

# History of the North Star House

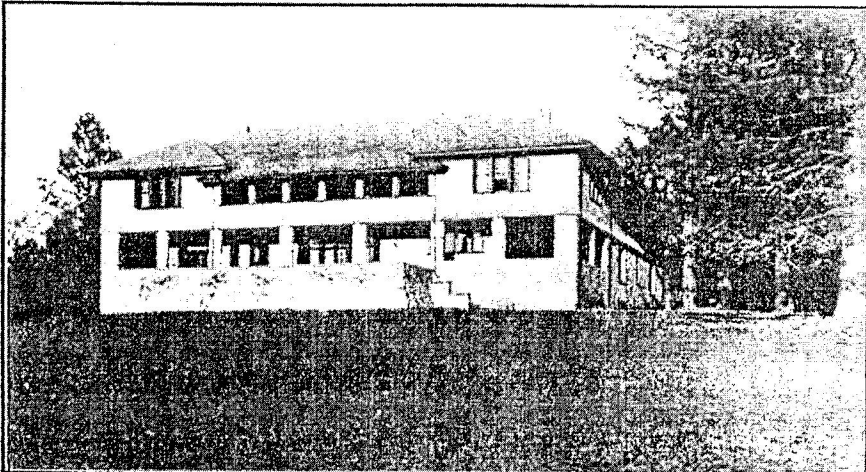
by Evelyn Gardiner

IN 1905 BOTH THE EMPIRE AND THE NORTH STAR Mines were flourishing, their managers known to each other and pleasantly competitive. William Bourn, owner of the Empire Mine, had Willis Polk design his hunting lodge and guest house and surrounded it with extensive, beautifully landscaped gardens. James D. Hague, owner of the North Star Mine, felt that his manager, Arthur De Wint Foote, should have an even larger home with enough room to entertain stockholders from New York.

Mr. Hague hired Julia Morgan to be the architect. I don't know whether Julia Morgan's engineer father was a friend of Mr. Hague or not, but Willis Polk was known to be a drinker and would undoubtedly charge a higher fee. This house was an early commission for the celebrated architect, Miss Morgan. She graduated from the University of California at Berkeley and was the first woman in California to be awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering and later was the first woman in California to become a licensed architect. She was a close friend of Phoebe Apperson Hearst and worked for her son, William Randolph Hearst, for 18 years at San Simeon.

The North Star House was built of native stone and cedar shingles in the Craftsman style which was favored by both Julia Morgan and Arthur Foote's wife, Mary Hallock Foote. The stone was hauled from the tailings pile in ore carts. The entire house cost about \$15,000. The design of the landscape of the extensive grounds was conducted by Arthur Foote. The North Star House faces west with a terrace in front for enjoying the view of the Sutter Buttes and the coastal range. The house was two stories and there were two wings which projected to the rear of the building with a

An early photograph of the North Star House with the west-facing terrace in the foreground. (Author's collection.)



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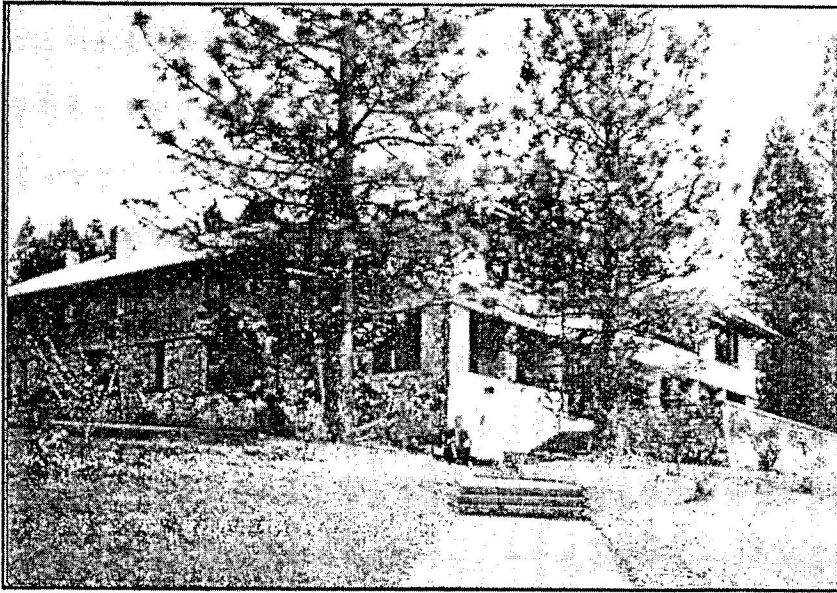
courtyard between them. The courtyard was partly shaded by a rose trellis and featured a round pool and two yew trees.

One wing of the two-story house was for the servants. The mine paid their salaries and the mine piped water to the house as well as providing electricity. The servants' wing had three bedrooms upstairs, a bath and a screened gallery for hanging out the laundry on rainy days. The back stairs to the first floor led to the laundry, the servants dining room and to the kitchen, two pantries and a milk room. Originally all of the servants' rooms and the laundry had wood stoves. The kitchen had its own screen porch and steep stairs led from there to the basement where apples, pears, jams and jellies were stored.

On the second floor of the wing on the other side of the courtyard there was a gallery running almost the length of the wing, two bedrooms, a large bathroom and, off the gallery, a darkroom where my father, Arthur Burling Foote, developed the photographs which can be found at the North Star Power House Museum, the Video History Museum and the Empire Mine Park.

Downstairs was a large bedroom and bath, and a large room for storing wood for the many stoves and fireplaces. To the west, facing the front of the house, was Mary Foote's study (where she would write several books) a large living room and a library which led to the master bedroom. The dining room faced north, with sliding doors leading to the living room and a swinging door leading to the pantry. In the corner, facing the courtyard was a small sunny room which originally held the newfangled crank telephone. The room had no foundation and, I suspect, it was an addition to shield the dining room and pantry from the kitchen porch where the dog was fed and where flies might collect. French doors led from the courtyard into a hall with an imposing staircase to the upstairs hall and bedroom.

There was a sitting room on the southwest corner upstairs. It had big closets, built-in chests of drawers and a handsome flat-topped Franklin stove. There two other



The North Star House before World War I. Betty Foote, sister of A. B., is standing beside Tod Swift, whom she married. (Author's collection.)

bedrooms, two more bathrooms, and a sleeping porch facing west. On the north end of the hall was a cool bedroom which shared a bath with the northwest room used by guests. A door from the hall led to the servants' gallery and there was a big walk-in linen closet, a built-in bookcase and several built-in benches. Also in the gallery there was a storage place for wood to supply the upstairs stoves, and over one of the bathroom closets a steep staircase led to the attic.

A house built on the property prior to the North Star House was located near the incline shaft of the North Star Mine and was called simply "the cottage." The Foote family initially lived in the cottage, but felt cramped. The two daughters slept on the porch, and when their son was home from college he slept in a tent outside. Tragically, one daughter, Agnes, died just as the North Star House was being planned. The other daughter, Betty, described the North Star House as "the house of sorrow, the house of success." The cottage had the North Star logo of the Big Dipper and North Star on the brick fireplace in the living room. (The new North Star House had the logo embedded in the cement of the terrace.) The Footes added an upstairs room and bath and an outside staircase to the cottage, which later became a home for young engineers, "the cottage boys," who trained under "Old A.D.," as he was known. He called them the kindergartners and they all went on to successful careers. Roy Tremoureaux had a distinguished career in San Francisco and invented the traveling cement mixer. Fred Sabin managed copper mines at Jerome in Arizona. Bob Bedford stayed on as Superintendent under A. B. Foote and Tod Swift married Betty Foote.

The wedding of Tod and Betty was unusual. It was early in the morning and afterwards Betty and Tod set out on horseback for an all-day ride to a cabin (complete with cook) which her father had given them for their honey-

moon. Their first child, Agnes, was born at the North Star House. Swift was a man who could not stay away from the sea, so they soon moved to Massachusetts, where they lived at Hingham in a house on the end of a wharf.

Arthur Burling Foote, my father, had one of the first cars in Grass Valley. It arrived in pieces on the train (the old narrow gauge). He put it together at the station, bought gas at the hardware store and drove it home. In 1911, together with George Starr (the manager of the Empire Mine), Dr. Carl Jones, John LaRue (a lawyer), and George Scarfe (a mechanical engineer), their car was driven over Donner Summit to Tahoe Tavern, for which exploit they were awarded a silver cup.

In 1913 A. B. Foote married my mother, Jeannette Hooper, a San Franciscan. She had been visiting the Footes since the cottage days. They had been friends for 18 years. By that time my father was serving as superintendent under Billy Hague, the managing director. A. D. Foote stepped down and became Consulting Engineer with offices at the Central Shaft. My grandfather still had many mining interests: the Tighener Mine in Alleghany, the Mugwump Mine near Forest City and the Neocene Mine near La Porte.

In 1915 Janet Foote was born in San Francisco and in 1916 Marian Foote was born at the Jones Hospital (now a bed and breakfast inn). Then came World War I. Only one of the engineers could be spared, so Billy Hague, the younger man with only one child, decided that he was the one to go. He died overseas of the influenza and A. B. Foote became manager. The mine stayed partly open producing tungsten. Bob Bedford stayed on in the cottage, adding a wife, a son and a daughter, and was superintendent under my father.

I was born in 1919 and remember the house as it changed. The big wood storage room had been made into a bedroom and bath for Pong, the Chinese cook mother brought with her from San Francisco. Wood was stacked in a room under the front stairs and could be pushed through under a built-in bench next to the fireplace. All the fireplaces were beautiful and efficient. A. D. Foote was an expert on fireplaces and undoubtedly had a hand in their design and placement. The fireplaces had handsome andirons, built in the blacksmith shop at the mine. The library, which my grandparents used for a sitting room, shared a chimney with the stove in their bedroom. The dining room fireplace shared a chimney with the fireplace in my grandmother's study. There remained a stove in one servant's bedroom and one in the northwest guest room. Electric heaters replaced the other stoves. There was a big wood

range in the kitchen and a huge double-doored ice box in the pantry.

In 1930 James Hague, Billy Hague's son, told me that Mary Foote remarked, "The house is only 25 years old and already it is an anachronism." She could see that the days of four gardeners, a cook, a housemaid, a laundress, and their children were going fast. Even the huge lawns at the North Star and Empire Mines were not practical in California's dry summers.

One big change came when Jeanette's father, John A. Hooper, died and my mother brought the furniture from his ornate Victorian home in San Francisco. The Foote family's simple Morris chairs and Stickley chairs remained, but, much to Mary Foote's dismay, my mother added an oriental rug, heavy carved and overstuffed furniture and fringed lamps. Then came the biggest change of all, when the Newmont Mining Corporation bought the Empire and North Star Mines and combined them. They had the use of the cottage and the Hague house. The Hague house had been built on the premises by Billy Hague for his wife and later his family. The Newmont Company had no use for the big house and they allowed my mother to buy the North Star House and surrounding acreage and we stayed on.

As a child, I didn't grow up in the real world, but it was a lovely world, more nineteenth than twentieth century. We were taught at home by a governess, first Miss Hickey and later Helen Barrett, much adored and known as Barrie. She was young, lively and red-headed. She swam with us, rode with us, read with us and taught us French and German. I

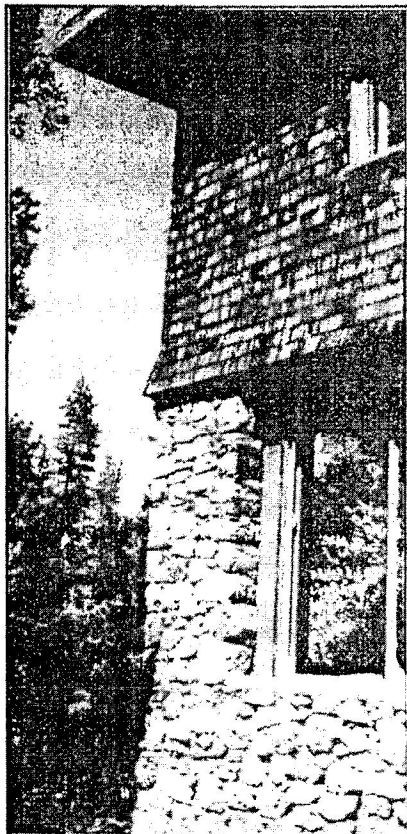
could even write in German script, but all that is long forgotten, although I can still read French. Each Friday we recited a poem for our parents: "The Lady of Shallot," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Kipling's "If" and "Lest We Forget." Once I even came through with all of "Horatius at the Bridge." Music came from my mother who had a lovely mezzo-soprano voice and a fine Steinway piano, a gift from one of her brothers. Each night I dropped off to sleep to the sound of her voice downstairs. She was dramatic and we made our own fun at home, playing charades (the old fashioned way with improvised costumes) and all sorts of other games. She loved to interpret handwriting and tell fortunes. We were seldom sick and even then got well fast because of her excellent nursing.

Best of all, in spite of being a city woman, she let us run free. We lived by the mine whistle. In the morning it was our signal to run and jump in bed with our parents. At noon, we headed home from wherever we were and the evening whistle worked the same way. We were allowed to play on the tailings piles, the mountain of white sand behind the cyanide plant, and to throw rocks into deep, deep prospect holes. In summer we went barefoot, even on the hot gravel road on the way to our swimming hole. We played naked in the lawn sprinklers. We were allowed to go to "Central" and watch Mr. Marshall pour molten gold into bricks and dad took us down 8,000 feet into the mine. Every day, after lessons, we went to dad's office for the mail, with a stop at a crooked tree shaped like a horse. We had horses too, very gentle and old ones. One of them pulled our horse-drawn lawnmower.

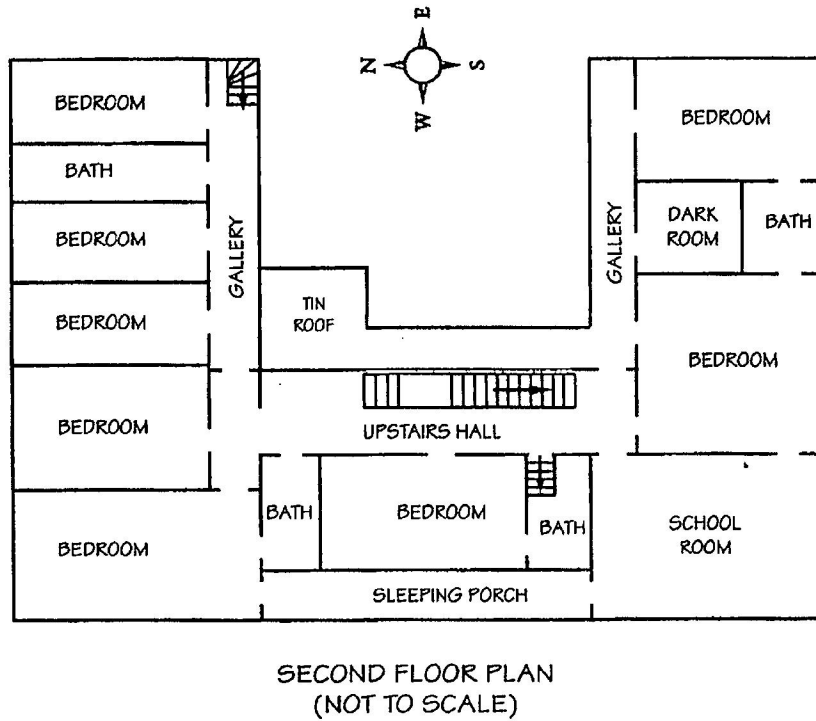
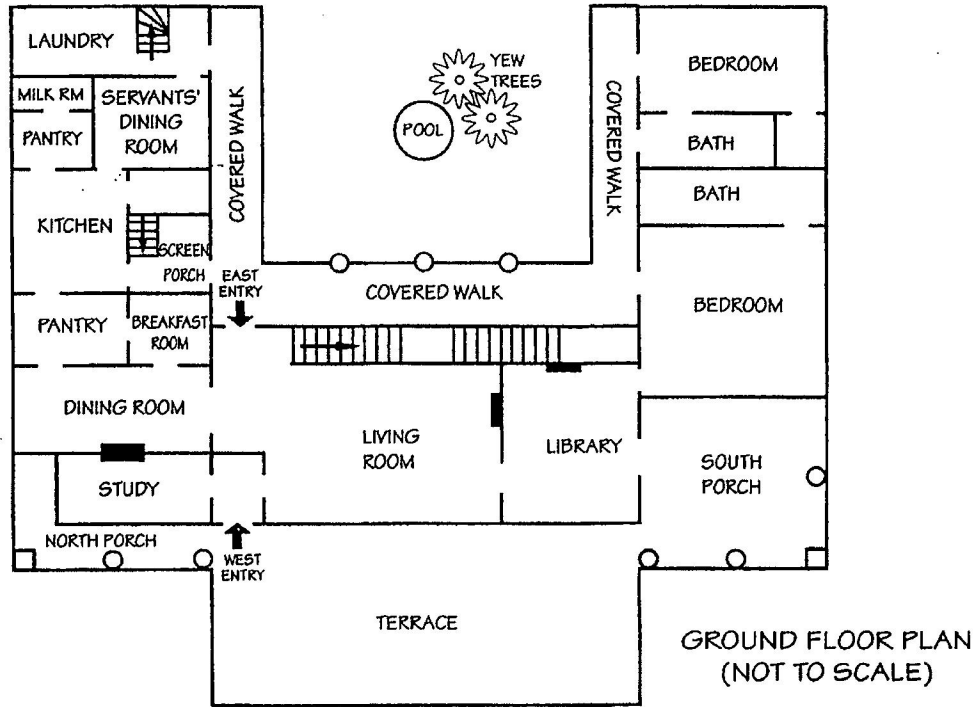
The food was delicious. We had our own cows, chickens and pigs for a while. The orchard had every kind of fruit except apricots and grapes. The vegetable garden gave us winter as well as summer vegetables and we even accepted turnips, parsnips and kohlrabi because they came from our own garden. I remember thinking it very funny to see a headless chicken still running around and once I pushed my city cousin into the pig pen.

Our grandparents lived with us and my grandmother gave me my supper when I was too little to eat at the family table. It would be milk toast or a very soft boiled egg (which turned me against eggs for a while). But she read to me while I ate and the sad stories made her cry, which fascinated me. She taught us to draw and made beautiful paper dolls for us. My grandparents had their own sitting room, but always ate with us and I remember the conversation being about books and current events, but never gossip or personalities. Often we were sent to the dictionary to look up a word under discussion. Dad and granddad spoke very little unless engineers were visiting.

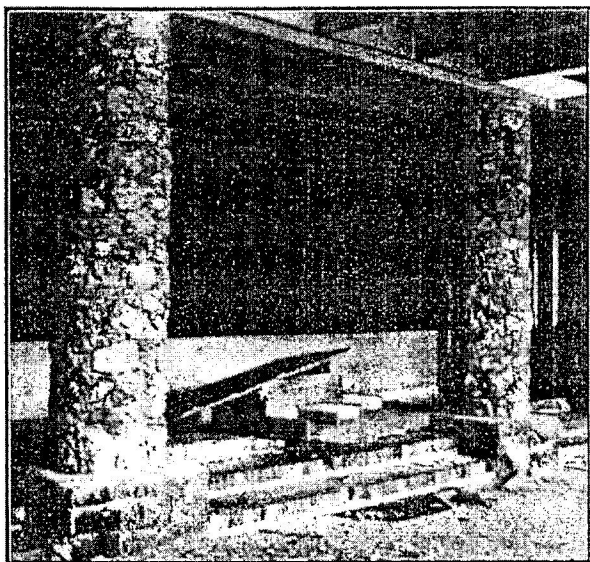
About this time, the Bedford family left the cottage and the new mine superintendent and his family (the Parsons) moved into the cottage with their daughter Jane. Mrs. Parsons was a wonderful cook, and we spent a great deal of



A recent photo shows the architect's use of native material: mine rock on the ground floor and cedar shakes on the second story wall. Notice the interesting detail where Julia Morgan added a flare to the shakes to direct rain water away from the top of masonry wall and soften the design. (Photo by Mike Grant from author's collection.)



Floor plan of the North Star House based on the author's sketch from memory.



Although North Star House has been severely damaged by later occupants and has suffered from vandalism in recent years, one can still see impressive evidence of the skill of

the architect and artisans who built the house, and the excellent taste of the Foote family who occupied it during the first half of the 20th century. (Photos by Mike Grant.)

time at the cottage using the upstairs room for a club house where we gave parties and put on plays.

In 1929, when the Newmont Mining Corporation of New York bought the Empire and North Star Mines (including other mines as well), they installed the new manager, Fred Nobs, in the Bourn "cottage." The Hague House could be rented as a home for the new superintendent of the North Star Mine. The accountant and his family lived in the cottage, and after my mother bought the North Star House, my grandparents moved east and we girls went off to boarding school.

The big staff was reduced to one gardener, Andy Tobiasen, his wife Myra, who did the cooking, and her mother, Mrs. Fiske, who helped with laundry and spring cleaning. When Andy and Myra bought a farm of their own, the gardener's cottage was lived in by Charlie Hatch, who kept the big garden as beautiful as ever. Later Mrs. Hatch did the laundry and the kitchen held a succession of cooks. The horses and cows were gone and we bought milk from MacDonald's Dairy. Dad mowed the lawn himself with a power mower. The big house remained as beautiful and impractical as ever and I'm glad that my six children have happy memories of the long miserable drive up from southern California with the welcoming house at the end of the drive.

In January 1937 there was another morning wedding when Marian married Ray Conway, and they set off in the snow to go back to college at Berkeley.

In February 1940 Janet married Jack Titcomb, an engineer with Newmont. The reception was at the North Star House with many mining people present, including Allen Hoover, Herbert's brother. Kenneth and Walter Nobs were

ushers and the champagne came from Errol MacBoyle at the Idaho-Maryland Mine.

Jeannette and Arthur B. Foote were both 87 when they died within a year of each other, and the three married daughters could not afford to keep the North Star House. We thought that mother, who loved to help young people, would be pleased when we sold the house to Outreach, a religious organization supposed to help troubled young people. In the sixties there were plenty of troubled youngsters, even in Grass Valley. We asked the minister in charge not to alter the house without the advice of an architect, but that was not to be. We pictured the young people growing their own food, cutting their own wood and learning to function self-confidently in the world of the sixties.

Instead, the topsoil in the vegetable garden was sold off, along with all the Julia Morgan fixtures which beautified the house. The back stairs were removed, a furnace was put in the attic and wooden fire escapes erected. The west-facing terrace was glassed in for religious services, with no thought of the summer heat.

The last family wedding took place on the glassed-in terrace when Pat Conway married Berndt Gaeddke with snow falling outside. Then they were off to a new life running a hunting lodge in Alaska.

Finally the North Star House was declared a fire trap and the owner went bankrupt. The property was sold to developers and now sits empty and is vandalized more and more each day. Due to fires and other disasters, Julia Morgan houses are rare these days. It's a shame to lose another one.