

LICK, ROSEMARY.
THE GENEROUS MISER : THE
STORY OF JAMES LICK OF
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THE GENEROUS MISER



THE STORY OF
JAMES LICK OF CALIFORNIA
BY ROSEMARY LICK



A FOREWORD BY RICHARD H. DILLON AND
AN INTRODUCTION BY C. D. SHANE

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P R E F A C E

THIS is a biographical portrait of my great-granduncle, James Lick, a California pioneer who became a legendary figure before his death in 1876.

While a great deal has been written about this Pennsylvania Dutchman who founded an astronomical observatory boasting the world's largest refracting telescope and who had a lunar crater named after him, not much is known about the miser-millionaire who left three million dollars in public benefactions.

No diaries and few documents—his trust deed and a handful of letters written to his father and brother—remain to make easy the researching of his life. It is hoped that the reader will be challenged, as I was, to discover what lay behind the taciturn, eccentric, nature of the man who was said to be "afraid to live."

ROSEMARY LICK

FOREWORD

THIS BOOK is the product of what, in James Lick's day, would have been termed "divers hands." Basically, it is Rosemary Lick's biography of her great-granduncle. She spent years in research and writing, and in following the trail of her ancestor from Pennsylvania to Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, Lima, and then on to San Francisco and the Santa Clara Valley.

On January 13, 1966, before the narrative was completed, Miss Lick died. Luckily, she left her draft and notes in the hands of her long-time friend, Marie Louise (Wenig) Donnell, whose husband, Curtis Pierce Donnell, revised and completed the unfinished manuscript for Rosemary's sister, Paquita Lick Machris. The latter, after consulting with a number of interested persons, including her father, to whom this volume is dedicated, Charles J. Lick; Chancellor Franklin D. Murphy of UCLA; and Dr. C. D. Shane, who has contributed the Introduction, turned the narrative over to the undersigned for the final editing for the press.

Doubtless, James Lick will, one day, be the subject of several—perhaps many—books. But until the appearance of the volume in hand we have had to rely largely on a pamphlet and a special issue of a journal of history for information on this little-known pioneer of California. The first-mentioned is William H. Worrilow's JAMES LICK, 1796-1876, PIONEER AND ADVENTURER, a 1949 publication of the Newcomen Society; the other is Volume I, Number II, of the QUARTERLY OF THE SOCIETY OF CALIFORNIA PIONEERS (1924), devoted largely to an anonymous sketch, titled "The Life of James Lick," thought

by many to have been the work of Henry E. Mathews of the Society, and Secretary of the Lick Trust.

It is hoped by all concerned that this new look at James Lick will prove to be not only interesting reading but useful to "aficionados" of California history who have been distressed by the dearth of information on the South American piano-maker turned California pioneer.

RICHARD H. DILLON

San Francisco
1967

INTRODUCTION

THE EARLY PIONEERS bequeathed to California a rich heritage, founded in history and embellished in fiction. Moving through the panorama of the turbulent forty-niners was the taciturn figure of James Lick. He was of a retiring and thoughtful disposition, always shrinking from publicity. Though he made few headlines in his day, his influence proved more fundamental and far-reaching than that of his colorful contemporaries. It is in retrospect that his remarkable qualities are best appreciated.

Nearly a century has passed since his death, yet no extensive biography has been published. His sober mien seemed not to catch the fancy of the writers who fictionalized so many early Californians. More scholarly writers may well have been discouraged by the lack of surviving records and letters. Most of these were lost in the San Francisco fire which destroyed the files of the Lick Trust. It seems appropriate that the present account should have been initiated and written by Rosemary Lick, the great-grandniece of James. It was a great privilege to know Miss Lick when on several occasions she visited the Lick Observatory. She was consulting the Observatory archives to secure material bearing on Lick's life. We enjoyed her friendship and were profoundly grieved to learn of her untimely death early in 1966.

My interest in James Lick dates from an initial visit to Mount Hamilton in 1914. While spending the summer there, Dr. Seth B. Nicholson had discovered the ninth satellite of Jupiter, and I later accompanied him to obtain additional

observations. This early interest grew during a connection of over fifty years with astronomy at Berkeley and Mount Hamilton, as a student, a teacher and more recently as Director of the Lick Observatory and Astronomer. Mrs. Shane's association with the Observatory is almost as long and as intimate as mine. We shared with Rosemary Lick an enthusiasm for James Lick whose life she felt in many ways paralleled that of his grandnephew, Charles J. Lick, her father. Both had started life in modest circumstances, had prospered through industry and keen judgment and both interested themselves in various philanthropic activities.

It was farsightedness and good fortune that brought James Lick to San Francisco a few weeks prior to the discovery of gold in California. It is evidence of his interest in fine craftsmanship that he brought his workbench and his tools. The bench now stands in the entrance hall of the Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco. Lick saw more potential gold in the sand lots of San Francisco than in the mines, and investments in carefully selected pieces of real estate soon made him wealthy. He recognized the undeveloped agricultural resources of the Santa Clara Valley and acquired a large tract of land near San Jose where he lived the majority of his twenty-eight years in California. He pioneered the growing of fruit in this area, experimenting with new introductions and with improved methods of cultivation.

As he advanced in years and prosperity, James Lick turned his thoughts to the beneficent uses of his wealth. The Third Deed of Trust by which his fortune was to be distributed attests the breadth of Lick's interests. Although his major bequests were for educational and scientific purposes, orphans and the elderly were remembered too, and a gift for a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was included among the minor bequests. He showed remarkable acumen in naming benefactions not only appropriate to the needs of his day but of enduring value. A surprising number of the institu-

tions to which bequests were made remain active today although their identity has in some cases been lost. Of those founded by substantial benefactions, only the Lick Baths has fallen prey to changing times. Its operation was terminated about 1918. The building, near 10th and Mission Streets, survived the 1906 earthquake and fire and the faded inscription, "James Lick Baths" can still be discerned. The Old Ladies Home, the Lick School of Mechanical Arts, now the Lick-Wilmerding High School, and the Lick Observatory have continued to prosper despite altered conditions over nearly a century. They still operate in close accord with Lick's original intent.

Much of the success of the Trust was due to his shrewd selection of a Board of Trustees, dedicated to administering his plans wisely and devotedly. The original endowments in each instance provided a sound foundation, and subsequent conscientious administration has encouraged additional support from private donors to maintain and expand the institutions he established.

The Lick Old Ladies Home was incorporated in 1884 and opened in an old school building located on 25 acres of land, then at the southern edge of San Francisco. Subsequently the name was changed to the University Mound Ladies Home. Part of the increasingly valuable land was sold and in 1932 a large new building was constructed on the same site. This at present provides a pleasant home for seventy-four ladies over the age of sixty-five.

In view of James Lick's appreciation of skilled workmanship, it is not surprising that one of his major bequests was to found The California School of Mechanical Arts. It opened in 1895 as a tuition-free secondary school for boys, the only such school in San Francisco. In 1915 it was merged with the privately endowed Wilmerding School of Industrial Arts, and these combined institutions became known as the Lick-Wilmerding High School. In 1956 Lick-Wilmerding moved

to its new building on Ocean Avenue, close to the James Lick Freeway. Since 1961 it has operated under the self-perpetuating Board of Trustees of the Lick School. The school is still tuition-free to its nearly three-hundred students. Although at least two years of shop work are required, the curriculum has been increasingly directed toward a college preparatory course. Recently 90% of the graduates have gone on to attend four-year colleges and another 8% have entered two-year colleges. The roster of its 4,000 graduates includes an impressive list of outstanding engineers, architects and leading business executives.

The project said to have been most dear to Lick's heart was an observatory to be equipped with "the most powerful telescope in the world." In his last years Lick took an active interest in studying possible observatory sites, and he himself chose Mount Hamilton, delighted that he had found a mountain over 4,000 feet in height in his own Santa Clara County. It had been customary to attach an observatory to a university, often in or near a center of population, and Lick's choice set a pattern for mountain observatories that has been followed ever since. The Lick Observatory is a most fitting monument to its founder whose remains lie under the pier of the great telescope. In accordance with his instructions, the Observatory was transferred to the University of California upon its completion in 1888. The State of California through its University has continued to support it generously and to add new scientific equipment and facilities. Today it ranks among the world's great observatories both in research and in the training of students. It has been unexcelled in the number of its young astronomers who have gained recognition as leaders in their profession.

In research the Observatory is particularly noted for determining the fundamental data on which so much of astronomy is dependent. The accurate measurement of star positions was an important part of its early work. The Ob-

servatory's extensive catalogue of double stars includes thousands discovered at Mount Hamilton. Using methods perfected there, a comprehensive program was carried out for measuring the motion of stars in the line of sight. The catalogue of these measures provides basic data for a large area of astronomy.

Soon after the opening of the Observatory, Barnard, on his photographs of the Milky Way, detected dark patches of obscuring material that blotted out the light of the distant stars. Later research by the Lick staff showed that this interstellar matter exists not only in small clouds but pervades our whole system and contributes a significant part of the material in the universe.

The place of the spiral nebulae in the universe was a much debated question early in this century. Photographs of hundreds of spiral nebulae made at the Observatory provided much of the early evidence that these systems are galaxies similar to our own and distributed throughout space. This discovery placed our galaxy in its proper perspective in a universe now vastly enlarged.

In 1966 the administrative headquarters and the offices of the Observatory were moved to the new Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. Here the staff can participate more intimately in the training of students and can maintain closer contacts with the scientific community. The observational program continues on Mount Hamilton.

The Lick Trust provided what proved to be handsome sums to the residuary legatees, namely, the Society of California Pioneers of which Lick was President at the time of his death, and to the California Academy of Sciences. Both of these institutions have prospered and expanded their activities over the years with the aid of additional gifts. The Society of California Pioneers with a headquarters building near the Civic Center maintains a valuable library and a large collection of California memorabilia. It also sponsors various educational

activities. The California Academy of Sciences, located in Golden Gate Park, has a rich program that includes active research and instruction in a wide range of the natural sciences. Approximately three million persons visit the Academy annually of which a considerable number are organized school groups from a large surrounding area.

Almost a hundred years have passed since James Lick created the Trust that would return to California the wealth the land had given him. His vision was clear—opportunities for youth, encouragement for learning, comfort for those in need. Though he never sought to glorify himself, the monuments he left are living tributes to the mind and heart of James Lick.

C. D. SHANE

*"So long
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THE GENEROUS MISER

"So long as San Francisco and the state of California shall endure, the name of James Lick will be associated with them. He will stand out clearly, by contrast, as the man who gave his millions in a state where all were fevered in the pursuit of wealth."

SAN FRANCISCO *Evening Bulletin*
October 2, 1876