

history



J. W. Lyndon

The Father of Los Gatos Debra Staab

The life of J.W. Lyndon truly epitomizes the “rags to riches” story. John Weldon Lyndon, the eldest of seven children, was born in Quebec, Canada, in 1836. The family moved to Vermont in the early 1850s, and at age 23, John struck out alone for California with only 65 cents in his pocket.

After arriving in San Francisco in 1859, John made his way to San Jose and then to Lexington, where he found work. His first job was as a grocery clerk. Not long after that, he started his own general store, which sold groceries and lumber. Within a few years, he started buying land, including a 160-acre parcel on Black Road. After the Civil War ended in 1866, John’s brother James joined him in Lexington, where he established a lumber yard. In 1894, James was elected sheriff of Santa Clara County.

John had no formal education, but he was an extremely shrewd businessman. By 1868, he sold his general store and purchased the Ten Mile house, a roadhouse ten miles from San Jose located where the Los Gatos Post Office is today. A need for cash forced him to sell the roadhouse, but within a few years he was able to buy it back. In 1872, he renovated the hotel and renamed it the Los Gatos Hotel.

When the Pacific Coast Railroad came to Los Gatos in 1878, they wanted to use the



site of the Los Gatos Hotel for their train station. John agreed to deed the parcel to the railroad, and in turn they paid to move/rebuild the hotel to the other side of the street. Sadly, the building burned to the ground just eight years later.

Within a year after the Los Gatos Hotel fire, John rebuilt, this time christening the structure as the Hotel Lyndon. The new building was constructed with luxury in mind, having 175 feet of frontage with a wide front porch, a bright white exterior, a red shingle roof, 60 deluxe bedrooms, velvet carpets, two large dining rooms, gardens, and cottages in the back. The interior space featured a gentlemen’s sitting room and a ladies’ parlor with a piano. Beautiful palm trees stood like sentinels on both sides of the building.

Records show that James Lyndon’s lumber yard produced more than 300,000 board feet of redwood from the Santa Cruz Mountains to construct the Lyndon Hotel. The grand opening took place in 1899. It was reported

that most of the town came out for an all-day celebration. The venue became the place to be and served banquets, weddings, dances, recitals, and meetings. Famous visitors included John Steinbeck and Charlie Chaplin.

This first-class hotel eventually fell into ruins and was demolished in 1963. In its place, the Lyndon Plaza office building was constructed. Today you can sit at Willow Street Pizza or Main Street Burgers enjoying



**Demolition of Hotel Lyndon,
1963**





couple had three children, Clyde (died at age 4), Ora, and Irma. Theresa also had a son from her first marriage. Theresa donated land for an Episcopal Chapel in 1883, which unfortunately burned down in 1901. The new church has a window

the street view and admiring the original palm trees left from Hotel Lyndon's glory days.

In 1871, John married Theresa Rector Starr, a young widow from Oregon. The



Lyndon Heights, circa 1886

in her honor. Theresa died in 1888 at just 45 years old.

Just two years later, John constructed the "Theresa Block" of shops near North Santa Cruz Avenue and West Main Street in her honor. In 1891, John married Marion Mace Parsons, a woman from Maine.

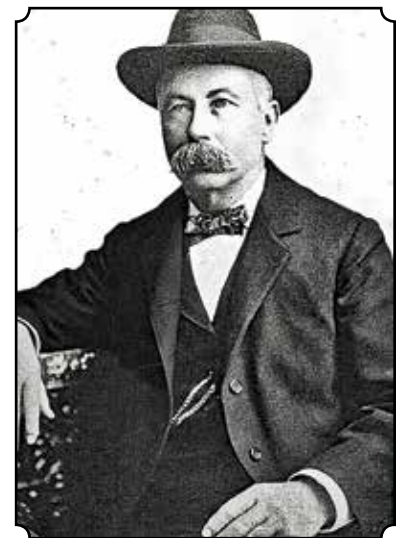
With John's businesses flourishing, he created a magnificent Victorian-style mecca on 11 acres in 1886, which he named "Lyndon Heights." The massive estate featured a three-story redwood house with 24 rooms, six fireplaces, and an elevator. The outside was painted a dark reddish on the bottom and a light yellow-green on top.

John was also very active as a community member. He owned stock in the Los Gatos Bank and the Los Gatos Fruit Packing Company, was a school trustee, and founded

the Los Gatos Gas Company. Los Gatos town was incorporated in 1887. He served as mayor from 1888 to 1892. His dedication to building up the downtown earned him the title "the Father of Los Gatos".

John and Theresa's daughter Irma married James D. Farwell in 1902. Farwell was an active member of the community as vice president of the Bank of Los Gatos, the manager of Glen Una ranch, and president of the Los Gatos Telephone Company. He donated land to the school district and to expand Memorial Park. The Farwells maintained Lyndon Heights until Irma's death in 1964. In 1969, the splendid house was demolished and replaced by the Los Gatos Meadows retirement home at 110 Wood Road. The cupola from the original carriage house now sits atop the bandstand in Oak Meadow Park.

John Lyndon died in Los Gatos in 1912. He is buried next to Theresa and their son Clyde at Oak Hill Memorial Park in San Jose. Marian died in 1920 and is also buried in Oak Hill Memorial Park. The Farwell family still own some of the commercial property in downtown Los Gatos. Our community owes many thanks to John Lyndon, the "Father of Los Gatos."



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