

# HISTORY TOUR

BY Anne Rosenthal

The town of Searsville came into existence in the early 1850s between Alambique and Dennis Martin Creeks. The establishment of a mill and forge by pioneer Dennis Martin in 1851 is considered by the late historian Dorothy Regnery as the birth of the town, even though neither Martin's house nor business were located within the town proper. The first major settlement within the town itself could be considered Augustus Eikerenkotter's hotel and store, which he opened in July of 1852.

The town economy revolved around lumber; many of those logging the nearby hills had been unsuccessful in the gold fields. By the mid-1850s, most of the trees had been felled and major logging activity moved to the coastal side of the mountains. However, the trees had been cut several feet above the ground, and some men remained in the area, earning a living by making shingles from the remaining trunks. Ranching, farming, and, in the 1870s, recreation were also part of Searsville's economic base.

Today when you stand at the western end of the bridge spanning the runoff from the inner marsh into Searsville Lake (see map on opposite page), you look out over the cattails of the inner marsh on one side and a calm expanse of water on the other. Continuing west from the bridge, you walk along a road, now partly grown over, that led to an entrance of Searsville Park, the recreational concession along the eastern shore of the lake that closed in 1976. But for a moment, imagine yourself at the same spot 130 years ago, in 1863, when the town of Searsville was well established and home to approximately 100 people. The surrounding area held a fluctuating population of loggers and mill men that reached perhaps 2000.

You would have been crossing just below the confluence of Alambique and Dennis Martin Creeks (see maps); downstream, these waters combined with flow from two other creeks. Perhaps the alders, willows, box-elders, bays, and maples typically lining the banks of California streams remained uncut. Along the stream valley were various shacks and shanties belonging to Chinese house boys, laundry men, and laborers. Ahead of you would have been one of the two main streets of the town of Searsville, Eikerenkotter Lane. Off to your left would have been the other, which was called A Street.

## Lands of Dennis Martin

Before walking through the town itself, let us take a short excursion to the lands owned by **Dennis Martin**. We can follow a trail that most likely existed down to and along the banks of San Francisquito Creek.

Dennis Martin was a member of a pioneer family that traveled to California from Missouri in 1844, crossing the wilderness in a prairie schooner pulled by oxen. The group exemplified the fortitude shown by the pioneering families. Dennis Martin's father was 70 years old at the time he made the crossing; two members of the party gave birth en route. As unbelievable as it may seem, the Stevens-Murphy party, with which the Martins traveled, brought the wagons across the Sierra—the first

*The town of Searsville had two streets that lay perpendicular to each other: Eikerenkotter Lane and A Street. The grid of streets shown on old maps of Searsville in a location south of Eikerenkotter Lane existed on paper only.*

party to do so—and were also the first to use the route later taken by the ill-fated Donner Party.

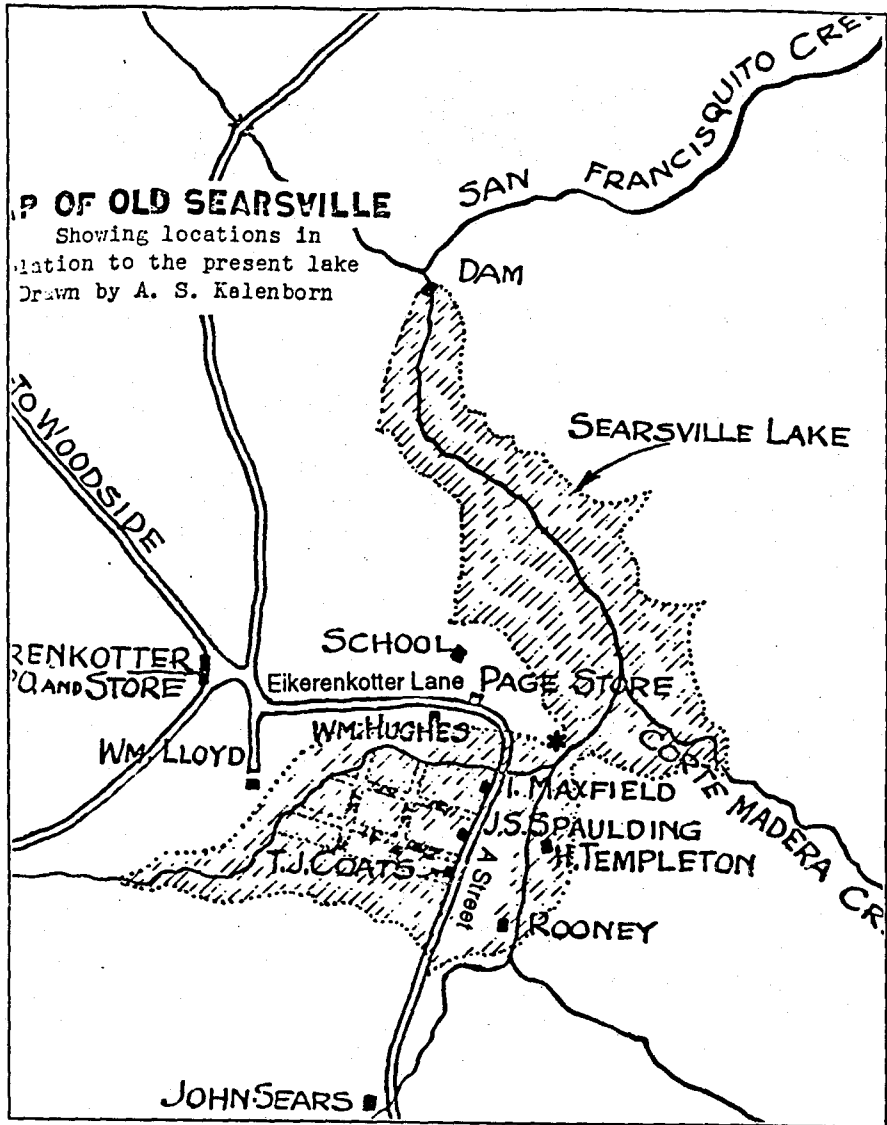
After a series of adventures, Martin left Sutter's Fort for the San Francisco Bay area in the summer of 1845, assigned by Sutter to supervise three Indians cutting timber. Martin ended up purchasing 1500 acres of somewhat dubious title, land bounded by San Francisquito Creek on the south. The northern boundary is approximated by the present-day Sand Hill Road. The first land purchased by Martin was later known as the North Ranch.

Slightly west of the point where Interstate 280 now intersects Sand Hill Road, a primitive road led down to San Francisquito Creek. It was here that Martin built his first house in the fall of 1845, on the banks of the creek, at a site now marked by a monument.

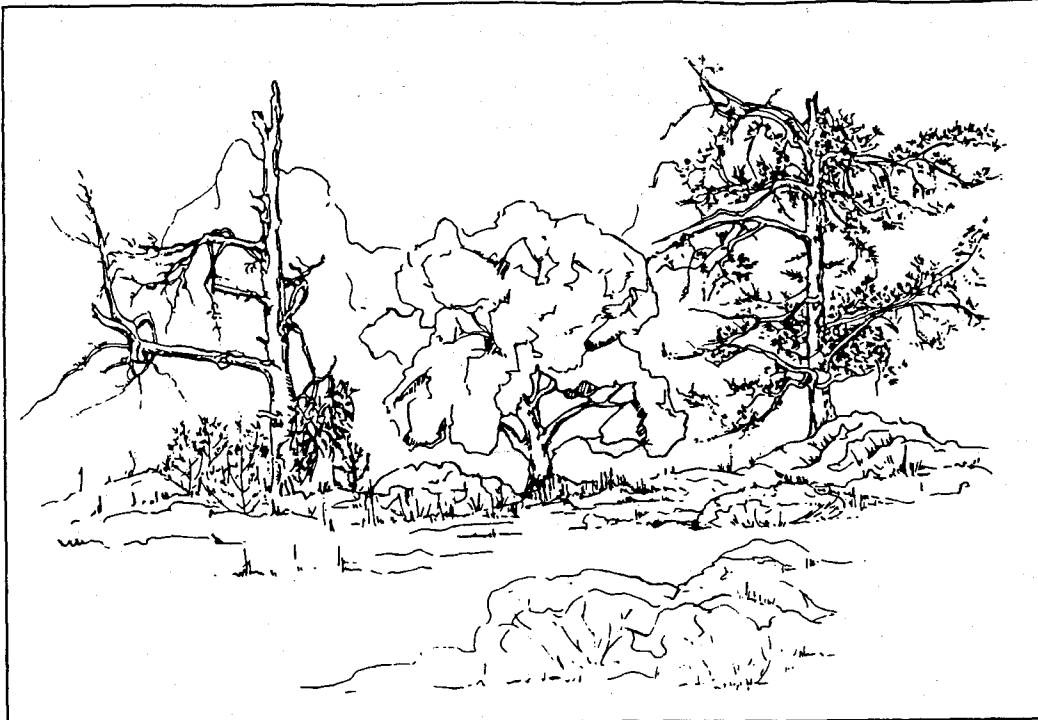
In 1848, Martin participated in the Gold Rush, apparently quite successfully. He married in 1849, and he and his wife had six children. Martin's lumber mill, built in 1850, was located just below the junction of Bear and San Francisquito Creeks, not far from the Indian grinding rock. It was the first mill built on the Peninsula that was meant to be powered by water. Within a few weeks, however, the mill was destroyed by a flood, and it was rebuilt as a grist mill. Remnant timbers of the mill, embedded in the creek bed and bound by tree roots, are exposed to a greater extent during some years than in others.

Additional ranch land was purchased by the Martins in 1854. This land, known as the South Ranch, included part of the present Jasper Ridge Preserve as well as Webb Ranch. In the early 1850s, Martin was successful as an investor in additional mills and in lumber. A church was built on the North Ranch property in the mid-1850s; a graveyard existed on the site as well.

Yet land claim disputes led to Martin's eviction from the North Ranch approximately 20 years after he purchased it. And some years later, after > page 8



Map drawn by memory by A.S. Kalenborn, former Searsville resident, showing the relative positions of the school and some of the major stores and residences. The outline of the lake shows its approximate boundaries in 1950. The asterisk has been added to mark the approximate location of the west end of the bridge, the starting point for the History Tour. Reprinted from the May, 1950 edition of La Peninsula, the journal of the San Mateo County Historical Association.



*Two Monterey pines mark the uphill corners of the school yard. Planted over 100 years ago, the size and condition of these trees, which are well past their normal life span, readily distinguish them. This view of the trees is from the north side looking toward the inner marsh. Art work by Chris Andrews.*

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encumbering the South Ranch in multiple mortgages, he lost title to that land as well. This brave pioneer died in San Francisco a destitute man, estranged from his daughters, and was buried in the cemetery on the North Ranch. (Although no longer owned by the Martins, the cemetery still served the surrounding populace.)

#### **Eikerenkotter Lane**

Returning to the intersection of Eikerenkotter Lane and A Street, let us walk down Eikerenkotter Lane (see map 2). The overgrown road to the former Searsville Park entrance approximates this lane. Proceeding west towards what is now Portola Road, we come first to the **Page Store**, which was located on our right (see maps). This general store was opened by William Page in 1857 as the "Farmers Exchange." Page had participated in the Gold Rush, returned east, and then come back to California. He and his wife Sarah lived in a house adjacent to the store. According to historian Dorothy Regnery, the Page business included a post office, lumberyard, and popular saloon. Page received the postmastership for the town as a reward for his support of Abraham Lincoln. (Page Mill Road in Palo Alto is named after the mill Page built on the redwood-covered land he purchased in what is now Portola State Park.)

The Page property at Searsville was purchased in 1867 by **Alexander Peers**, who had worked as clerk and bookkeeper for Page. He and his new wife **Lizzie** planted two live oaks, one on either side of their front gate, to commemorate the purchase. The oaks were to be cut as part of a road construction project in 1929, when the elderly Lizzie Peers appeared and successfully requested they be saved. These trees still stand today, and are marked with a small sign.

Next to the Page store, up on the knoll, was the Searsville school. The first school was in a small structure moved to the site in 1854. It was a subscription (private) school. In addition to being used for the school, the building was also used for a community center. A new schoolhouse was built in 1868, with money raised by a tax. This schoolhouse, repaired during the summer of 1890, was the last building left in the town after the Searsville Lake was filled. In 1894, the school site was sold to the Spring Valley Water Works; the schoolhouse was auctioned and dismantled. According to Herb Dengler, long-time Jasper Ridge associate, two Monterey pines, now old with broken tops, mark the upper end of the school yard (see drawing).

Across the street from the school was the **William Hughs residence**. Originally from Maine, Hughs came to California in 1852 at the age of 22 with a group that included his future

wife. After working in the mines and as a contractor harvesting lumber, he bought the triangular property upon which he built a house. Apparently the house was fancy by Searsville standards and had a white picket fence. Hughs was a wealthy, dynamic man who got along well with others; he invested in ranch lands and lumbering, worked as a manager, gambled, and raised race horses.

Further down on the left side of the street was **William Lloyd's blacksmith shop**. Lloyd opened his shop in 1857. Behind the shop was his house and acreage, purchased from Horace Templeton (see below), that he farmed. This land is now part of the inner marsh; interestingly, his rancho included a stretch of the San Andreas Fault zone and a sag pond, which was known as Lloyd's Pond.

At the end of Eikerenkotter Lane was a **hotel and store built by Augustus Eikerenkotter** and his wife **Lena**. The roads of that era were primitive, sometimes impassable, and it often took one or more days to travel between towns. The location of the property at the junction of one road that went to Tripp's store (now a historic site in present-day Woodside) and one to Redwood City, where lumber and shingles bound for San Francisco were loaded, made it a node in the web of Peninsula roads. Eikerenkotter purchased the land at least twice to obtain clear title; this was typical since ownership of a given piece of land was often hazy. Unlike most hotels, which were fairly primitive structures—sometimes even tents—the Eikerenkotter Hotel was a two-story building. (See photographs.)

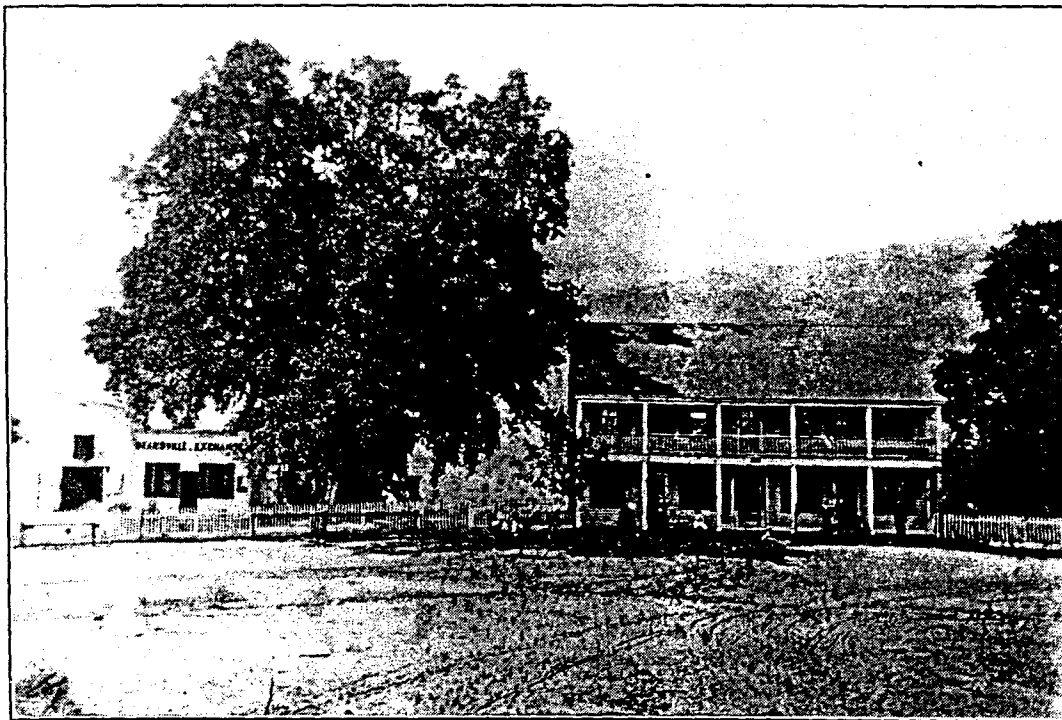
That one of the two main streets carried his name attests to Eikerenkotter's local prominence. It was Eikerenkotter who provided the land for the schoolhouse. The success of his businesses enabled him to purchase, in 1871, the property previously owned by Page and, subsequently, by Peers. In so doing he bought the store that competed with his and also acquired the appointment of postmaster.

The two buildings containing the hotel and store were located across Portola Road from the former public entrance to Searsville Park. The original store, called the Searsville Exchange, is shown in the photograph included in this newsletter. This structure burned in 1873 and was replaced with the store pictured on page 34 of Dorothy Regnery's *History of Jasper Ridge*.

The hotel and store were taken over and revitalized by Eikerenkotter's sons in the early 1880s. As the dam neared completion and the townspeople began to remove their structures, the Eikerenkotters held out, even improving their businesses. Only the school remained in Searsville when the Eikerenkotters finally salvaged the lumber from the store and sold the hotel for lumber in fall of 1891.

#### A Street

Returning to the corner of Eikerenkotter Lane and A Street, let us now walk up **A Street** (see map). One of the first properties on the right was owned by **William Maxfield**, who operated a stage coach. ➤ page 10



*Eikerenkotter Hotel and the original store, which was called the Searsville Exchange. This store burned in 1873 and was replaced with a new store. Photograph from the Dorothy Regnery Collection, Town of Portola Valley Archives.*

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Next to Maxfield lived **Joseph Spaulding**. Originally from Maine, Spaulding and a partner had a mercantile store in Searsville from 1855-56. After a trip back to Maine, and several other adventures, Spaulding purchased the house in Searsville in 1864 and married two years later at the age of 33. His wife **Elizabeth**, or Liza as she was called, was known for her kindness to the poor and sick. Family finances were derived from gambling, horse racing, and several hotels. One of the saloon-boarding houses Spaulding ran was known as the "Crystal Palace." Its former location is now part of the inner marsh.

On the other side of the Spaulding residence was land purchased by the **Coats family** in 1868. Father of 10 children, Coats was killed in a lumber mill accident at age 63, six months before the birth of his last child.

Across from Spaulding, on the eastern side of Dennis Martin Creek, was the property of **Horace Templeton**, a county judge. Templeton also purchased the land between Alambique and Dennis Martin Creeks (now part of the inner marsh) and hired the county surveyor to plot the grid pattern

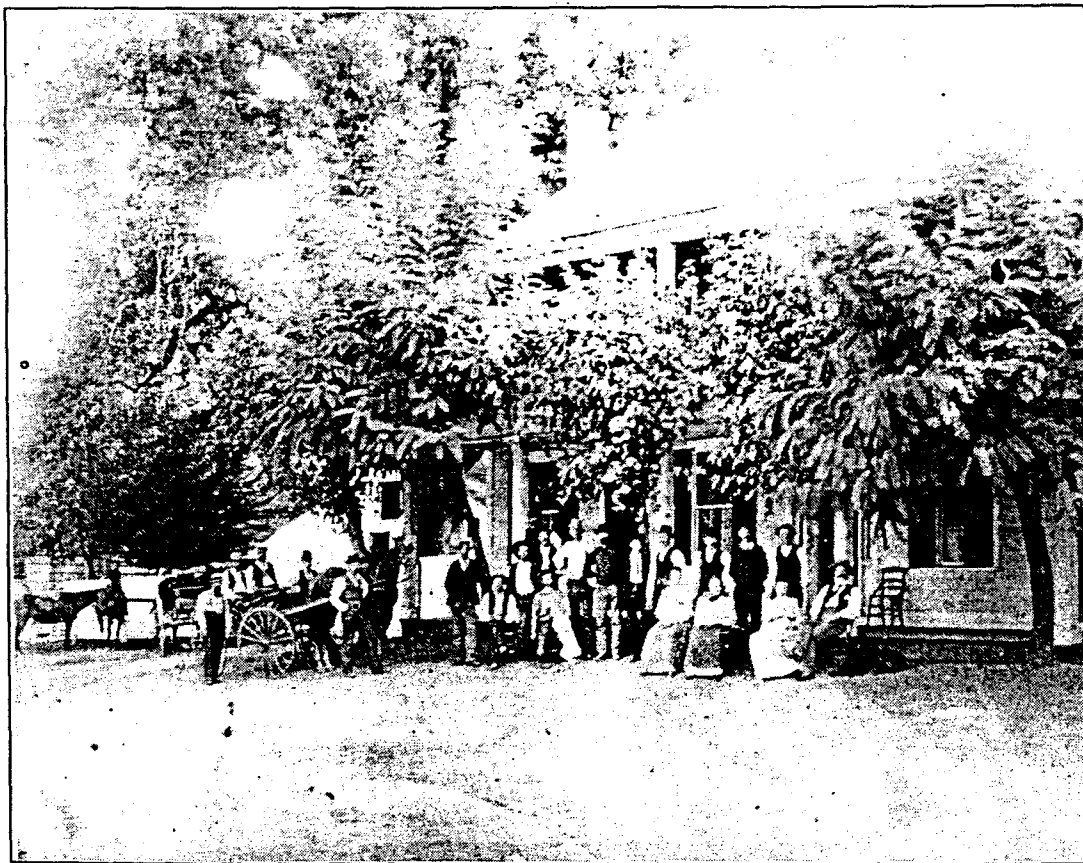
of streets shown on many of the old maps. This grid, however, only existed on paper and this land was later sold to others.

Toward the end of A Street on the right side was the property of **John Sears**, for whom the town was named. On this property Sears constructed a two-story building that held a saloon, restaurant, and private home. It was called the "Sears House."

The **Sears House** was sold in 1858 to Maxfield (see above) and a partner. Renamed the Searsville Hotel, it became an extremely popular gambling house. Regnery wrote, "Thousands of dollars, numerous animals, large acreages, and expensive jewelry changed hands in card games there." The hotel burned in 1866, revealing a system for observing player's cards and informing the house player, a system which some accredited to Judge Templeton.

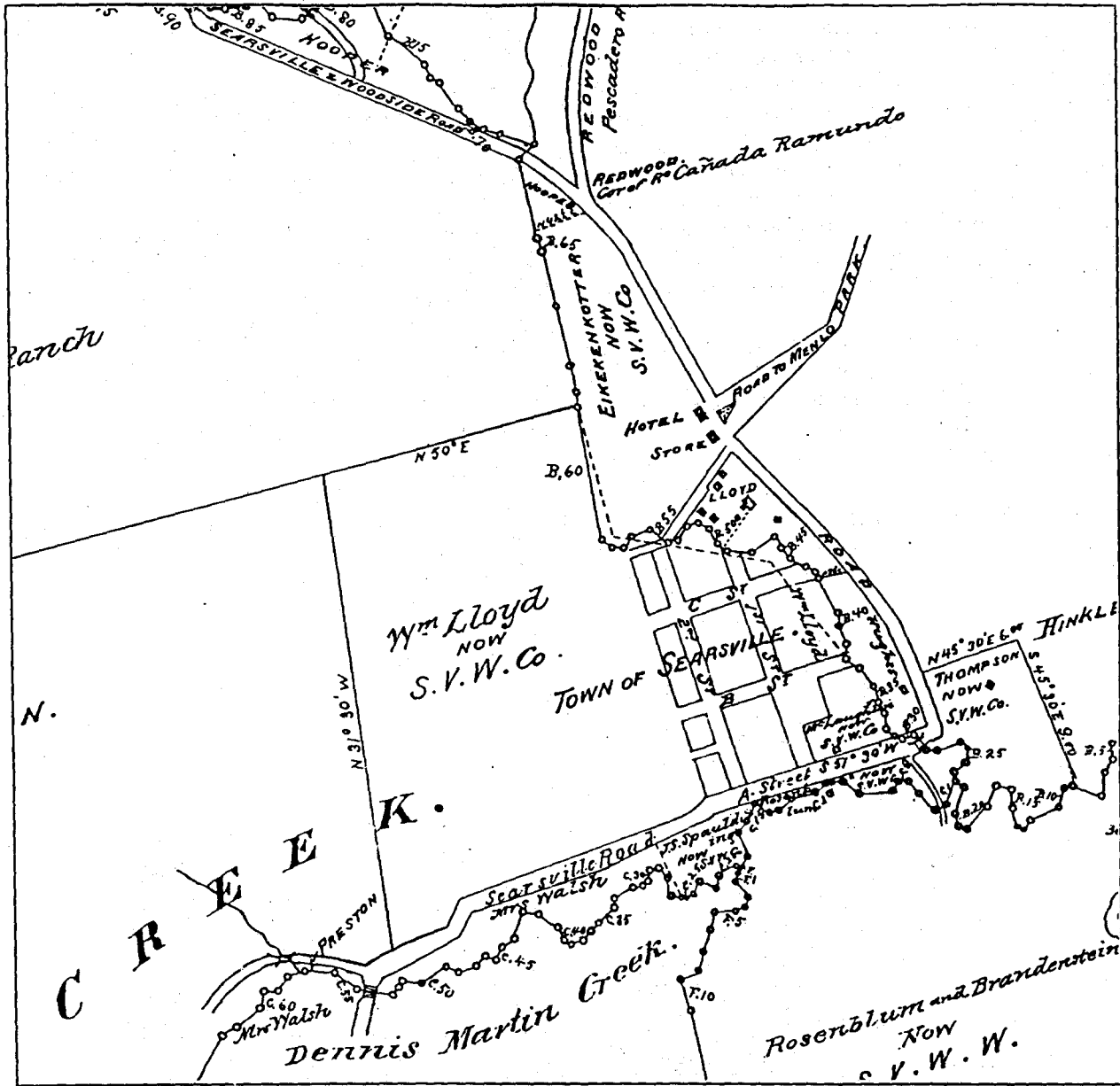
**Conclusion**

Over the 40 years that the town existed, land was bought, sold, and transferred many times; structures were built, removed, or torn down. In our tour of Eikerenkotter Lane



*Eikerenkotter Hotel in later years. Photograph from Dorothy Regnery Collection, Town of Portola Valley Archives.*

Views



Portion of map from Stanford University Maps and Records (50-D-023). The map was retitled by hand as "Corte Madera and West Union Creek Survey". This map shows the positions of the roads more accurately than the Kalenborn map on page 7. Note that much of the land had been transferred to the Santa Clara Valley Water Company at the time this map was made.

and A Street, we undoubtedly stopped at only a few of the structures that existed.

The history of the town came to a close in 1891, as the Searsville Dam neared completion. The townspeople moved their buildings, or tore them down and scavenged the wood. Most had sold their land to the water company, some with the agreement that they could remain rent and tax free until the lake formed; others were tricked or pressured into it. When the lake filled, A Street and its environs were covered.

Over the 100 years that passed, remaining foundations were buried and remnants of the town removed or overgrown. Yet the old maps and photos, and the trees that mark the sites where buildings once stood, hint of the town that once existed.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all factual information for this article is from *The History of Jasper Ridge* by Dorothy Regnery, published in 1991 by the Stanford Historical Society. ♦