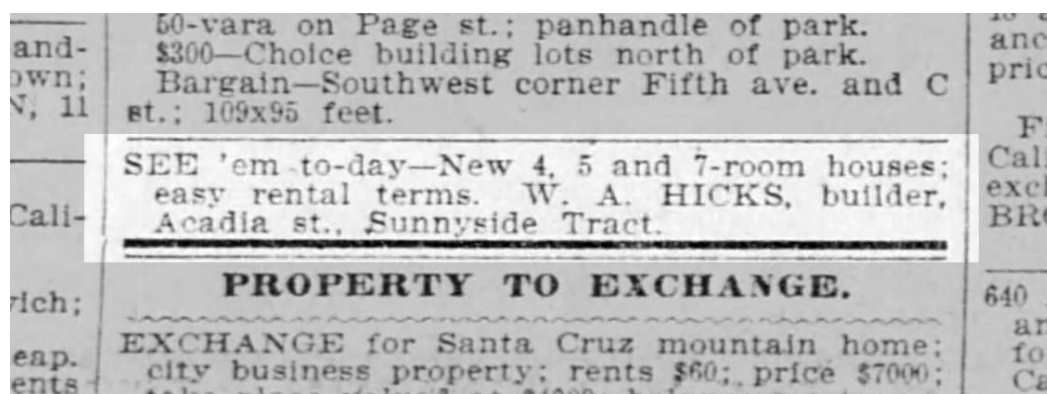
Hicks advertised three houses for sale in June 1898, which I believe to have been the three on Acadia that he built (though this is open to





interpretation). From this ad and another classified ad later for 210 Acadia (now 224), I surmise that, in their original forms, 211 had four rooms, 215 seven rooms, and 210 five rooms (as before, this could be wrong).

*Right: Classified ad, SF Call, 19 June 1898. Newspapers.com.*



The Hicks' were involved locally in civic matters. W.A.

Hicks represented Sunnyside at meetings of the Mission Federation of Improvement Clubs, an important activist group at the time for coaxing the City to build much needed infrastructure in the Mission area, which was then considered to include Sunnyside.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth helped organize a fundraiser to benefit the not-yet-completed Sunnyside community hall at 10 Flood Ave in 1900.<sup>3</sup>

Hicks also worked as contractor in other parts of town on fancier houses he did not design, such as this one at 21st Street and Noe.

*Right: the house at 3800-21<sup>st</sup> Street at Noe Street, built in 1899. Photo: Google Streetview.*



Unfortunately—due perhaps to poor decisions or to a general economic downturn—W.A. Hicks filed for bankruptcy in November 1901, selling his house at 215 Acadia St soon after. His liabilities amounted to \$4000 (\$115K now).

Where do people go to remake themselves? At least by 1904, he and Elizabeth moved to Los Angeles, where he soon started up as a builder again, constructing many houses there. He died in Los Angeles in 1923 at age 69.

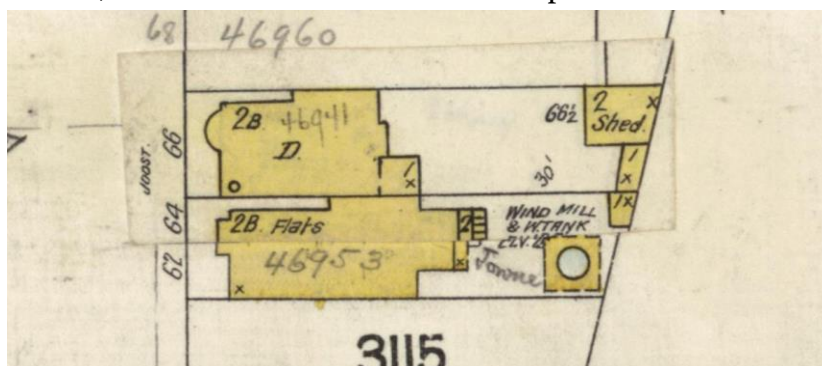
## The First Family

**George J. Lillie (1868–1915)** with his wife **Mary Kirby Lillie (1873–1951)** bought the house at 211 Acadia from Hicks when it was first built, about July 1898. They had been married in 1895, and had previously lived nearby at 142 Old San Jose Road, which was then just across the Southern Pacific railroad tracks (now the freeway I-280) from Circular and Flood Avenues (now the 1700 block of San Jose Ave).



The source of water when the house was first built may have been a neighbor's well, as it was for other Sunnyside houses at this time. Water was spotty in supply for many years, and wells continued to be used sometimes even after piped water service was laid in. Here is a well around the corner at 62 Joost Ave, marked on the 1905 Sanborn map.

Right: 62 Joost Ave, with its well— and 15-foot-tall windmill to pump the water up—marked on the 1905 Sanborn map. This is just down the hill from 211 Acadia St.



But in February 1899 the water records for the City show that the Lillies were connected to the municipal water supply, as was their neighbor and builder W.A. Hicks, shown just above Lillies' entry.

Acadia Street								
DATE.	NAME.	WATER NO.	STREET NO.	LOCATION.	CORPORATION STOP.		STOP COCK.	
					No.	Size.	No.	Size.
Oct 95	J. J. Sanburg	41229		Op 100 at Joost Station to First St				
Jan 99	Small Pipe and Rain	7	Aug 6	Crosses 4' Outlet 2. P. H. Outlet				2' P.B.
Jan 99	W. A. Hicks	10113	10011	19 B. White Sheds St from Joost Ave				
Feb 99	Geo Liley	10111	10010	Retap 4/1/24	3/4	1/2	1/4	1/4
Apr 1900	F. Creighton	47345	128	Retap 4/1/24	2/4	1/2	1/4	1/4
Apr 2/01	A. E. Rudell	10110	210	Retap 4/1/24	3/4	1/2	1/4	1/4
Mar 16/06	Geo. J. Bostel	10107	130	Ex 50' S. Joost Ave	3/4	1/2	1/4	1/4
July 25/06	James H. Long	10109	209	near Joost Ave	3/4	1/2	1/4	1/4

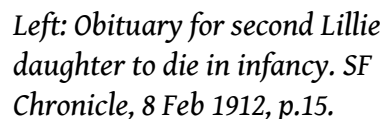
For a link to these archived water tap records, see Links at the end of this document.

Of note on this record is the date of the water supply re-tap (written in darker ink): April 1924. This would have been occasioned by the grading and paving of this block of Acadia Street. Before that point, the street was likely just unpaved dirt, as were most streets in Sunnyside.

It was this later grading that left the west side of the street lower than it had been, requiring the owners of houses on that side, including 211, to build extra stairs to reach their front doors. Houses on the east side were left sunken in comparison to the street. This phenomenon happened all over Sunnyside, and elsewhere; many houses here were built when the planned street was a mere narrow dirt track. Bringing such streets up to City

## A Young Family in their New Home

George and Mary had their first child, **George J. Lillie Jr (1899–1952)** in early 1899. They also had two daughters, in 1907 and 1912, but both died in infancy, perhaps due to the presence in the family of sexually transmitted disease, as I'll shortly discuss.



Below is the entry for the Lillies on the 1900 US Census (Ancestry.com). George's occupation is "Day Laborer." The Hicks' are entered just below the Lillies. *(From Ancestry.com.)*

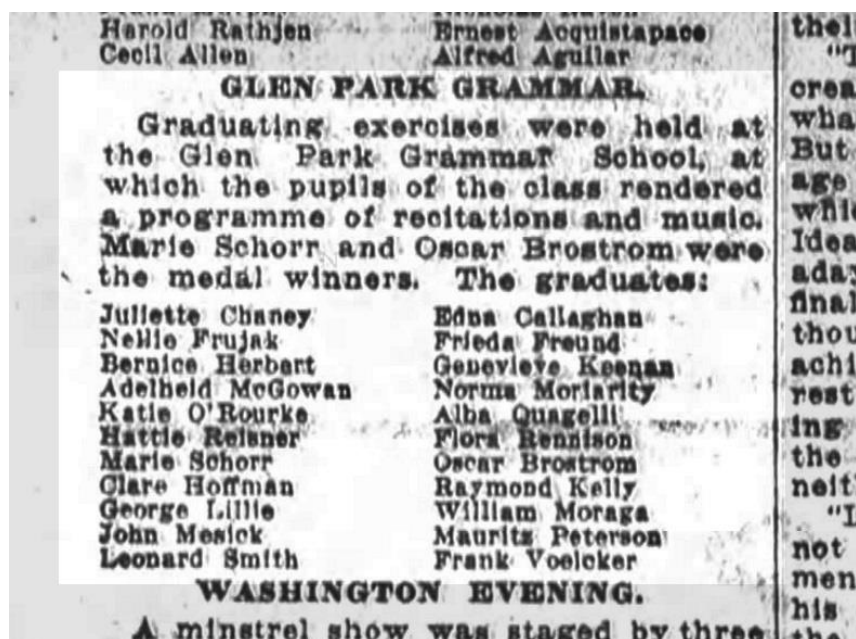
10



George Jr attended Glen Park School, where in seventh grade he was vice-president of his class, which was announced in the “Junior Call”.<sup>4</sup>

Right: SF Call, “Junior Call,” 19 Oct 1912, p.3. Newspapers.com.

He graduated in December 1913, which marked his last year in school. He was on the threshold taking on some of his father’s position in the family—George Senior was soon to die.



Left: Graduating Exercises for Glen Park School announced in SF Chronicle, 21 Dec 1912, p.53. Newspapers.com.

## 1915: a Year of Changes for the Lillies

The family had two important things happen in the year 1915. Tragically, the father George Senior died in December in Agnews State Hospital in Santa Clara, California’s first modern psychiatric hospital ([read more about this historic institution here](#)). The cause of death was ‘paresis,’ which is a term of the time customarily indicating the dementia and paralysis that accompanies untreated tertiary-stage syphilis. [More on this below](#). He most likely entered the hospital a year or so before his actual death, and although it was not uncommon for newspapers of the time to note such intimate happenings in people’s lives, this particular

event in the Lillie family history was not recorded in the SF papers. [Here is his funeral home record](#) (found on FamilySearch.com).

Earlier in the year, Mary Lillie had initiated a construction project, contracting with her brother James A. Kirby, a carpenter, to build a store and residence at 75 Joost Ave (now 85) just down the street from their house. The cost was \$1200. *Right: Building and Engineering News, 7 April 1915.*



*Above: Shop-front building, 85 Joost Ave (originally 75), 2016. Photo: Amy O'Hair.*

Wednesday, April 7, 1915.		BUILDING AND
Owner.....Prudential Life Insurance Co., Pacific Bldg., S. F.		CEMENT FLA
Architect...None.		(995) SW S
Contractor...Brumfield Elec. Sign Co., 18 7th, San Francisco.		Cement floo
	COST, \$1990	Owner.....M
FRAME STORE AND DWELLING		Architect...N
(986) S JOOST 100 E Acadia. One-story and basement frame store and dwelling.		Day's work.
Owner.....Mrs. G. Lillie, 211 Acadia, San Francisco.		FRAME RESI
Architect...None.		(996) W TW
Contractor...J. A. Kirby, 20 Nordin, San Francisco.		California.
	COST, \$1200	frame resid
		Owner.....B
ALTERATIONS		P
(987) NOS. 1315-19 PACIFIC. Alter store.		Architect...N
Owner.....Rathjen & Kupper, Prem.		Day's work.
Architect...None.		FRAME RESI
		(997) W TW
		S California
		ment frame
		Owner.....B
		P

Mary and her son George Junior lived there, presumably conducting a small retail business, though such local shops often don't leave much trace behind them, often not even being listed in the Directory. They lived and worked there from 1916 to 1919, while renting out their house at 211 Acadia Street. It seemed they were set to recover well from the impending loss of their breadwinner.

## The Scourge of an Era

In the first decades of the twentieth century, syphilis impacted many families in San Francisco, as elsewhere. It was a terrible disease with no real cure, affecting mental and physical health, lifespan, and fertility for many members of an infected person's family. ([Read a short history of treatments.](#))

George Lillie Sr suffered the fate of many of those infected: a slow inexorable decline into insanity and paralysis. In 1913-14, around the time when he is likely to have entered the Agnew State Hospital, this facility was an important center for testing a new treatment involving intraspinal injections of an arsenic compound with the tradename Salvarsan. It was considered an improvement on the centuries of treatment with toxic mercury which had come before.

One scientific paper published that year by doctors there details the histories and treatments of many similar men and women, who served as test patients for the new



protocol.<sup>5</sup> Apparently the test results showed that the substance, which is also toxic heavy metal, did reduce the serum levels of the bacterium responsible for the disease—yet it did little to relieve the symptoms of disorientation and psychotic ideation that so many suffered with.

It was often the case that such symptoms forced families to commit an affected loved one to institutions like Agnew, as that family member became too erratic, irrational, or weakened to be managed at home. Such a committal usually was a death sentence, as most died within a year or two of being admitted. It was not until the 1940s that a true cure, penicillin, would be regularly used as treatment.

### **Another Generation of Lillies**

In 1917 George Lillie Jr was drafted into the Navy and served in WWI.<sup>6</sup> In the Navy, he surely travelled—which may explain how he met the woman he would marry in 1920, **Hazel Amanda Tilford (1902–1947)** of Brooklyn NY. Although he had returned home from his period of military service to live with his mother before that, he went out to New York in August of 1920 to marry Hazel.<sup>7</sup>

They returned to SF, living with his mother Mary, all of them now back in the house at 211 Acadia. The young couple had two children, a daughter, **Jean Marion Lillie (1922–1995)** and a son **Donald George Lillie (1928–1996)**. The Lillies seem to have sold the shop on Joost Ave during this time. Later, in 1934, the shop's address is listed as a meeting place for communist sympathizers!<sup>8</sup>

George Lillie Jr worked in elevator construction, and later as a janitor at his 8th-grade alma mater, Glen Park School. They moved from 211 Acadia St to the Avenues in 1937, marking almost 40 years that the Lillies owned 211 Acadia St. George Jr was also active in the union for janitorial workers, being elected in 1951 as treasurer; he died the following year at age 53<sup>9</sup>. His wife Hazel had died in 1947 at age 45; his mother Mary passed in 1951 at age 78.

### **The Second Family**

In 1936–37, the house at 211 Acadia was sold by the Lillie family, in Mary's name, passing through two different people, before finally being sold in mid-1937 to the second family who would actually live there, Jack and Norma Thompson.

**Jack Fitzsimmons Thompson (1894–1979)** and **Norma Gertrude McNulty (1899–1970)** were married in Alameda in 1926, even though both lived and worked then in San Francisco—she as a biller for a postal telegraph company and he as an electrician.

Jack came from Pennsylvania, and Norma had grown up in the Russian Hill neighborhood. When the family moved into 211, their only child, **Donald Jack Thompson (1930–2008)**, was nine—coincidentally having the same first name and almost the same age as the George Lillie Jr's son, Donald Lillie. The 1940 US Census for the Thompson family states that Jack was a floor refinisher, and had a 7th grade education; Norma had two years of high school. They

valued the house at \$3500 (\$60K now). They had unspecified additional income from a source besides Jack's work (this usually meant property or investments).

213	41	0	3000	70	M <sup>c</sup> Conneck, Edith Stiffon, Ray Constance Roy, C. Constance J.	Head Wife John Daughter	M M F M	21 20 20 21	8 30 28 3	74 74 74 74	8 14 14 0	1	Ohio California California California	California Some place Some place	44 44 44 44	7 4 4 4	74 74 74 74	0 — — H	48		monteview	Corned meat	PN	47	8	1	0	74
211	42	0	2500	70	Thompson, Jack Norma Donald Son	Head Wife Son	M F M	20 20 20	45 39 9	74 74 74	7 14 3	1	California California California	Some place Some place Some place	44 44 44	7 4 7	74 74 74	— — —	38	Flora Refinisher	Hardwood Floor	OF	34	0	74	0	74	
204	45	0	3500	70	Sanacini, Daniel Belon Margaret	Head Wife Daughter	M F F	20 20 21	35 31 12	74 74 74	8 8 5	1	Italy California California	Some place Some place Some place	44 44 44	7 4 7	74 74 74	— — —	35 22	presser	Washing Washing	PN	44 44	0 6	74 74	0 32	74 74	

Above: portion of the 1940 US Census for 211 Acadia Street showing Thompsons' entry. Ancestry.com.

The Thompsons did not get themselves into the newspapers, and so I haven't much detail to offer about their lives, except Jack's draft card from 1942, below. As a 48-year-old father he was not likely to be actually drafted. Here we can also see that he was self-employed and working out of their home, perhaps still as a floor refinisher as per 1940 census.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)			
SERIAL NUMBER	1. NAME (Print)		ORDER NUMBER
U 211 42 0 2500 70	Jack Thompson		
	(First)	(Middle) (Last)	
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)			
211 Acadia St SF Calif			
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]			
3. MAILING ADDRESS			
Same			
(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)			
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS	6. PLACE OF BIRTH	
Del 8493	48	Phila	
(Exchange) (Number)	DATE OF BIRTH	(Town or county)	
	Jan 28 1894		
	(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	(State or country)	
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS			
Norma Thompson (wife)			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS			
Self Employed			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS			
211 Acadia St SF Calif			
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 4-1-42)		16-21630-2	
(over)		Jack Thompson	
		(Registrant's signature)	

Above: WWII Draft Card for Jack Thompson. Ancestry.com.

In 1954 the Thompsons sold the house to **Lester and Yvonne Brandin**, the third owner-residents. I surmise from the record that Jack and Norma Thompson were divorced about then, as Norma and her son after that were Millbrae residents,<sup>10</sup> and Jack continued to live in the house for about three more years according to the SF Directory, perhaps paying rent to the new owners. Despite the sale date of 1954 found at the City Recorder's, the 1958 SF Directory was the first time the Brandins were listed as the residents in the house.



## The Third Family

**Lester and Yvonne Brandin** (sometimes misspelled 'Brandon') also have not left much in the public record.

In 1953, the year before purchasing the house at 211, Lester became owner of a service station on Mission Street, in the Crocker Amazon neighborhood<sup>11</sup>; perhaps this ensured the prosperity needed to buy a house. Their son, **Lester Brandin Jr (b.1943)**, married a girl from Bayview named Kathleen Henderson in 1964. Their younger son **Stephen Brandin (b.1948)** went to Riordan High School.

In 1973 the Brandins sold the house to Thomas Cline and Robert Thralls Hayn. Two years later, Cline sold his half to Hayn.

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## LINKS

- To read *SF Chronicle* archives cited in the Endnotes below, go here and sign in with SF Public Library card:  
<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/resources/search/nb?p=AMNEWS&t=pubname%3A142051F45F422A02%257CSFCB%21Multiple%2BPublications&b=pubname>
- To read *SF Call* archives: <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=SFC&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>
- Family Tree for the Thompsons, on Ancestry.com (free trial subscription available):  
<http://person.ancestry.com/tree/74980595/person/40307260538/facts>
- Family Tree for the Lillies (ditto):  
<http://person.ancestry.com/tree/1639651/person/1075499425/facts>
- Water tap record for 211 Acadia:  
<https://archive.org/stream/springvalleywate01unse#page/732/mode/2up>
- Philip Henry Smith, Acadia a lost chapter in American history, 1884.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=sd0BAAAAMAAJ&dq=Acadia&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=true>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See also <https://sunnysidehistory.org/street-names/>.

<sup>2</sup> See *SF Chronicle*, 3 May 1900, p12, and *SF Call*, 18 Feb 1900, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> See "To complete Sunnyside Hall," *SF Call*, 16 May 1900, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> To read the full article about the Glen Park School in the *Junior Call*: <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19121019&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>

<sup>5</sup> See "The Intraspinal Injection of Salvarsanized Serum in Paresis" by Cutting and Mack, in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1914, Vol. 62, No. 12, Page 903. Online:  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=HvZGAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

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<sup>6</sup> See information in a family tree on Ancestry.com:

<http://person.ancestry.com/tree/1639651/person/1075499425/facts> (subscription required; free trial available).

<sup>7</sup> See reference in Note 5 above.

<sup>8</sup> “Sinclair Group Denies Tie-up with Red Nests,” *SF Chronicle*, 20 July 1934, p.14.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VPD6-2LG> on FamilySearch.com, as no-fee genealogy website.

<sup>10</sup> As mentioned in an obituary for Norma’s mother, *SF Chronicle*, 18 Dec 1954, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> See *SF Chronicle*, 3 Sep 1953: gas station permit transferred to Lester C Brandon (sic), at the corner of Mission and Allison streets.