

## “Hinckley” Cottage on the Meek Estate

Written by HAHS Staff

In 1869, during the planning and construction of the Meek Mansion, William Meek’s oldest child, Sarah Charlotte, began a courtship with Frank Hinckley, an engineer and surveyor who was working near the town of Livermore. By the spring of that year, Frank was a regular guest at the Meek home, making the eighteen-mile journey over bad roads and rough terrain to visit with “Lottie”. On May 17, 1870, **Frank and Sarah Charlotte** were married at the Meek Mansion, the first big event to be held in the newly completed mansion. Following the wedding, the two moved to a house they had rented in San Francisco. After just seven months in the city, the couple moved to Portland, Oregon, where Frank found work with the Northern Pacific Railroad. Shortly after their move to Oregon, the Hinckley’s had their first child, Nathaniel. However, their stay in Oregon turned out to be temporary, and in November 1872 they headed back to California.



Frank Hinckley



Sarah Charlotte Meek  
Hinckley

Upon their return, William Meek, Sarah’s father, made Frank foreman of the Meek ranch and the couple, with their son Nathaniel, moved into the Meek mansion. The following April, Sarah Charlotte gave birth to their second son, who they named Meek Hinckley, in honor of her father (1873). Though the Meek mansion was large, the increasing number of family members living in the mansion (with the addition of the newest Hinckley baby) could have been what motivated William Meek to suggest to Frank that he build a house for his family. William even gave them a spot to build on.

According to a biography of Frank Hinckley, he and Lottie were very enthusiastic about the idea of building their own house (most often referred to as “the cottage”).<sup>1</sup> Because of its close proximity to the main house, just 300 feet across the driveway and gardens, the cottage was also an integral part of the Meek ranch.

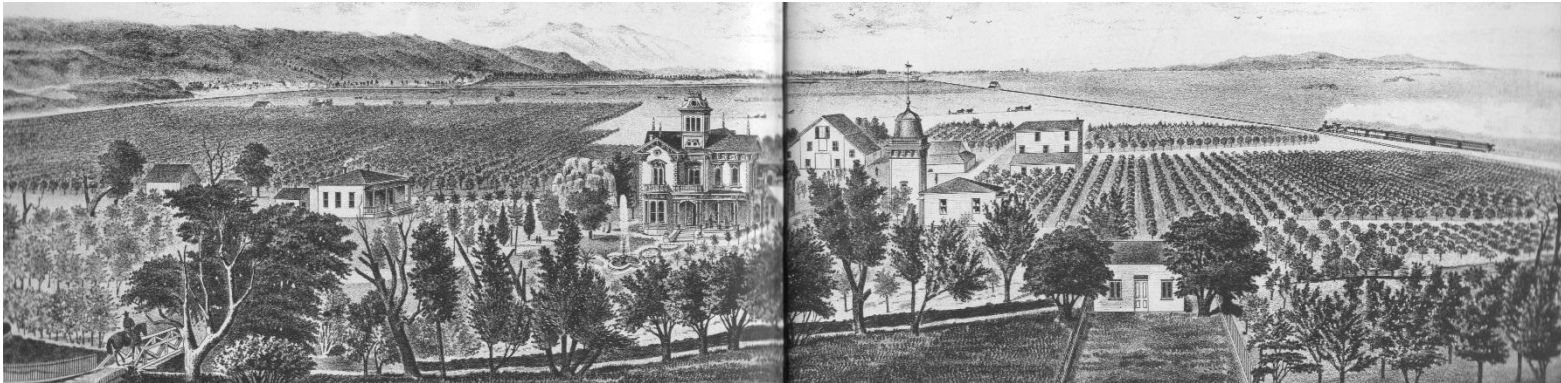
Frank and Lottie moved into the home on January 13, 1874. According to Frank’s diaries, the couple had made several trips to San Francisco to buy household items such as cooking implements, blankets, furniture, carpets and other decorative items.<sup>2</sup> While they seem to have

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<sup>1</sup> “Frank Hinckley: California Engineer and Rancher, 1838-1890” by Edith Parker Hinckley. Saunders Press: Claremont, California, 1946, page 90. It is unclear who did expansions on the cottage but there is a history of large families living in the home. The Hinckleys ultimately had five children in the cottage: Nathaniel and Meek were the oldest, born in Oregon and in the Meek Mansion, respectively. Hobart, Meda and George Hinckley were born in the cottage.

<sup>2</sup> Hinckley, p. 90

done most of the work themselves, for example, Frank says in his diary “Cleaning up my own desk while Lottie is cutting papers for shelves in the closet,” they did have some domestic help.<sup>3</sup>



1878 illustration of the Meek Estate. The mansion is in the center with the cupola and what is believed to be the Hinckley cottage is to the left of the mansion.

Frank and Lottie went on to have 3 more children in the cottage. But in the summer of 1880, William Meek told Frank that he would be replaced as foreman of the operation by **Horry**, William’s oldest son and Lottie’s half-brother. By October of that year, the Hinckleys had vacated their cottage and moved to Santa Clara. How this move affected the Hinckley’s relationship with the rest of the family is unknown. The Hinckley’s eventually moved to Southern California where they raised their ten children.



Horry Meek

As foreman of the ranch and the oldest son, Horry moved into the cottage, no doubt in part to get away from his younger siblings. Within months of Horry taking over foreman duties on the vast Meek holdings, his father died. While his mother and younger siblings remained in the mansion, Horry settled into his broader duties and made his own home at the cottage.

After years of bachelorhood, Horry married Harriet Webb, daughter of another neighboring farmer, Captain Otis Webb, in 1884 at the Webb house down the street from the Meek Mansion. Their May 24 wedding was the “society event of the season.” According to the *Hayward Journal*, Harriet Webb was “...well-known among her friends as a bright, intellectual and charming young lady, accomplished in all the duties fitted for her position, and is decidedly popular with those who have had the pleasure of forming her acquaintance.” The newspaper reported that Horry’s home had been “transformed into a regular bower of elegance and comfort” for the

<sup>3</sup> Hinckley, p. 90. There are several diary references about either Frank or Lottie going into San Francisco to find domestic help. The author speculates that the Hinckley’s had a hard time finding good help because the Ranch, and therefore the Cottage, were fairly isolated and rural. It could also have been five small children to help take care of as well!

newlyweds.<sup>4</sup> The couple spent their wedding night in the cottage before honeymooning in San Francisco. The couple had three children while living in the cottage. The first was William Harold, born in 1885, followed by Gladys in 1887 and Harriet in 1889.

Horry's mother, Fidelia, died in 1891. His sister, Susie, was married and moved away in 1893. His brother, William E., and his youngest sister, Ethel, were both married in 1894. With his mother gone and his siblings moving on, Horry moved his family into the mansion sometime during this period. Horry's younger brother, William E., and his new wife Carolyn, essentially switched places with Horry, as they moved into Hinckley Cottage after their marriage.



William E. Meek

**William E. and Carolyn** had four daughters while living in the cottage. Two of the girls died in infancy while the other two lived into adulthood.<sup>5</sup> According to census records, William and Carolyn also employed at least two household servants. While William E. was not the foreman of the Meek ranch, he helped manage the family operations in general and was a partner in many business ventures with his brother. Additionally, he had several of his own ventures. In 1907, William E. and Carolyn left the cottage after completing a large, grand home they called "Edgemont," which was located on Prospect Street, closer to downtown Hayward.

Horry Meek died in 1910. Either just before or after his death, his son, **William Harold Meek**, became manager/foreman of the Meek farm<sup>6</sup>. Harold attended UC Berkeley and received a degree in agricultural management. He and his first wife, Marguerite, were married in February 1917. Their sons, William Harold Meek Jr. and John Meek, were born in 1918 and 1920, respectively. They lived in the cottage a short distance from the mansion until the mid-1920s, when they moved into the mansion<sup>7</sup>. We are not entirely certain what prompted the move, though there is some speculation that Harold's mother, Harriet Meek, may have decided at around this point to live full-time in Oakland or Piedmont to be closer to her daughters. This may have led to the mansion being vacant for Harold and his family to move in. Jack Meek, Harold's youngest son, recalled living in the mansion for about seven years prior to leaving the area, and living in the cottage prior to that.

In a report on the cottage conducted by architectural historian Michael Corbett, he states that there was a fairly substantial remodel of the cottage in the late 1920s. However, there is no evidence at this point to indicate who was living in the cottage at that time, as it was a number of years after Harold and his family moved into the mansion. Harold's wife, Marguerite, passed away after a short illness in 1931, in the solarium of the Meek Mansion. About two years later, he married Myrtle LeMaitre of San Francisco. Sometime between 1932 and 1934, Harold and his

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<sup>4</sup> Hayward Journal, May 24, 1884, p. 3. Unfortunately, there was no description of what exactly that means.

<sup>5</sup> They had a fifth daughter in 1908 after moving out of the cottage.

<sup>6</sup> Harold's son, Jack, recalled his dad being a "gentleman farmer," indicating that his father did not work in the fields.

<sup>7</sup> There is no specific reference found as to when Harold moved into the cottage in the first place. In the 1910 census, Harold is listed in his mother's household at the mansion.

second wife, Myrtle, and his two sons moved to Knight's Ferry and later, Woodland, where they also had a working farm<sup>8</sup>.

In 1934 **George and Harriet Mays** are listed as residing in the cottage, though there is no indication that they owned the house<sup>9</sup>. More likely they were renters. They were no longer in the house by 1938<sup>10</sup>.

According to the 1940 census, **Jerry and Ruth Ferguson** and their eight children are living in the cottage as renters. Jerry is listed as a commercial artist working in advertising. It is unclear at this time exactly when Harold and his siblings (who also owned the Meek land) subdivided the property that the cottage sat on from the general Meek Estate property. Subdivisions of the entire Meek holdings began on a large scale beginning around 1920 but the property closest to the mansion was some of the last to be subdivided. Harold deeded the property on which the cottage sat to his wife Myrtle around 1932.<sup>11</sup>

Harriet Meek, Horry's mother, died in 1937 in Oakland after several years of illness. Her death may have paved the way for the mansion and the last of the grand Meek estate property to be sold a few years later. When the mansion and surrounding 10 acres were put on the market in 1940, there was no mention of a cottage.



The cottage c. 1895. Possibly two of Horry Meek's children

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<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with Jack Meek.

<sup>9</sup> 1934 Hayward City Directory. George Mays later became a Hayward city councilman and mayor in the 1940s.

<sup>10</sup> 1938 Hayward City Directory

<sup>11</sup> Michael Corbett, "Historic and Architectural Assessment of the W. Harold Meek Residence and Henry-Gorie Chicken Ranch", July 2004, p. 9, quoting the Alameda County Recorder 1932.

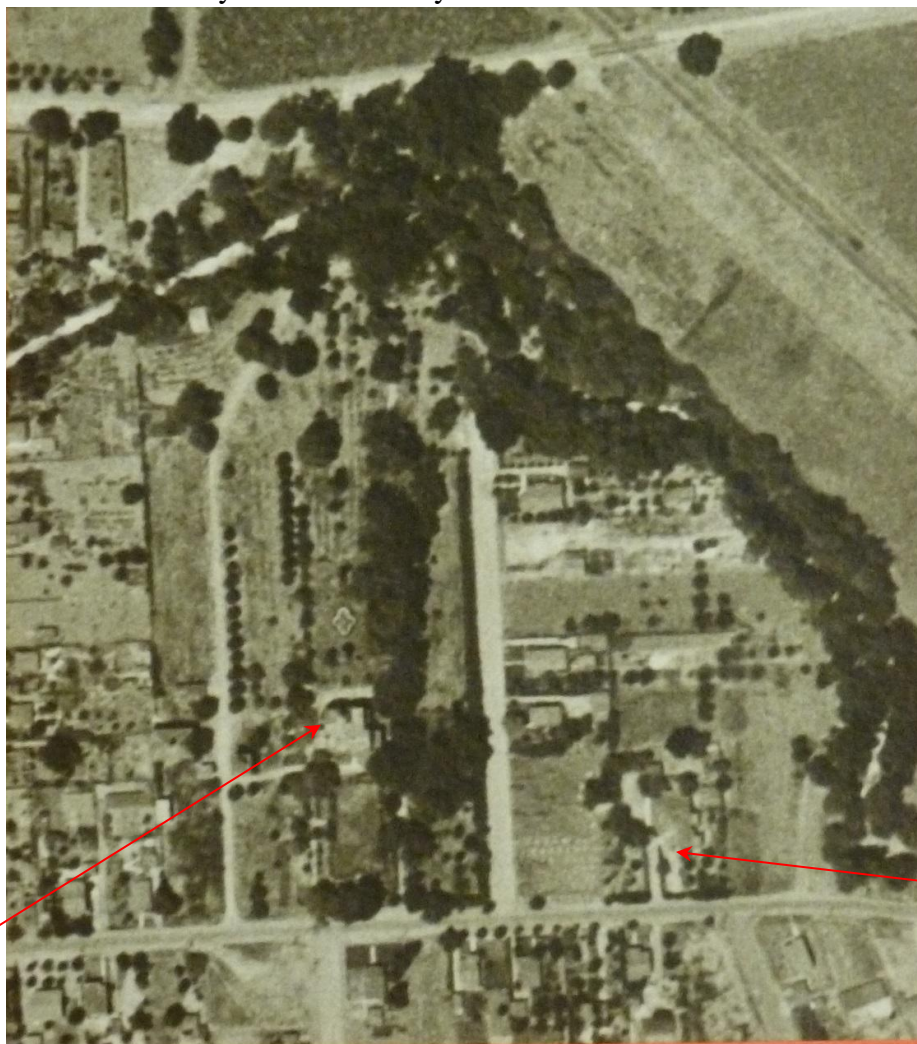
In 1944, Myrtle Meek sold the cottage property to **Russell and Grace Henry**<sup>12</sup>. The Henrys owned the property from 1944 until 1962. They operated a small commercial chicken ranch on the property.<sup>13</sup>

In 1962, the Henrys sold the cottage and property to **Claude T. Gorie**, who owned it until 1966. Gorie, with his six children, continued the tradition of having a large family in the cottage. He continued the chicken ranch but also had a full time job as an engineer for PG&E.

From 1966 to 2003, the cottage and property were owned by **Joseph McNeil**. They did not continue the chicken farm but did raise small family farm animals<sup>14</sup>.

The McNeil's sold the house to **Cai Jin Chen** in 2003 but no one lived in the cottage from that time until it burned down in 2008. **This local landmark is gone but not forgotten** - the site is now the location of the new Cherryland Community Center.

Aerial view showing the Meek Mansion and cottage, c. 1939.



<sup>12</sup> Corbett, p. 9

<sup>13</sup> Corbett, p. 9

<sup>14</sup> Corbett, p. 11